ENTERING INTO LITERARY COMMUNION: REIMAGINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READERS AND TEXTS IN THE SECONDARY LITERATURE CURRICULUM

By

Kati S. Macaluso

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ABSTRACT

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Throughout the history of English Language Arts education, educators have relied on literature as a tool for the cultivation of knowledge: cultural knowledge, moral and critical knowledge, and knowledge of skills and strategies. The English Language Arts curriculum's increasingly technocratic agenda (Brandt, 2015; Brass, 2014) has resulted not only in the marginalization of literature, but also in the increased instrumentalization of literature—the increased "tooling" of literature toward rational ends. Rather than focusing on literature's "ends," and asking what kinds of knowledge literature might help to facilitate, this project focuses on and takes as its starting point the *relationships* that comprise the literature curriculum, namely the relationships between readers and texts. By applying a Rancièrian lens of equality to literature's more traditional curricular frameworks, I make visible how and when these frameworks perpetuate inequality between readers and texts. Then, using Rancièrian equality, along with my own and others' lived experience of reading literature, I imagine a kind of event not accounted for in literature's more rational-instrumental frames: literary communion.

I conceive of literary communion as more sacramental than rational-instrumental, evoking a sense of spiritual transcendence, transubstantiation, and giftedness. In my quest to unpack these sacramental dimensions of literary communion, I elaborate their implications for longstanding pedagogical and curricular traditions of close reading, reader response, and emancipation. I conclude by acknowledging that openness to literary communion in the English Language Arts curriculum is, in many ways, a departure from certainty and control. In keeping

with the sacramental connotations of communion as well as the spirit of "as if" undergirding Rancièrian equality, literary communion might reframe the teaching of literature as a matter of faith.

For Mike, my better half. Your emptying of self, for the sake of our marriage, our family, and our faith, is a model of communion to us all.

And for my children, Matthew, Michael, and Grace. You have gifted these days of writing with laughter and love, and so I leave you with this: May you grow to realize all that literature and language makes possible, and that *all* things in life—regardless of what the world may tell you—come down to faith.

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I also wish to acknowledge my committee members at Michigan State University: Dr. Kyle Greenwalt, Dr. Janine Certo, Dr. Mary Juzwik, and Dr. Lynn Fendler. Their expertise as phenomenologists, poets, English Educators, and philosophers converged to give life to this project, and their openness to Humanities-based research gave me the courage to "let go and be literary." I am especially grateful to Lynn, my greatest sounding board as I tried to put words to this project. I will miss our conversations and the close proximity of a colleague who always seemed to know what I needed before I did, but who gave me the time and space to discover it for myself.

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And finally, I wish to acknowledge my family and friends. My parents, Susan and Richard Duffey, were the pillars of support all children hope for, meeting me all over the country

to watch my children during conferences and comprehensive exams, and never asking for anything in return. My husband, Mike, was my constant companion, shifting gears from graduate student to father with a seamlessness that enabled us to complete our degrees in the five years we had allotted. I know he joins me in acknowledging and thanking God for our children, Matthew, Michael, and Grace, who were our greatest source of laughter and perspective these past five years.

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BREAKING BEYOND LITERARY INSTRUMENTALISM

Sitting over words

Very late I have heard a kind of whispered sighing

Not far

Like a night wind in pines or like the sea in the dark

The echo of everything that has ever

Been spoken

Still spinning its one syllable

Between the earth and silence. (Merwin, 1996, p.198)

The Echoes that Still Spin

How often I have thought of this Merwin poem in the hours, days, weeks, and months of composing this dissertation. I have felt, in the many evenings and early mornings of writing, what it is to "sit over words/Very late." And, in the gifts of silence those hours afford, I have heard "a kind of whispered sighing," "the echo of everything" that has come before these pages "still spinning."

Spinning can evoke any number of meanings: It can, for example, refer to the action of rotating or whirling about, as in a *spinning* top. Journalists might modify, or *spin* their stories to sway public opinion. Our heads might *spin* at the announcement of shocking news. As I settle into my chair to begin another day of writing these pages, I cannot help but consider yet another derivative of spinning: *homespun.* Meaning "woven in the home," the term captures both a connotation of made-ness and a humble place of origin, and it occurs to me that these pages are

themselves an exercise in making, with a home in many of the texts that, in the busyness of this past year, have come to line the stairs of my home.

These texts, whose shadowy contours I can barely make out in the late evenings and early mornings of writing, are the contrails of both a year and a lifetime of reading. Children's books—many of them my own from childhood—coalesce with Billy Collins's latest poetry anthology that I turn to for inspiration when the more desiccated prose of academic writing creeps into my soul. On another stair sits a smattering of titles by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, who has become for me a kind of conversational companion throughout this project. Kevin Henkes's *Waiting*—the latest in my children's collection of favorites—sits on the landing closest to their bedroom. Seeing it, I wonder if my sons will one day hear its echoes in the same way I still hear the echoes of my father's voice reading *Where the Red Fern Grows* or *To Kill a Mockingbird* at the end of a long day.

My eyes wander toward a stack of English methods textbooks, and I am overcome with memories of my former English Language Arts students—all ten years' worth. I wonder what, if any, echoes of our literature curriculum they may still hear, or see, or feel. I wonder if my first class of high school students from Donaldsonville, Louisiana, still owns the bright red shirts they made to memorialize our unit on American Romanticism, Longfellow's verse "Be not like dumb driven cattle" stamped across the front. In the darkness of these quiet and motionless hours, I recall Huck Finn's nighttime observations along the silvery, silent Mississippi: "It *smelled* late." And I wonder what tastes and smells from literature still live with my students, what incense still wafts through the air they breathe.

From the echoes of many of the literary, philosophical, and teacher education texts that line my stairs, from the echoes of my own and others' lived accounts of reading literature—and

even from my own spirituality—I have spun this dissertation. I might argue that this dissertation is proof of the made-ness of reading, or of the creativity of reader, and—as such—a testament to reader and text as creative *equals*. I raise this point because equality—an ethical lens I borrow from French philosopher Jacques Rancière—will be the unifying lens of the pages that follow.

The pages that follow are dedicated to one of the three domains of the secondary English Language Arts curriculum: reading—specifically the reading of literature. I write them in an educational climate that, while still conducive to literary texts lining people's stairs, is not as conducive to literary texts lining students' backpacks. I write them in an educational climate concerned with what readers can extract from literature and what literature can allow readers to know. Believing, from experience, that reading literature can be about more than extracting and knowing, I choose, in the pages that follow, to be faithful not to the rational-instrumentalism pervading the curricular conversations surrounding literature. I choose instead to focus on the relationships between readers and literary texts—relationships that, in more rational-instrumental curricular frameworks, have tended to keep the text in a position removed from and superior to the reader. I choose to consider how faithfulness to equality between reader and text might allow English educators to imagine a version of literary reading perhaps more sacramental than instrumental. This version of literary reading is one that I call *literary communion.*

My discussion of literary communion is intended to show how relationships between readers and texts that perpetuate inequality might be otherwise, and to elaborate the possibilities for the English Language Arts literature curriculum afforded by an ethical framework—one grounded in equality. Much like Rancière's philosophical project intent on imagining what might be possible in beginning from an assumption of equality, my own project is one of imagining. My goal in the pages that follow, then, is not to prove that literary communion *is,* but

to reconfigure the assumptions that ground the secondary literature curriculum and to imagine literary communion as that which might be possible when literature is approached from an ethical commitment to equality between readers and texts.

Defining Literature

Before proceeding, I wish to clarify a few terms, beginning with the term "literature." B.A. Hinsdale's (1896) tripartite division of the English Language Arts into speech, composition, and reading participated in making literature one of the three primary domains[1] of the upper-middle and secondary English Language Arts curriculum. However, as Rosenblatt (1978/1994) pointed out in her own work on literary reading that has had long-lasting implications for English Language Arts education, the term "literature" is notoriously fluid. While it is sometimes used to refer to a language art of narrative, poetic, or dramatic quality, it is more often than not used to refer to *any* printed matter, or to writing considered to be of high quality.

My own use of the term literature refers to a language art of narrative, poetic, or dramatic quality, but it also bears some connection to the work of Canadian scholar and English educator John Willinsky (1991) who, interested in literature's connections with literacy, defined literature as a networked "activity as well as artifact" (p.4). For me, literature as *artifact,* is what I will often refer to throughout this project as the *literary text*—the textual work of art most likely composed in a narrative, poetic, or dramatic mode. A great many of the ethical arguments for literature that have arisen of late in response to the age of scientific measurement and accountability (e.g., Alsup, 2015) have tended to equate literature with literary *fiction*. However, my own interest in literary communion is one that applies to the reading of both fictional and nonfictional narrative, poetic, and dramatic texts.

[1] The centrality of literature, even at the upper middle and secondary levels of the English language arts,

The literary text, though, is only one piece, or player, in the broader notion of literature as networked activity. While there may be innumerable players that comprise literature as networked activity, I limit that network, in my own project, to the relationships among readers (both students and teachers), writers, and texts. As will become clear in the chapters that follow, I have chosen for this project to focus primarily on the equality *between readers and texts*, keeping in mind that the equality between readers and texts has implications for the relationships between teachers and students in English Language Arts classrooms, as well as for the relationships between writers and readers, writers and texts.

Why Attend to the Ethics of Literary Reading?

I will say more in later chapters about what I mean by equality and what attending to equality might make possible for literary reading in the English Language Arts curriculum. Before launching into that line of argumentation, however, I wish to provide some context for *why* attending to the ethics of literary reading—the relations between people and literature—matters in mainstream US English Language Arts education. I will do so by inquiring into the ethical implications of a trend in US literacy education—one that literacy studies scholar Deborah Brandt (2015) has identified as the ascendance of more technocratic values rooted in a knowledge economy. These values, I argue, coincide with the marginalization of literature in secondary US curricula, and what I perceive as the instrumentalization of literature as sponsored by the secondary US curriculum.

Viewing these trends through the lens of Jacques Rancière's equality—an ethical framework that readers will soon discover to be of central importance to my project—reveals their rootedness in relationships of assumed *in*equality between readers and texts. Equality, for Rancière, functions not only as a lens through which to critique hierarchical arrangements. It is

also a launching-off point from which to begin to imagine how things might be otherwise. So, in my own project, equality serves as a way of analyzing literature's existing curricular frameworks, as well as a means by which to imagine how literature might be open to relationships between readers and texts that look and feel different from those sponsored by the literature curriculum's more rational-instrumental frameworks. Literary communion—one such possible reconfiguration of the relationship between readers and texts—will be the focus of subsequent chapters. For now, though, I shed light on the current context of the literature curriculum in English Language Arts education to illuminate why the chapters that follow might be worth reading at all.

The marginalization of literature in a knowledge economy

The knowledge economy, as Brandt (2015) defines it, refers to the economy first identified by Fritz Machlup (1972) as that rooted more in the manufacturing of ideas, data, information, and news than in the manufacturing of material things. This rise of a knowledge economy has been accompanied by shifts in the ways people make sense of the worth of various kinds of literacies. Literacies that can be leveraged as tools—or instruments-- for the manufacturing of knowledge, ideas, and information assume a greater value, and a more privileged place in the U.S. school curriculum.

Alsup (2015) has argued that the rise of a knowledge economy, along with an increasing obsession with scientific measurement, has resulted in the marginalization of literature. With the advent of the Common Core State Standards in 2011, for example, came a new ratio of recommended "text types," calling for a 30 percent emphasis on literary fiction and nonfiction, and a 70 percent emphasis on informational text that Common Core author David Coleman (2011) claims lends itself more efficiently to students' mastery of *ideas*. And while some (e.g.,

Wessling, 2011) have argued that such ratios refer to a distribution of reading students undertake *across* the curriculum, with English Language Arts holding these two types of reading in much greater balance, the increasing linkages between literacy and a knowledge economy do not bode well for literature's place in the secondary English Language Arts curriculum.

Brandt's (2015) analysis of recent changes to literacy trends throughout the U.S. substantiates the arguments of scholars concerned with literature's marginalized status. According to Brandt, reading was considered from the earliest days of the Republic indispensable to liberty and democratic citizenship, to the point where mass literacy was understood almost exclusively from a reading perspective. But reading, it seems, has assumed a position subordinate to writing, which in this past decade has, for the first time, outpaced reading as a mass daily experience. Brandt's observations about the status of reading in relation to writing is relevant to my own project concerned with literary reading, but more relevant perhaps is her analysis of *why* writing is outpacing reading for the first time in U.S. history: writing's service to a knowledge economy.

Whereas reading carries with it a moral legacy that was used, in the context of American education, to socialize students into the value system of Protestant Christianity, writing "has always been for work, for production, for output earning, profit, publicity, practicality, record keeping, buying and selling" (Brandt, 2009, p.164). Brandt's read of the economic sponsorship of writing illuminates what she refers to as writing's "commercial value": "[T]he way it can be transacted and enhance other transactions, the way it can fit into systems of work, wage, and market, all make writing unique among the so-called language arts" (Brandt, 2015, p.5). In short, reading might be product*ive*, but writing *is* a product, for it embodies the virtual "goods" of the knowledge economy: the manufacturing of ideas, information, etc. Brandt's analysis of

the ascendance of writing, therefore, helps to illuminate both the technocratic agenda that governs literacy curricula in the United States as well as the ways that particular literacies find themselves adopting a more instrumental tenor in order to sustain themselves in the U.S. English Language Arts curriculum.

The instrumentalization of literary reading

This more instrumental tenor might seem evident in what Langer (2014) has described as a "turning away" (p.162) from literature's centrality as source of moral and civic development in the U.S. English Language Arts curricula. Throughout the history of the teaching of English, there have been a number of competing "traditions" (Applebee, 1974) in the English Language Arts curricula—each carrying assumptions about the goals of literature and the way it should be taught. What Langer has described as a "turning away" from literature's pivotal role in students' moral and civic development speaks in part to a kind of abatement of what Applebee might refer to as a "cultural heritage" tradition, a tradition that played an important role in the 19th century in legitimizing the study of literature. In what follows, I review what I see as three dominant traditions in the teaching of literature—the cultural, the critical, and the skills-oriented. I contend that all three might be implicated in what I term the "instrumentalization" of literature—the "tooling" of literature toward pre-established ends—with what seems to be a resurgence of the skills-oriented tradition as the dominant currency of today's knowledge economy.

Literature as tool for developing cultural knowledge and morals

Even the "cultural heritage" tradition, which Langer (2014) has speculated is declining in an era of standardization and accountability obsessed with college and career readiness, has at times had a certain aura of instrumentalism about it. Literature, after all, was considered the most effective *tool* for intellectual enlightenment and moral conditioning. Rick Beach, Amanda

Thein, and Allen Webb (2012) identify as one of English Language Arts's four predominant curricular frameworks a "shared cultural knowledge framework" that stresses this continued "tooling" of literature in the name of civic readiness or participation. This framework, in keeping with the work of scholars who study the link between the English curriculum and cultural memory (Anagnostopoulos *et al*., 2013) and/or the role of literature in building the nation state (Choo, 2016), "stresses the idea of the language arts as content or shared cultural knowledge essential for an understanding and appreciation of one's heritage and participation in society" (Beach *et al*., 2012, p.23). Literature, in other words, is a tool for the sake of civic readiness and participation, with the assumption being that students need to know specific information about canonical authors and texts in order to be "culturally literate" (Hirsch, 1987) enough for civic participation.

In addition to building a knowledge base considered necessary for civic participation, literature has been known for its usefulness in shaping moral character through the inculcation of values, virtues, etc. This use of literature for the sake of moral grooming is not entirely separate from the way literature has been used as tool for civic participation, given the ways literature has historically been used to socialize students into the value system of Protestant Christianity thought to impose order on an ever-changing demographic in a democratic U.S. society (Fraser,1999). Language Arts educators have been known to capitalize on literature's aesthetic dimensions to accomplish these simultaneously moral and civic-minded objectives. Brass's (2010) historiographical research points to the ways educators and curriculum designers have conceived of literature, in particular, as offering a set of non-coercive conditions through which to develop the "right" sorts of aims, values, and visions in readers. Literature's "musical and imaginative products," wrote 19th century English educator Percival Chubb, "would lodge more

memorably and fatally in the hearts and minds of children more than anything else" (qtd. in Brass, 2010, p.708). In other words, literature's aesthetic dimension afforded educators a subtle, but effective tool with which to shape the morality of students' hearts, minds, and souls. Though Chubb was writing in the early nineteenth century, even some of the most current arguments (e.g., Alsup, 2013; Malo-Juvera, 2014) in defense of literature as it continues to be relegated to informational reading and writing have highlighted the ways literature might serve as a powerful tool in the service of students' moral transformation.

Literature as tool for reading the world

Though still linking literature with moral and civic development, critical frameworks for the study of literature remain distinct from other curricular traditions given their explicit attention to ideology and politics. Critical approaches to literature (e.g., Appleman, 2009; Tyson, 2011) have tended to treat literature as tool for reflecting on and affecting the diverse, political, and often troubled world that readers inhabit. As Appleman (2009) argues in the opening paragraph of her second edition of *Critical Encounters in High School English,*

> The charge for those of us who engage with adolescents through literacy, as Paolo Freire (Freire & Macedo, 1987) has pointed out, is to help students read both the world and the word. Our job is not simply to help students read and write; our job is to help them use the skills of writing and reading to understand the world around them. (p.2)

In the critical tradition, then, reading literature matters for the sake of allowing readers the opportunity to engage with alternative ideologies, so that students may expand their interpretive choices, appreciate the power of multiple perspectives, and critique hegemonic power structures.

However, for critical literacy advocates, reading literature alone does not suffice in the accomplishment of these goals. Rather, critical approaches to literature instruction call for the

explicit instruction of contemporary literary theory to be used in conjunction with literary texts. Wearing the lenses afforded by contemporary literary theory, readers are able to see and challenge gaps, silences, and inconsistencies within the authored text, while also becoming more aware of their own ideologies that might privilege particular personalized readings. For the critical literacy advocate, then, literature, in the company of literary theory, is about more than reading the literary word. Literature's function, in a critical curricular framework, is to serve as an instrument for reading the world.

Literature as tool for declarative and procedural knowledge

A third more explicitly instrumental tradition shaping the secondary literature curriculum—and the tradition that has possibly outranked all others with the increasing pressure to "instrumentalize" literacy practices in service of a knowledge economy—is one that has emphasized the development of essential language skills (Applebee, 1993). The function of literature, it seems, is to resolve the problem that popular English methods textbook author Jim Burke (2013) identifies in the ever-popular *English Teachers' Companion:* "that high school and even a large percentage of college graduates are showing up for work without the *skills* and *knowledge* needed to compete in this economy" (p.2).

More recently implemented curricular documents like the Common Core State Standards have sought to correct this problem, not just requesting, but "*demand*[ing]…that the building of knowledge through *reading* play a fundamental role" in a child's literacy education (Coleman, 2011, p.9, emphasis added). The more technocratic discourses of the standardization and accountability movement, it seems, have tended to favor the treatment of reading—including literary reading—as tool for the acquisition of procedural and declarative knowledge, with

literature's political, moral, and aesthetic potential figuring less prominently of late in the English Language Arts curriculum (Brass, 2014).

Again, Beach *et al.'*s (2012) sketch of the curricular topography of the English language arts is helpful in underscoring the ways literature has assumed what is largely a rational-instrumentalist "use" value in the English Language Arts curricula. Of the four predominant frameworks they identify as having historically shaped the English Language Arts curriculum, three link the English Language Arts curriculum explicitly to the acquisition of declarative and procedural knowledge. English Language Arts, they argue, has been dedicated to the acquisition of skills, the rehearsal of strategies, and knowledge of form.

Though Beach *et al*. elaborate the ways these curricular frameworks have governed the teaching of reading *and* writing in the English Language Arts, I pay close attention, in the sub-sections that follow, to the implications of each of these curricular frameworks for what it means to read literature. My goal in doing so is to delineate what some of the leading scholars of English Education have conceived of as the historical distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2006)—the seemingly sensible way things are and have been—in the literature curriculum in secondary English Language Arts education. In doing so, I hope to make room to explore, in later chapters, what might be possible for literary reading beyond these current curricular configurations.

Literature as tool for mastering skill and rehearsing strategy

In what Beach *et al*. (2012) label skills- and strategies-based curricular frameworks for English Language Arts, reading "is defined as a category consisting of an extensive set of 'subskills'—decoding, word-attack, inference, etc" (p.22). This framework is perhaps the one most promulgated by the authors of the Common Core State Standards who, in delineating the

expectations for reading literature across Grades 9 through 12, equate literary reading with two primary skills: "analysis" and "determination of meaning."

Within this framework, one of the guiding priorities for literary text selection is text complexity that, according to Common Core authors, can be measured through qualitative and quantitative assessment of "levels of meaning, structure, language conventionality and clarity, [and] knowledge demands" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012, p.4). And, while English Language Arts teachers with whom I have worked have defined text complexity in other ways, citing instances of students who find themselves grappling, for example, with the content of a literary work fraught with moral complexities, those indicants of text complexity are not as valued in a skills-oriented framework. After all, they do not guarantee the creation of conditions for decoding, inferring, and interpreting. The literary texts deemed valuable in a skills- or strategies-oriented curricular framework are those that are capable of serving as rehearsal grounds for a set of transferrable skills or strategies.

Literature as tool for understanding form

Much of the procedural knowledge foregrounded in a skills or strategies-oriented framework for literary reading relies on students' declarative knowledge of form. Concern for this type of declarative knowledge has given rise to its own curricular framework within the English Language Arts, one that Beach *et al.* (2012) refer to as "English language arts for the sake of understanding form." Beach *et al.*'s analysis resonates with the findings of what is still the field of English Education's most extensive national study of the literature curriculum in U.S. secondary schools. In it, Applebee (1993), in conjunction with the National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning (NRCLTL), revealed the pervasiveness of a literature curriculum dominated by the study of genres.

For Beach *et al*., this curricular paradigm dedicated to knowledge of literary form includes knowledge not only of genre, but also of the formal devices that comprise the literary text's organic whole. Elaborating this "knowledge of literary and rhetorical forms" curricular framework, Beach *et al*. note that "the number of genre types and rhetorical structures that secondary students attempt to learn, often by rote […] is remarkable" (p.26). Their claims seem very much in sync with the observations of Willinsky (1991), who—in the midst of conducting classroom observations of literature units—thumbed through the pages of students' high school anthologies. Turning to Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," he observed the word "simile" inscribed in the margins next to each "like" or "as" that appeared throughout the poem. It was, noted Willinsky, as if the reader had foreseen the "inevitable questions that follow the poem in English class like a head cold follows a sore throat: Identify the poem's three similes; In your own words, explain what Arnold means by…" (p.54).

And, indeed, Willinsky's observations resonate with some of my own experiences teaching literature in the high school English classroom, where I can still picture the charts that covered my walls—veritable cascades of terms like asyndeton, synecdoche, metonymy, allusion, metaphor, simile, villanelle, Petrarchan sonnet, and the like. As a teacher of Advanced Placement Literature, I seemed to share the concern of Stotsky, Goering, and Jolliffe (2009), who, in their investigation of literary study in Grades 9, 10, and 11 throughout Arkansas, identified as their primary impetus the fact that "American students seem to graduate from high school with little literary *knowledge* and *understanding*" (p.7). For Stotsky and her colleagues, this deficit of knowledge and understanding had to do with literary form and its contribution to understanding the overall meaning of a literary work.

Formalism as a Conglomeration of Skill, Strategy and Form

Knowledge of literary forms carries with it important implications for readers' skills and strategies, namely their ability to *interpret* literature. In a "formalist" approach to literature—arguably one of the most popular pedagogical approaches in the secondary literature curriculum (Applebee, 1993; Beach, 1993; Faust and Dressman, 2005)—readers consider how the formal qualities of the text—the author's character development, diction, figurative language, etc.—collectively contribute to the overall meaning of the literary work.

Studies of the secondary literature curriculum (e.g., Applebee, 1993; Stotsky, 2010) revealed a prevalence of formal analysis, very much in the tradition of the New Critics, who in the early to mid-twentieth century, codified a set of techniques dedicated to "unlocking" a text's meaning. New Criticism achieved prominence in the mid-twentieth century as a reaction against "old criticisms" that privileged knowledge of those things *surrounding* a text, namely authorial intention, as determinants of textual meaning. In contrast to the "old critics," the New Critics deemed the long-standing emphasis on authorial intention the "intentional fallacy." Readers, after all, could never really know an author's intention behind her literary composition. The New Critics also declared the reader's personal and psychological response to text insufficient grounds upon which to determine textual meaning (Wimsatt & Beardley, 1954). All a reader had was the work itself—the text—which possessed a certain organic unity that gave the work its meaning. The reader, therefore, had a specific task: to engage in a close reading of the text in order to arrive at a valid interpretation consistent with the organic unity of the text as a whole.

Formalism has, from the time of New Critical theorists I. A. Richards (1929) and Brooks (1947), stipulated close reading as a rigorous, objective method for literary reading. It should come as no surprise, then, that close reading has become the dominant currency of literary

reading in a curricular era obsessed with measurable accountability and the tangibles of a knowledge economy: ideas, information, etc. And though Hinchman and Moore (2013) are quick to point out that "recommendations for conducting the methodical interpretation of texts referred to as close reading vary in important ways" (p.443), the version of close reading put front and center in recent U.S. curricular documents is intended to be rigorous, objective, and oriented toward rational knowledge. As presented in this description by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), close reading:

> stresses engaging with a text of sufficient complexity directly and examining its meaning thoroughly and methodically, encouraging students to read and reread deliberately. Directing student attention to the text itself empowers students to understand the central ideas and key supporting details. It also enables students to reflect on the meanings of individual words and sentences; the order in which sentences unfold; and the development of ideas over the course of the text, which ultimately leads students to arrive at an understanding of the text as a whole. (2011, p.6)

Readers, it seems, are to attend to the formal qualities of text—the order of sentences, the choice of words, the overall order or organizational schema of the text as a whole—to "gather observations" (p.6) that, taken together, allow them to *understand* "key details and central ideas." Applying to both informational and literary texts, this definition of close reading positions literature as a tool designed primarily for the procurement of ideas and the rehearsal of rational analysis.

The Ethical Implications of Rational-Instrumental Approaches to Literature

In reading across these traditions, curricular frameworks, and curricular documents that have governed the teaching of literature, literature appears to function primarily as a tool for

knowing what or how to think, behave, or participate. In other words, reading literature matters to the extent that it serves as rehearsal ground for knowing *x* or for knowing how to do *x*. To conceive of literature as tool, then, is to privilege knowledge as both mediator and ultimate aim of literary reading, and to conceive of the reader as empty until somehow filled up by the text. What this means, then, is that literature, in the midst of adopting a more instrumental tenor to sustain itself against a backdrop of an increasingly technocratic agenda in education, is also complicit in sustaining inequality.

Chief among these inequalities is the implied superiority of text over reader. Both Sulzer (2014) and Aukerman (2013) have critiqued the language of the Common Core State Standards for promoting what they perceive as an impoverished view of readers. Sulzer, for example, noted the degree to which the standards promote "*reading* without foregrounding the necessary agents who enact it...read*ers*" (p.141). The standards, argued Sulzer, strip readers of their creative authority, placing "a strict division between authors and readers" (p.142). After all, to read is to analyze the *author's* choices and the *author's* ability to "create effects" (See e.g., CCSS Initiative, 2010, p.38). To read literature, therefore, is to do no more than analyze or decipher someone else's craft, functioning more as a static noun—as in "a 'reading' of a text" (Beach, 1993, p.16)—than a dynamic action.

In such models of literary reading, like those promulgated by the Common Core—where reading seems more a noun, than a creative action—the teacher might, like the text, assume a position superior to that of the reader. Teachers are easily perceived as "master explicators" who possess the "keys to unlocking the text" that student readers have been given the task to analyze (Beach, 1993, p.17). One dominant model of literary reading being taken up in classroom spaces, then, seems to position the author as creatively superior to the reader, whose lack of

creativity renders her almost, if not entirely, invisible. Reading is about a distribution of knowledge that flows from text to student-reader, and—if the student somehow offers a less-than-legitimate reading—from text to *teacher* to student. The dynamics of literary reading in the English Language Arts classroom, then, often abide by a set of hierarchical relationships overlooked in light of the degree to which they help to facilitate students' mastery of declarative or procedural knowledge—valuable products in a knowledge economy.

Though arguments (e.g., Appleman, 2009) in favor of critical approaches to literature revolve to a certain extent around dismantling the hierarchies that privilege a teacher's authoritative reading, or a reader's overly personalized reading of a text, these approaches can also operate from a deficit perspective. In attempting to authorize readers so that readers may resist texts, and in advocating that readers equip themselves with the more "expert" knowledge of contemporary theorists, critical approaches to literary reading lose sight of the degree to which readers come to a work of literature *already* as seeing, thinking, feeling, evoking beings.

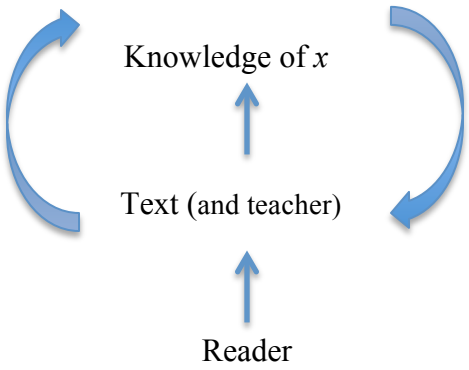
Brass's (2010) critique of Appleman's introduction to her first edition of *Critical Encounters* underscores the hierarchical relationships at play in critical literacy education. The reliance on theory, in particular, in critical frameworks for the secondary literature curriculum, produces and sustains those hierarchies, as:

> …critical literacy theories are sanctioned to 'redefine what counts as knowing in literature classrooms' and to 'reshape the kind of knowledge that students and teachers might have of texts, themselves, and the worlds in which both reside.' Thus, the text constructs students' more familiar ['atheoretical'] ways of reading worlds as in need of expert-mediated ['theoretical'] intervention. (Brass, 2010, p.716)

Brass's commentary points to the ways that critical curricular frameworks for literary reading sanction, and therefore privilege, a particular way of knowing, while also implying that readers do not come to texts already knowing in these sanctioned ways. According to Appleman's framing of a critical literacies approach to the secondary literature curriculum, readers need the intervention of theories as well as *explanations* of theories to usher them into these new ways of knowing. Thus, although advocates of critical approaches to literature instruction might claim that exposure to a range of contemporary literary theories can disrupt the hierarchical tendencies of literature instruction by destabilizing any one, single, privileged interpretation by the teacher, Brass's critique posits otherwise. Literature, in a critical framework, often ends up functioning not only as tool, but as *expert-mediated* tool, where the expert is someone or something *other than* the reader.

As I see it, then, literary reading that abides by more instrumental commitments to acquiring skills, strategies, and even habits of moral behavior, generates a hierarchy in English Language Arts classrooms that might look something like the relationships sketched out in Figure 1. The reader, aspiring toward the acquisition of skills, strategies, critical capacities, or cultural knowledge, engages with the text in a way that is both mediated by and directed toward knowledge. The reader remains empty until filled up by the text—a filling up that might also necessitate the mediating expertise of the teacher. The "tooling" of literature, then, not only makes literature an instrument in the acquisition of knowledge, but an instrument in perpetuating inequality.

Figure 1. A visual of the hierarchical flow of knowledge in the literature curriculum



Imagining Otherwise: Toward a Communion of Reader and Text

My delineation of the many ways literature has been treated as tool in the English Language Arts curriculum, and my surfacing of the dynamics of inequality at play in these more instrumental approaches to literary reading are in no way intended to debase skills, strategies, cultural knowledge, etc. I say this as the composer of this dissertation—an undertaking that has relied in large part on executing skills of interpretation, understanding the genre conventions of a dissertation, and implementing strategies of close reading, synthesis, etc. I say this as a teacher who has taught students struggling to bring their test scores up to grade level. And I say this as a teacher educator tasked with teaching preservice teachers who feel the pressures of accountability for their own students' standardized test scores. However, I am interested in exploring the possibilities that might exist in and for a literature curriculum where attention is diverted away from these more instrumental goals, and focused instead on ethical relationships of equality at play in literary reading—particularly those between reader and text.

Another echo

As an entrée into this focused attention on the relationships at play in literary reading, I offer yet another echo, the whispered sighings of which reverberate throughout this project. This

echo hails from spring 2003. I was a sophomore in college, enrolled in a literature seminar titled *Mark Twain and the American Imagination,* where, in keeping with the expectations of the syllabus, I waded through a figurative sea of American classics: *Innocents Abroad, Life on the Mississippi, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court,* to name a few. Like most English majors, I wrote paper after paper in response to each of Twain's masterpieces, and in the cleaning frenzies to which I've grown addicted while writing this chapter, I've come across many of them.

The echo from that course that still spins as I write these words did not originate in one of those course papers though. It originated on the eleventh floor of the library at the University of Notre Dame, where I sat reading *The Diaries of Adam and Eve,* a lesser-known gem of a book that Twain (1904) composed in the twilight of his career. In retrospect, I imagine the location mattered, given the degree to which my elevation and proximity to a window procured for me a star-studded backdrop for Eve's soliloquy. Eve's words held me captive as, gazing out at a meteor-streaked sky, she confessed one of life's more heart-wrenching epiphanies:

> By watching, I know that the stars are not going to last. I have seen some of the best ones melt and run down the sky. Since one can melt, they all can melt; since they can all melt, they can all melt the same night. That sorrow will come—I know it. I mean to sit up every night and look at them as long as I can keep awake; and I will impress those sparkling fields on my memory so that by-and-by when they are taken away I can by my fancy restore those lovely myriads to the black sky and make them sparkle again, and double them by the blur of my tears. (p.123)

Twain's cadence, combined with the imagery of fading stars, doubled by the blur of tears, elicited my own tears. At 19, I was still relatively unscathed by loss. Unlike Eve, I had not yet

"seen some of the best ones melt and run down the sky." But there, on the eleventh floor of the library, the rhythm of Eve's words rocking my soul, I found myself confronted by the *inevitability* of loss. Even before Eve herself uttered those words, I knew them: "That sorrow *will* come."

So when three months later I lost my grandpa, himself a star-gazer, to an unexpected heart-attack, and I watched my mother crumple to the ground like a helpless child, I did what I felt needed to be done: I revisited Twain's passage that had struck a deep and painful chord within me, and I wove it into the eulogy I delivered at my grandpa's funeral. It was my own manner of restoring him to the black sky and making him sparkle again.

That eulogy, one might argue, was my course paper in response to *The Diaries of Adam and Eve.* With the semester long over, and Professor Werge, therefore, not privy to the paper, I wrote to him. I thanked him for having introduced me to Twain's *Diaries,* and I shared with him what I had created out of that encounter with Eve's soliloquy months earlier on the eleventh floor of the library. And though I had not expected any reply whatsoever, Professor Werge—true to his nature—replied with a hand-written note, excerpts of which I include below, along with his own first-edition copy of Twain's *Diaries of Adam and Eve:*

August 14, 2003

Dear Kati,

I was sorry to hear about your grandfather, and at the same time extremely happy that Twain's words complemented your own heartfelt words and sentiments. I learned long ago, though it was a hard-earned lesson, that when those we love die, every reason we have to feel bitter is more than matched by our own reasons to be grateful they were with us, and graced us, as long as they did. All the rest comes down to faith, hope,

and love. I'd like you to keep this first edition of Eve's Diary. You have already made it your own. You'll find the passage on the page with this note.

Take good care,

Tom Werge

I think it is worth noting here (consistent with what I acknowledged above) that my reading of *The Diaries of Adam and Eve,* and the ensuing experiences of writing eulogies, letters, and even this dissertation, relied upon elements from the more instrumental curricular paradigms I outlined in previous sections. Albeit subconsciously, I certainly relied upon *strategies* as I read that passage from Eve. I cannot say for certain, but—consistent with reading comprehension strategies—I likely accessed prior knowledge and experiences and was all the more moved by Eve's tragic realization because of prior experiences with others who had suffered the pangs of loss. Though I did not engage in a careful annotation of the text by documenting its formalist qualities and attributes in the margins, those formal elements were nonetheless present, and were likely accentuated by my skilled ability to de-code punctuation. Stopping where the commas signaled a pause, for example, made Eve's soliloquy all the more heart-breaking, given the degree to which it mimicked the pace and logic of Eve's tragic epiphany: "Since one can melt, they all can melt." With the pause of the semicolon, I was allowed to dwell in the inevitability of the stark reality that followed: "since they can all melt, they can all melt the same night." I stood at the brink of the pause that parsed that compound sentence, literally feeling the words that came next: "That sorrow will come; I know it." In fact, recent scholarship in the realm of affect theory (e.g., Brinkema, 2014), has worked to reunite a reader's aesthetic, affective response to text with the formalist qualities of the text itself, asserting that close reading and affect go hand-in-hand.

Although I relied on much tacit procedural knowledge throughout my reading of this passage, my engagement with Eve's soliloquy on the eleventh floor of the library was not directed toward the acquisition of skills, strategies, or knowledge of literary form. It was not an exercise in critically analyzing the ideological discourse at play in Twain's writing, or an attempt to acquire the cultural knowledge of 19th century American classics. I have taken the time to recount this literary reading experience, and the pieces of writing born out of it, because I feel my reading of Eve's soliloquy serves as an instance of what I'd like to call *literary communion.*

Other scholars who have studied literature and the literature curriculum in secondary schools have offered their own terms to make sense of what happens, especially between reader and text, in an act of literary reading. Bakhtin (1981), for example, conceived of literature in dialogic terms, imagining the reader's engagement with the literary text as a kind of dialogue with the author. Rosenblatt (1978), whose ideas I'll elaborate in greater depth in Chapter 3, theorized how a reader *transacted,* often times aesthetically, with text, and—more recently—Smagorinsky (2001), building on Rosenblatt's theories, detailed what he called a *culturally mediated transactional zone* that readers inhabit as they engage with literary works.

These concepts are useful in trying to imagine how English Language Arts educators might more fully capitalize on readers' personal responses in the process of literary interpretation, correcting for the "New Critical dogmas" that assert the "independence of the text" from the reader (Rabinowitz & Bancroft, 2014, pp.6-7). They may even trouble the soundness of interpretations that might result when a reader's response ignores the text under interpretation. However, while concepts like transaction, dialogism, and the culturally mediated transactional zone might explain, to some extent, the process of literary interpretation, they do not explain the tears that flowed as I came to the realization that even the best stars can melt.

They do not fully capture the almost sacramental nature of the event that happened as I read Eve's soliloquy and that continued to unfold when "that sorrow *had* come" with my grandfather's death. Literary communion*,* I think, does.

Communion with Literature

The term *literary communion* is not one I borrow from the writings of Jacques Rancière. It comes, rather, from my own spiritual sense of communion derived from my experiences as a practicing Catholic. The term communion has become synonymous with participation in the sacrament of Eucharist, a sacrament through which "we unite ourselves (*com-* is a prefix meaning "with, together") to Christ, who makes us sharers in his Body and Blood to form a single body" (*unus* means "oneness, union.") (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1331). The Greek word for communion—*koinonia*—appears in St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, where he asks, in reference to some of the earliest practices of the Christian Mass, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation [a *koinonia*] in the blood of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:15-17). Both the Catechism and Paul's letter present communion—like all sacraments--as a type of mutual participation, through visible, material signs, in the transcendent—something bigger than ourselves.

The ecclesiastical connotations of the word *communion* might give some readers pause. As I have already mentioned in my unpacking of literature's cultural heritage tradition, literature has certainly been used throughout history in spiritually coercive ways that run counter to equality. In addition, the source of my own use of the term *communion*—the Catholic Christian tradition—has a history of patriarchy and magisterium that, for many, have come to epitomize hierarchy. This more hierarchical stigma seems at odds with the claims about literary communion I made in this chapter's introductory paragraphs: that it is the fruit of my own

imagining how alternative relationships of *equality* might be different from the kinds of relationships between readers and texts that perpetuate inequality. However, the connotations of Communion that I invoke in my own thinking and discussions about literary communion are ones I find to be commensurate with equality. The Eucharistic act of communing with Christ is due, in large part, to the Incarnation: Christ's taking on the flesh and thereby assuming *equality* with humankind. As John proclaims in his Gospel: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." It was Christ's becoming flesh that made possible the sacrifice of his crucifixion—a sacrifice that the sacrament of Holy Communion memorializes through its gifts of Christ's body and blood. Thus, the Christian narrative is, in some ways, a story of the possibilities that exist in Christ assuming a kind of equality with humanity.

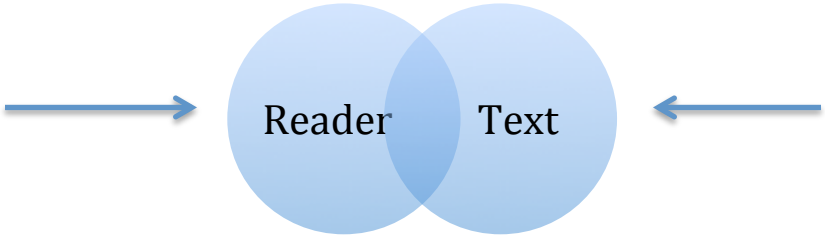
My unpacking of literary communion throughout Chapters 3, 4 and 5 does not elaborate how it is that literary texts facilitate a union between readers and *Christ*. This is not a project on literary evangelization. Rather, I use three connotations of the term communion—spiritual transcendence, transubstantiation, and thanksgiving—to imagine a more sacramental coming together of reader and text alternative to the relationships assumed in the literature curriculum's more rational-instrumental frameworks. Literary communion, in contrast to literary instrumentalism, is a coming together of reader and text as assumed equals. To quote Bishop Robert Barron (2011), "Those who participate in communion never leave unchanged; they never go back the same way they came" (p.194). To speak of literary communion, then, is to speak of a "*transformation* into a communion, in which [reader and text] do not remain what [they] were" (Gadamer, 1975, p.34).

I dare say I did not remain what I was after reading Eve's soliloquy. In the words of a reader whose stories appear in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, Eve's soliloquy was "in my muscles

and in my bones." Having come face-to-face with the inevitability of loss, I, too, found myself sitting up every night, looking at my own figurative stars in my life for as long as I could keep awake. *The Diaries of Adam and Eve* did not remain what it was either, becoming—in addition to the literary diary it had always been—a gift, both a figurative one in the form of the eulogy I composed for my grandfather, and a literal one, in the form of the first edition copy I received from Professor Werge. Even Professor Werge's letter—yet another gift born out of my initial engagement with Eve's soliloquy—evokes a sense of communion. Its lexicon drips with a kind of sacramental spirituality. There is no analysis, no interpretation—only mention of things that transcend the rational world: namely faith, hope, and love.

Earlier, I offered a visual depiction of the relationships between readers and texts as they play out in the literature curriculum's more rational-instrumental frameworks. Viewing those relationships through a lens of Rancièrian equality, I highlighted their hierarchical structures and their "tooling" of literary texts for the sake of knowledge. I will close this section here with my best attempt at visualizing literary communion in Figure 2. Just as Rancière's ethical lens has helped me see when and how relationships between readers and texts perpetuate inequality, his lens has also helped me to see how a relationship of equality might be different. Literary communion, born out of an assumption of equality between reader and text, is one such possibility—a sacramental possibility—for literary reading with implications for how English Education understands many of its pedagogical and curricular traditions, including close reading, reader response, and critical approaches to literature. The chapters that follow are my own attempt at elaborating literary communion and its implications for these long-standing traditions.

Figure 2. A visual of literary communion



Overview of Chapters

The details of my own communion with Twain's *Diaries of Adam and Eve* are, in many ways, a preview of what this dissertation is as a whole: an exploration into one possibility in and for a secondary English Language Arts literature curriculum that abides by equality. Literary communion is one such possibility that I elaborate throughout Chapters 3, 4 and 5. I lay the groundwork for that elaboration in Chapter 2, where I reconstruct the Rancièrian conceptual framework that animates my theorizing of literary communion. This chapter serves as the introduction to the notion that pulsates throughout all of Rancièrian philosophy and that serves as the unifying lens for my project: equality. Chapter 2, I hope, lends greater clarity to this current chapter, where I have already applied a lens of equality to make visible the relationships of inequality between reader and text in more instrumental frameworks of literary reading.

In Chapter 3, I examine the work of literary theorist and educator Louise Rosenblatt whose scholarship on aesthetic transaction has, as she herself said, contributed to "revising the teaching of literature" in a way that would make a reader's personal response the basis for growth toward a more…knowledgeable interpretation" (1990, p.100). I engage with Rosenblatt's work because it has, like my own project on literary communion, worked to mend the perceived independence of the text from the reader inscribed in formalist traditions. Given the ethical nature of my work on literary communion, I apply an ethical lens—Rancièrian

equality—to Rosenblatt's work on aesthetic transaction. This lens allows me to imagine literature as being grounded not only in experience, as Rosenblatt's theory of aesthetic transaction assumes it to be, but also in equality. It is this vision of literature—a vision of literature that assumes readers and texts to exist in a relationship of equality—that allows me to imagine how literature might be open to a kind of communion between reader and text, one in which readers literally dwell or infuse themselves in the textual gaps between language and experience.

Whereas Chapter 3 uses a lens of equality to help theorize the relationship between reader and text assumed in literary communion, Chapter 4 uses Rancièrian emancipation and aesthetics to deepen my theorizing of literary communion as involving a kind of transubstantiation of both reader and text. In this chapter, I consider the potential for emancipatory reading opened up by overthrowing the logic that attempts to determine the effect a work of literature can have on its readers. I use emancipation to trouble more traditional frameworks of literature instruction that claim to be emancipatory, namely critical frameworks. However, I also emancipate myself, to some degree, from Rancière's articulations of emancipation, which—to my reading—appear grounded primarily in rational-intellectual terms. I conclude that the term "transubstantiation" is more generative in unpacking literary communion as a kind of relationship between reader and text where words—rather than abiding by rational-instrumental actions like decoding, interpretation, and analysis—become flesh.

Chapter 5 lends one more dimension to literary communion by using the Eucharistic connotations of "gift" and "thanksgiving" to re-read Chapters 3 and 4. This re-reading serves as a summary of the discussions that precede Chapter 5, but also helps to reframe literature as a kind of mutual "gifting" between reader and text. After discussing how it is that reader and text

might function as dual subjects giving and receiving together, I return to the place this dissertation began: the secondary English Language Arts curriculum, and I elaborate the implications of literary communion not only for readers and literary texts, but also for English Language Arts teachers.

CHAPTER 2
"POEM-ING" RANCIÈRE: CONSTRUCTING MY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND MY METHOD/OLOGY

> A method means a path: not the path that a thinker follows but the path that he/she constructs, that you have to construct to know where you are, to figure out the characteristics of a territory you are going through, the places it allows you to go, the way it obliges you to move, the markers that can help you, the obstacles that get in your way. (Rancière, 2009a, p.114)

> Attention alters what it touches […] To write a poem isn't to paint by numbers, or to follow a cookbook recipe. You don't take one metaphor, one surprising shift of relationship, and mix with one shift of grammar or view. To write a poem, for me, is to weave a needed rope out of thin air, often in desperation, while falling. (Hirshfield, 2016, Interview published online)

Introducing Rancière

In the previous chapter, I outlined what I perceive to be the dominant traditions, curricular frameworks, and curricular documents governing the teaching of literature in English Language Arts education. While I could have intervened on or engaged with those curricular traditions, frameworks, and documents in any number of ways, I chose to do so through a lens of equality—a lens I borrow from the French philosopher, Jacques Rancière.

Rancière invented his intellectual identity against a historical backdrop that Jean-Philippe Deranty (2010) has described as "one of revolutionary effervescence all around the world" (p.2). Rising to scholarly significance in France in the 1960s, Rancière came onto the French intellectual scene just a decade or two after post-war French intellectual giants Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. What set Rancière apart from these intellectual icons, though, including his teacher, Louis Althusser, was what Jean-Philippe Deranty (2010) has

described as Rancière's "consistent attempt to scrupulously follow the implications of the idea that human beings are equal in all respects" (p.3). Rather than unpacking the discursively and institutionally inscribed power structures contributing to systemic inequalities, Rancière pursued a philosophical project dedicated to imagining the possibilities that might exist in treating equality as a presupposition rather than an end goal. It is *this* equality—the only equality that, in a Rancièrian frame, can be deemed *real*—that sits at the heart of my own project, and at the heart of this chapter where I construct a conceptual framework designed to animate my deepening and elaboration of literary communion.

My conceptual framework comprises Rancièrian equality, as well as two concepts that emanate from equality: aesthetics and emancipation. This conceptual framework has felt to me much like the rope to which poet Jane Hirshfield refers in the epigraph that opens this chapter. In other words, I did not enter into this project knowing that Rancièrian equality, aesthetics, and emancipation would animate my thinking on literary communion, nor was I able at the outset to conceptualize how or why these concepts might intertwine with one another. These concepts of equality, aesthetics, and emancipation felt originally like disparate strands. However, with time, and a great deal of thinking, reading, and writing, I have found a way to weave them together. Their convergence in this chapter and throughout this project is an act of making, not unlike the *poiesis* of poetry.

As the above paragraph attests, I find it impossible to talk about the animating concepts of this project without also talking about my methods. Thus, this chapter lays both the conceptual and methodological groundwork for my project devoted to imagining and elaborating literary communion. For the past five years, I have taught a variety of teacher preparation courses devoted to "methods." I can always sense students' eagerness at the outset of those

courses, their blind hope that we will part ways 15 weeks later, their notebooks brimming with all that the course title promises: a list of "things to do," "strategies to follow." As readers, you have likely entered this chapter hoping to leave with a sense of my research methods—those things I have done and the paths I have followed that have allowed me to arrive at the arguments in subsequent chapters. Methods, though, as Rancière reminds us in the epigraph that opens this chapter, are not followed so much as they are *constructed* on the fly. One task of this chapter, then, is to illuminate the constructed-ness of my project, or—to evoke the Rancièrian epigraph that opens this chapter—to give readers a sense not of the path I have followed, but the path I have, and continue to construct out of Rancière's thinking as well as the lived accounts of my own and others' literary reading experiences.

On "the Universe Conspiring:" Reading Rancière While Writing Poetry

I'd like to open this chapter, with its dual focus on key Rancièrian concepts and what I conceive of as my research methodology, with a story that speaks to the inseparability of these two foci. My story is one that narrates my first encounters with Jacques Rancière through reading. My hope is that, by sharing it, I make more concrete the *concept* of Rancièrian equality and what it might have to do with reading literature. In addition, I hope that my sharing this story underscores a key methodological point by illuminating the equality by which I have abided as a reader of Rancière—a reader who has re*written* Rancière in the service of literary communion. Indeed, this project on literary communion is itself a manifestation of the way reading literature might be an act of communion--an act through which neither reader nor text can remain what they once were.

My first years as a high school English teacher transpired in the sleepy plantation town of Donaldsonville, Louisiana, in a high school of no more than 150 students. My drives to and

from school those first few years of teaching took me down 60 miles of single-lane, sugar cane-flanked highway. Somewhere along that blank canvas of LA-1, I dreamt up Ascension Catholic High School's first parent-child supper and book club. A decade has now passed, and I'm fairly certain my copy of Paolo Coelho's *The Alchemist,* a text over which we enjoyed sparkling conversation and spicy sauce piquant, is somewhere with a former student who had forgotten her copy the evening we all gathered to discuss it. Without it, I am unable to recall many of the details beyond the basic plot line about a shepherd boy named Santiago questing for his treasure. But I do remember that Coelho's bestseller felt to me like a stitching-together of the kinds of passages that readers could chew on for days on end. In several of those passages, Santiago would speak of a phenomenon I have thought about quite often in the years since: one of the "universe conspiring."

As I begin this chapter devoted to re-constructing Rancière's philosophy of equality, aesthetics, and emancipation alongside my methodological commitments, I cannot help but think about how my first encounters with Rancière might best be described as an instance of the "universe conspiring." I was a doctoral student when I began my forays into Rancière. I had just completed a poetry seminar, and was newly enrolled in a philosophy of education seminar where my professor, Lynn Fendler, had invited us to consider Bingham and Biesta's (2010) *Jacques Rancière: Education, Truth, Emancipation* as a possible course text. I read it over the semester break, letting both it and the poetry reading and writing regimen I had established in my poetry seminar fill that three-week caesura between fall and spring semester. That juxtaposition of poetry and Rancièrian philosophy was just the conspiracy I needed to commence my construction of a path where poetry and philosophy have converged once more to give shape to this dissertation.

As I composed my own poetry, I came to feel the profound sense of equality at the core of Rancière's project. I sensed what poet Charles Simic described as "the labor of poetry:" "finding ways through language to point to what cannot be put into words," and realized how the limitations of language demanded the creativity not only of writers, but readers as well (qtd. in Zwicky, 2003, p.85). "The poet," writes Rancière, "strives to say everything, knowing that everything cannot be said, but that is the unconditional tension of the translator that opens the possibility of the other tension, the other will" (1991, pp. 69-70). Working in the gaps between experience and language, I composed poems, all the while anticipating the "possibility" of the person beyond the words themselves: the reader.

Reading Rancière while writing and imagining others *reading* my own poetry, I began to consider the implications of equality for literary reading. I began to reflect on some of my most moving engagements with literature, as well as the lived accounts of other readers. My theorizing of literary communion is the product of all of this. Therefore, what follows is not just an explanation of Rancièrian concepts, but rather a transformation, or a rewriting of Rancière. To rewrite Rancière is, I believe, commensurate with the spirit of literary communion—a commensurability I believe will become more apparent in Chapter 4 where I dwell on a kind of figurative transubstantiation possible in and through literary communion. The idea of re-writing Rancière also resonates with the observations of scholars who have expounded upon what it means to engage with Rancière's work:

> Understanding [Rancière's work] does not consist in explaining it from a position of superior knowledge and authority, but in translating it, in appropriating it within an activity of (self- as well as social-) transformation that constantly rewrites the book according to the ever-changing demands of the new situations. (Citton, 2010, p.37)

And so begins my rewriting of Rancièrian philosophy, in the service of imagining and elaborating literary communion.

Key Concepts in Rancièrian Philosophy

Rancièrian equality

Given the ways that Rancière's equality literally pulsates throughout and gives shape to other Rancièrian concepts essential to my project, I begin by reconstructing this key tenet of Rancière's philosophical project. While much of the discourse of education, and even the teaching of literature, revolves around the bringing about of equality, Rancière's equality problematizes critical theory's projection of equality into the future. Equality, according to Rancière, "is a presupposition, an initial axiom—or it is nothing." After all, to project equality into the future, as something eventually to be attained, is only to verify inequality.

As I have already noted, Rancière's equality resulted in a philosophical project devoted to following the *implications* of the idea that human beings are equal. In other words, Rancière's philosophical project is not about proving that all individuals begin as equals, but is rather about illuminating how equality, as a theoretical starting point, might transform the way individuals perceive and engage with the world. His project, then, is not about what *is* so much as it is about imagining *what might be possible* in beginning from an assumption of equality. My own project focused on literary reading in the secondary English Language Arts curriculum shares that interest in what might be possible. Rancièrian equality, therefore, might best be described as a "lens"—one through which I critiqued the dominant curricular traditions and frameworks that have governed the teaching of literature in the English Language Arts in Chapter 1, and one through which I imagine literary communion.

Rancière's recalibration of equality makes him the ideal conversational companion with

whom to carry out a project that I ground in a humanities-oriented tradition. Though not incommensurable with the standards set forth for social sciences research, humanities-oriented research in education has been likened to:

> various forms of criticism intended to problematize unrecognized assumptions, implications, and consequences of various kinds of educational practice, policy, and research, as well as to challenge what these approaches take for granted as beyond questioning. In this way, humanities-oriented research in education is intended to foster dissonance and discomfort with conventional practice. (AERA, 2009, p.482)

By problematizing the treatment of equality as end goal, Rancière's philosophical project fosters discomfort with frameworks that disguise, promote, or sustain hierarchical relationships. This discomfort also serves as a launching-off point for imagining how relationships of equality might pose alternative possibilities.

In the case of my own project concerned with the dynamics of literary reading in the secondary English Language Arts curriculum, Rancière's *equality* makes visible the hierarchical implications of more instrumental curricular frameworks. Rancièrian *aesthetics* and *emancipation* remain tethered, like all things Rancièrian, to equality, but they each have a unique function in this humanities-oriented project dedicated to fostering dissonance and discomfort with conventional practice *and* imagining unconventional alternatives. As I'll begin to suggest in the next section, and then expound upon further in Chapter 3, Rancière's philosophy of *aesthetics* might allow English educators to overthrow the hierarchical relationships that have characterized the literature curriculum by imagining literature as grounded in relationships of equality between readers and texts. Rancière's writing about what he termed the "aesthetic regime" might also open up a space in the literature curriculum for readers to do more than

analyze an author's meaning. Thus, Rancièrian aesthetics troubles the implications of literary instrumentalism intent on tooling literary texts for specific purposes, and renders literature conducive to a reader's self-*emancipation*—a kind of emancipation with transformative implications for both reader and literary text.

I will elaborate these points about aesthetics and emancipation more fully in the sections below, and then more fully in relation to literature throughout chapters 3 and 4. My point here has simply been to illuminate the ways that Rancièrian equality, aesthetics, and emancipation—as concepts radically reoriented from the more normative sense of these terms—comprise a generative framework for a humanities-based project designed to foster dissonance and discomfort with the conventional practice of literary reading in the secondary English language arts curriculum.

Rancièrean aesthetics and its implications for literature

In keeping with his re-calibration of equality, from that of an end goal to a starting point, Rancière also offers a more radical conceptualization of aesthetics. Though aesthetics has more commonly been understood, in Kantian terms, as the philosophical study of beauty—most often the study of art-inspired beauty—Rancière returns to the etymological root of aesthetics to refresh its meaning. *Aesthesis*, the Greek term for the "faculty of sense, the capacity to both perceive a given and make sense of it" (2009b, p.1) is the launching-off point for Rancière's unfurling of aesthetics. Making sense of sense can, according to Kant, be done in three ways—two of which, when viewed through a Rancièrian lens of equality, define a hierarchical order. In the first way, the faculty of knowledge overtakes the faculty of sensation. In the second way, the faculty of knowledge is made subordinate to the faculty of sensation. The third way, which

Rancière conceives of as the *aesthetic experience*, is to overthrow the hierarchy—to neutralize the division between knowledge and sensation:

> What I call the aesthetic dimension is this: […] It is another kind of relation between sense and sense, a supplement that both reveals and neutralizes the division at the heart of the sensible. (2009b, p.3)

Thus, aesthetics—as that which reveals and neutralizes the division between knowledge and sensation—is, for Rancière, *equality.* To introduce Rancièrian aesthetics into the curricular conversations about literature, then, is to intervene on the hierarchical relationships that characterize dominant curricular frameworks for literature instruction—to overthrow them and to begin to imagine literature as a set of relationships grounded in equality.

Applying Rancièrian aesthetics as a lens through which to view the pervading traditions, frameworks, and curricular documents that have governed literary reading in U.S. schools can be incredibly generative. These curricular frameworks and traditions comprise what Rancière would call the *distribution of the sensible,* a "certain configuration of the given" (2009b, p.3), or the system of divisions[2] that assigns parts, associates meanings with those parts, and defines the relationships between things. Rancièrian aesthetics--by overthrowing hierarchical divisions--allows for a *re*distribution of the sensible, a reconfiguration of the divisions and roles that have traditionally disciplined or "policed" (Rancière, 2010) the reading of literature.

As I tried to demonstrate in the previous chapter, more traditional curricular frames for literature thrive on the stability of relations between and among people (teachers, students, published authors), objects (texts), and modes of perception and signification (favoring, as is often the case within the Cartesian paradigm of U.S. schooling, knowledge as the primary mode

[2] The French term, used by Ranciere to identify the distribution of the sensible, is *le partage du sensible*, derived from the verb *partager,* meaning both "to break apart" and "to share."

of "sensing"). I outlined those predictable, stable relations in Chapter 1, noting how literature is often mediated by knowledge and taken up for knowledge. Readers are the analysts of texts, which remain the products of someone else's—the author's—creative capacities. Teachers assume the authority to mediate a reader's analytic interpretation and/or judge its validity.

Rancièrian aesthetics troubles the fixedness and the inequality of the positions and roles assumed in a more conventional, instrumental literature curriculum. In fact, Rancière's work dedicated specifically to literature[3] does not equate literature with *les belles lettres*. For Rancière, literature does not intervene as literature because it possesses the specific properties of literary language. Literature intervenes as literature when literature "no longer addresses itself to a specific audience, one sharing a prescribed position within the social order and drawing ordered rules of interpretation and modes of sensibility from that ethos" (Rancière, 2011a, p.12). In other words, Rancière's aesthetics, as evidenced by his writings about literature, affords the possibility of imagining an alternative ethos for engaging with literary texts—one that supplies experiences of equality between readers and texts and that challenges the unequal distribution of capacities across the various players in the networked activity of literary reading.

Rancièrian emancipation

The alternative ethos for engaging with literary texts afforded by the aesthetic experience is one that stems, in part, from the untying of *poiesis*, the text's manner of making, from *aesthesis*, the text's manner of reception. The reader, presumably equal in experience and capacity to the literary artist, remains free to deviate from any allegiance to the artist's actual or assumed intentions. Literature, according to Rancière's aesthetics, rejects a "theology of signification: the assumption of an unspoken element slumbering within speech to be revealed by

[3] e.g., Rancière's (2011) *The Politics of Literature*

the work of the critic" (Bewes, 2014, p.188). With this logic overthrown, there exists space for readers to play with texts, to reinvent texts, to seize texts and form new texts of their own.

This act of reinventing texts, playing with texts, seizing texts and forming new texts of one's own might best be described as a kind of *emancipatory* reading. By recalibrating equality as an assumption rather than a goal toward which to strive, Rancière also offers a new logic of emancipation—one that troubles the ethical implications of more traditional notions of literature and literary theory's capacity for emancipation. As I noted in my delineation, in Chapter 1, of more critical approaches to the literature curriculum, English educators have expressed enthusiasm for what they perceive as literature's potential to serve as a tool for making readers aware of and thereby liberated from the ideological forces at play within texts. Focused on exposing oppressive structures that remain relatively invisible to the untrained eye, critical frameworks for engaging with literature evince a rootedness in the critical pedagogy camp. Members of this camp (e.g., Giroux, McLaren) claimed to assist in emancipating the oppressed by making them aware of the power relations that define their situation.

But for Rancière, who imagined equality as a starting point, rather than a goal toward which to strive, this emancipatory logic proves problematic. Critical pedagogy, in a Rancièrian framework, falls short of its supposed emancipatory interest because it operates from an assumed divide between those who already possess a very specific mode of knowing and those who do not. Emancipation, in the tradition of critical pedagogy, then, is exactly what Rancière argued could *not* be emancipation: a reliance on *someone else,* free from, and therefore aware of, the workings of power, who could help demystify these workings of power for others, so these others might join the ranks of the free.

In light of the contradictions between Rancière's new egalitarian ethic and more traditional notions of emancipation, Rancière's new logic of emancipation treats emancipation, quite simply, as something one does for oneself. It is, as Rancière (1995) noted, a kind of "testing of equality" (p.45). Artistic forms that identify with what Rancière refers to as the aesthetic regime, where there is no assumed "effect" of an art's form on the reader or spectator, where the reader is assumed to no longer "share a prescribed position within the social order and draw ordered rules of interpretation and modes of sensibility from that ethos" (2011a, p.12) remain open to a reader's emancipation. In the context of literature, the emancipated reader is not she who relies on the knowing authority of theory, teacher, or text to see that which she could previously not. The emancipated reader is she who "makes her own poem with the poem before her" (2011b, p.6). This notion of emancipation leaves literature not only open to experiences of equality between reader and text, but also to a kind of transubstantiation, in which it is impossible for reader and text to remain fixed, stable, or unchanged.

An Elucidation of my Method/ology

Delving into lived accounts of literary reading

While the preceding sections serve as a weaving together of key Rancièrian concepts that will animate my elaboration of literary communion throughout subsequent chapters, these subsequent chapters are themselves a weaving together of Rancièrian philosophy with people's lived accounts of reading. These lived accounts originate from people I imagine to be the most embodied readers of us all: English Language Arts teachers. I realize that interviewing *teachers* might seem a contradiction of sorts, given the way it appears to cater to the higher rungs of the hierarchies embedded in the curricular frames and traditions that have tended to govern the teaching of literature in English Language Arts (See Chapter 1). However, my reason for

interviewing teachers stems from both a desire for my work to speak back to the English Language Arts curriculum, and a more general belief about curriculum: that it is not something external to teachers, that they somehow enact, so much as it is something that emerges out of their lived experience (Aoki, 1986/2005).

I place my own stories of reading literature, as well as these teachers' stories gleaned from conversational interviews, on an epistemological plane equal to that of Rancière. Rancière's lens of equality guided my analysis of more traditional curricular frameworks for literature instruction, helping me to see when and how relationships between readers and texts perpetuate inequality. This in turn inspired me to seek out lived accounts of literary reading that might offer glimpses into relationships of equality between readers and texts that look different from the more instrumental models of literary reading I outlined in Chapter 1. It was not until I began studying these accounts that I began grasping for additional threads of Rancièrian philosophy—such as aesthetics and emancipation-- with which I have woven together my thinking on literary communion.

The interviews

Over a span of eighteen months, I interviewed 11 different teachers, 3 male and 8 female, ranging from 2 years of classroom teaching experience to 32 years of classroom teaching experience. I located these teachers through a survey I had administered in the states of Illinois, Alabama, and Michigan, inquiring into teachers' reading and writing practices. For the sake of this project focused on literary reading in the English language arts curriculum, I identified a list of persons who self-identified as avid readers of literature.

My first round of interviews served an introductory purpose, with my intention being to come to know these persons as English language arts teachers. I asked each person, as we sat

together in libraries, coffee shops, and bookshops, to narrate how they had ended up in the English language arts classroom, which—in most cases—elicited accounts about their experiences as readers and writers. These first-round interview transcripts, along with each person's in/abilities to continue our conversations, led me to pursue more focused interviews with five persons--Dan, Margie, Jane, India, and Lisa-- some of whose accounts will emerge in later chapters.

My more focused interviews with Dan, India, Lisa, Margie, and Jane revolved around one or two concrete accounts of literary reading. I did not specify whether the account needed to have originated in or out of school—only that the person needed to think about a literary work (a piece of writing produced in a narrative, poetic, or dramatic mode) that had left a lasting impression on her in some way, and that she be able to recount her experience of reading that literary work. In keeping with the phenomenological tradition's interest in the lifeworld existentials (VanManen, 1990) of lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived relation, I oriented our interview conversations around these lifeworld existentials, so as to focus on the concrete details of the literary reading event. In the case of these second-round interviews, which sometimes evolved into a third interview so that we might discuss a second reading account, I asked people to bring their chosen piece of literature with them. I did this so that we might revisit a particular passage or two that factored into the literary work's lasting impression upon the reader. When this revisiting occurred, the person would often re-read the passage after providing some context for it, and then talk in detail about where and with whom they had been, along with what they heard, saw, felt, and so on when they read this passage for the first time or in subsequent readings.

I realize, of course, that Rancière is not a phenomenological philosopher, and so--from a certain vantage point--to merge his philosophical project with lived accounts of reading might seem disjointed, if not entirely illogical. My response to such an imagined critique is to argue that Rancière and the phenomenological tradition--though different--are not incommensurate, and that bringing together Rancièrian philosophy with these lived accounts is an example of the kind of convergence of philosophy and empirical research that scholars of educational philosophy have found so generative (Wilson and Santoro, 2015). In many ways, focusing on the temporality, embodiment, relationality, and spatial dimensions of reading literature challenged the more cerebral model of literary reading advanced by the rational-instrumental frameworks that Rancière's lens of equality begins to problematize. By detailing the specifics of time, body, relationship, and space that characterized a particular reading event, these persons also remained oriented toward an experience of reading where the unique particulars of time, space, relationship, and body matter—where who, where, and with whom the *reader* is, in relation to the text, actually matters a great deal.

Data analysis

After transcribing these interviews, I engaged in a holistic reading approach (VanManen, 1990), where I attended to the text of an interview as a whole. I read the transcripts for words or phrases that captured the fundamental meaning of the lived account, ruminating on these accounts and writing about these phrases in conversation with Rancière and my own lived experiences of reading (like the one I detailed in Chapter 1). Reading across each participant's account of impressionable literary reading experiences, I observed themes like the following: that the reader somehow made the text her own; that there was a kind of sensory depth to the reading experience that suggested the reader was engaged both bodily and cognitively with the

text; that the reader, though engaged with the text, also read "beyond" the text; that—temporally—there was an alignment of sorts between the reader's time in life and the events and details of the literary text.

Guided by a Rancièrian lens of equality, I was interested in allowing these stories to feed my imagination as to how literary reading might defy the hierarchical distributions of the rational-instrumentalist frameworks I identified in Chapter 1. The accounts people shared with me, as evidenced by the themes I articulated above, evinced an almost spiritual depth not accounted for in the more rational-instrumental uptake of literature in the secondary English language arts curriculum. I kept finding myself drawn to the phrase of India, who, in one of our interviews together, recalled the day her mother "came to me with *A Wrinkle in Time,* handed it to me as if it was my First Holy Communion or my Bat Mitzvah, and said, 'You're ready. It's time. It's time you read this book'" (Interview, 16 July 2015). I detected in India's recollections a kind of sacramental quality to her mother's feelings about reading—this sense that her life, thus far, had been preparing her to read *A Wrinkle in Time*, in a way comparable to the kind of preparation one undertakes in anticipation of a sacrament. And so began my theorizing of literary *communion* as a way of imagining how relationships of equality between reader and text might lend a kind of sacramental quality to reading that looks and feels different from the more rational-instrumental treatment of literature that has seemed to characterize the high school English language arts curriculum.

As I noted in Chapter 1, Rancière, I learned, could only take me so far in my theorizing of literary communion. His lens of equality helped make visible the implicit hierarchies at play when literature is treated in rational-instrumental terms. Wanting to imagine what other possibilities might exist when literature is approached, ethically, as if reader and text are equal, I

found myself grasping, in the spirit of the Hirshfield epigraph, for a strand of Rancièrian philosophy that would allow me to do just that. My grasping put me in touch with Rancièrian aesthetics as a way of overthrowing the hierarchies of instrumentalism and beginning to imagine—along with my own and other people's lived accounts of reading-- how relationships of equality between reader and text might be different. That imagining is what produced literary communion—a kind of sacramental event between reader and text that I deepen to some extent through the Rancièrian notion of emancipation, but which Rancièrian emancipation—as I argue in Chapter 4—falls short of elaborating.

There are, then, a number of threads that course throughout this project: various strands of Rancièrian philosophy, of people's lived accounts of reading, my own lived experience of sacrament. Of course threads alone are not enough by which to hang. As Hirshfield notes, a rope is required for hanging, and so it is that process of "weaving together" that I'd like to elucidate next. For Hirshfield, to write a poem is to weave together a needed rope out of thin air. This "weaving together," is what I feel to be the essence of my methodology, lending credence to Wittgenstein's assertion: "Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten," "In philosophy we can only poem."

What it has Meant to "Poem" Throughout this Project

As I open this section on what it has meant "to poem" throughout this project, I cannot help but call upon the scholarship that surrounds the arts-based, qualitative tradition of poetic inquiry. Scholars have interpreted poetic inquiry to mean any number of poetry-related practices (See Prendergast, 2009 for a complete list) that range from a researcher's style and attitude toward writing (e.g., Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009) to methods of data collection, analysis, and representation that include the composition and presentation of actual poems (e.g., Furman,

Langer, Davis, Gallrado & Kulkani, 2007). Scholars' meta-analysis of the ways poetic inquiry has been taken up suggests that poetic processes can be used both as a mode of reporting research, *and* as tools of discovering, or re-searching meaning. These poetic *processes*--what I call the act of "poem-ing"--are what I intend to elaborate in relation to my own project in the sections that follow. I highlight three processes in particular that I feel I have enacted throughout the writing of this project: reducing, concretizing, and evoking. Each of these actions, I believe, aligns with Rancièrian philosophy and remains true to the phenomenological tradition that inspired my collection of readers' lived accounts.

Reducing: Writing as linguistic thickness

Earlier, I noted that my Rancièrian conceptual framework is the result of what I have felt to be a "weaving together" of Rancièrian concepts that are themselves woven together with people's lived accounts of reading. This "weaving together" implies a kind of "thickening" that is part and parcel of what it means "to poem." Here, I think it is useful to return to the Wittgenstein quote: "Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten" and dwell on that final word, *dichten,* for which there is no literal English translation. The German word *dichte* is associated with "thickness," "heaviness," or "specific gravity," not unlike a reduction or concentrate that forms when heat is applied to a combination of liquids in the culinary sciences. Basbøll (2005) has referred to the poem as "a sort of linguistic thickness," arguing that philosophical inquiry might be likened to the action of poetry for its composition of pure text--a crystallization of sorts-- "one that is produced by thickening (writing, compressing) and trimming (reading, editing)" (http://pangrammaticon.blogspot.com/2005/06/epiphany.html).

These assertions resonate also with the phenomenological tradition underpinning my reliance on lived accounts, for scholars have argued that phenomenological research is

fundamentally a writing activity (Van Manen, 2000). My own weaving together of Rancièrian concepts and lived accounts has produced a kind of linguistic thickness derived from what was, at one point, a sprawling collection of interview transcripts and notes on my multiple readings of Rancièrian philosophy, but with much reading and re-reading of interview transcripts and Rancièrian philosophy, began to thicken. The pages that follow, then, lend credence to Van Manen's assertions that "research and writing are aspects of one process" (p.7), but also suggest, quite fittingly in a project on literary *reading,* that *reading,* research, and writing are aspects of one process.

The primary evidence for the linguistic thickening that has evolved over the course of this project exists beyond these pages before you—in Google Docs never shared, in drafts of chapters that never felt as though they had congealed. For example, at one point in the earlier stages of this project, in an iteration of this project other than the one you see before you, I found myself relying on the Rancièrian notion of politics to deepen my theorizing of literary communion. As I read more about Rancièrian politics, though, I realized politics could not elaborate the transformative essence of literary communion, to the degree that emancipation could—and even emancipation, as I noted above, fell short. I, therefore, began to edit out those Rancièrian threads of politics-- to "trim" them, as Basbøll suggests. What resulted was a "purer" concentration of Rancièrian ideas that seemed more in alignment with the metaphor of communion that had itself crystallized through writing about my own as well as others' lived accounts of literary reading.

When I argue that "poem-ing," in the sense of linguistic thickening, has been a fundamental process throughout this project, I am embracing the made-ness of this research. This embrace is one that I feel to be methodologically consistent with Rancièrian equality. Rather than writing *about* Rancière and/or lived accounts, I place Rancière's philosophical project on

the same epistemological plane with my own and others' lived accounts, and, in turn, compose something new, and more concentrated: something I call "literary communion." I "make my own poem with the poem in front of [me]" (Rancière, 2009, p.36).

Concretizing: Using anecdotes

Of course there is always a risk involved in leaning too heavily on existing philosophical frameworks.[4] The end result of a project that relies so heavily on philosophy might seem too theoretical or abstract and therefore guilty of perpetuating the very hierarchies on which this project on literary reading hopes to intervene. Therefore, I "poem" in yet another sense throughout this project: by concretizing the abstract. Poet laureate Ted Kooser (2005) has argued that poems do not begin with ideas. They are instead "triggered by catchy twists of language or little glimpses of life" (p.14). Poems are rooted in the concrete.

Many of the lived accounts that readers shared with me appear as anecdotes that I lace throughout my writing. I hope these anecdotes show that my commitments lay beyond fancy theoretical discourse, in the concreteness of lived experience--a lived experience that I share in common, I'm sure, with readers of this project. My use of anecdotes, then, serves as more than a "warm up" to more philosophical ideas or a way of making the seemingly esoteric ideas of Rancière more palatable. I use anecdotes throughout my chapters to locate my work in lived experience as a gesture of equality to my readers who, possessing their own lived experience, might counter translate (See Chapter 3) my work back to the experience they have lived and continue to live well beyond these pages.

Van Manen (2000) reminds researchers that phenomenological research "does not start or proceed in a disembodied fashion. It is always a project of someone: a real person, who, in the

[4] See Ranciere's *The Philosopher and His Poor*

context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence" (p.31). The anecdote of my own lived experience of reading Twain's *Diaries of Adam and Eve* in Chapter 1, and the anecdote of my first encounters with Rancièrian philosophy in this chapter, are reminders of the concrete origins of this project dedicated to imagining literature through a lens of equality. This project did not originate just with philosophy. It originated in these little glimpses of life that I offer throughout this project.

Evoking

Finally, much of the artistic challenge of this project has existed in my commitment to one of the central functions of poetry: evocation. Van Manen (2000) has characterized phenomenological research as working "*in spite of* the words," as a kind of "poetizing" that involves "speaking in a more primal sense" or "an original singing of the world" (p.13). The kind of writing Van Manen espouses--that which evokes a more primal sense rather than explaining something's meaning--resonates with Rancière's rejection of explanation in the name of equality. Rancière is quite critical of explanation and the assumptions it makes about readers: specifically the assumption that reading is a pipeline of knowledge directed from the all-knowing text to the soon-to-be-knowledgeable reader.

In truth, it is pretty near impossible to *explain* people's lived accounts of reading, and Rancière's prose, I've also learned, is impossible to reduce to an explanation. As one of my participants, Margie, noted: "I have discovered/ That words come hardest to me/ When I try to talk of works that have moved me/ The most poignantly, the most profoundly." And so, in the spirit of defying explanation, I strive to evoke more than explain throughout this project. The construct "literary communion" is perhaps my most obvious reliance on evocation, with my

choice of the term communion based far more on its spiritual and sacramental connotations than on strict ecclesiastical definitions.

In one of his most famous works on aesthetics and emancipation, Rancière (2011b) challenged the passivity of art's spectator, claiming that the "spectator is active [...] He makes his poem with the poem that is performed in front of him" (p.6). What follows is the poem I have made with the poems performed in front of me: the poetry of readers' lived accounts, the poetry of my own lived accounts, and the poetry of Rancière. In my own quest to evoke, rather than explain, I hope I have underscored my own belief that the spectators of this work--my readers--are themselves active and capable of all that I argue remains possible in a relationship of literary communion between reader and text.

CHAPTER 3
ENTERING INTO COMMUNION: REIMAGINING LITERATURE THROUGH A LENS OF EQUALITY

> I had come to see language as an almost supernatural force, existing between people, bringing our brains, shielded in centimeter-thick skulls, into communion. A word meant something only between people, and life's meaning, its virtue, had something to do with the depth of the relationships we form. It was the relational aspect--i.e., "human relationality"--that undergirded meaning. (Kalanithi, 2016, p.42)

Introduction

Reflecting back on previous chapters, I have--up until this point--contextualized my theorizing of literary communion. In Chapter 1, I made the case that the increasing technocratization of education in the United States has manifested itself in both the marginalization of literature (Alsup, 2015; White, 2015), and the instrumentalization of the English language arts (Brass, 2014), including literature. In other words--to borrow language from Chapter 2--the *distribution of the sensible* in English language arts curricula is one that abides by a logic that uses literature for the sake of building cultural, critical, and skills-oriented knowledge.

Within a Rancièrian framework, the key question with respect to any distribution of the sensible is whether it is founded on equality or inequality. By applying a Rancièrian lens of equality to more traditional curricular frameworks (Beach *et al.*, 2012) that guide literature instruction in middle and high school English language arts curricula, I made visible the hierarchies embedded in these more traditional curricular frames. For Rancière, equality not only serves as a primary means by which to contest hierarchical and exclusionary distributions of the sensible, it also feeds the imagination of other arrangements. And so, in that spirit, I

introduced--at the end of chapter 1--an alternative arrangement to the relationships that undergird literary reading: literary communion.

There are multiple dimensions to literary communion that I will address before this project has ended, but--true to Rancièrian ethics--I will begin by elaborating how it is that literary communion functions as a relationship of equality between reader and text. Throughout my own elaboration of the equality between reader and text, I will engage the work of reader response theorist and educator Louise Rosenblatt whose scholarship has done much to reform the teaching of literature. As I'll discuss, her transactional theory was ground-breaking in reformulating the relationality between reader and text--to the point where readers may wonder where her project ends and my own project begins.

Given the Rancièrian spirit of my project, the answer rests again, of course, in equality. Rosenblatt was for all intents and purposes, a pragmatist, and so from her philosophical vantage point, her project was not so much about ethical relationships as it was about the way meaning- making occurred in the service of literary interpretation. My own project is about ethics, and so--for that reason--I cannot claim that I am picking up where Rosenblatt left off. A more accurate and fair description for what I aspire to do in this chapter is to say that I intend to apply an ethical lens--equality--to the work Rosenblatt has already done in and for the field of literature curriculum. Applying that lens, I argue, might lessen the tendency toward one of the leading misappropriations of Rosenblatt's work: the bifurcation of a reader's aesthetic response to text from reading that pays close attention to the text's form. Bringing Rancière's ethical lens to bear on Rosenblatt's theoretical contributions, I argue that aesthetic reading, when considered through a lens of equality, requires a commensurability of reader response and formalism distinct

from Rosenblatt's transaction--more akin to what I consider a *communion* between reader and text.

Rosenblatt's Reconfiguration of Reader-Text Relationships

I begin this chapter wishing first to credit the scholarship of literary theorist and educator, Louise Rosenblatt. Rosenblatt's work, dating back to her publication of *Literature as Exploration* in 1938, did perhaps more than any other theorist of her time to re-cast the reader in an active role. Her work is not only of seminal importance in the canon of reader response theorists (Tompkins, 1980), but has continued to have lasting effects on the teaching of literature in English classrooms throughout North America (Justman, 2010; Willinsky, 1991), with Dressman and Webster (2001) labeling her the most oft-cited literary theorist in school literacy texts.

Chief among Rosenblatt's contributions is her delineation of a theory she called "literary transaction," and that she later referred to as "aesthetic transaction." This theory is one that scholars (e.g., Blau, 2003) have identified as a source of reform in literature instruction. Rosenblatt, perhaps more than any other scholar before her time, steered the literature curriculum away from reverencing textual authority, so that readers' individual responses to texts might find a place in the English language arts classroom. For Rosenblatt, the process of reading literature was not so much about the reader mining the text for its self-contained meaning, so much as it was a process of "transaction" *between* reader and text. Transaction, for Rosenblatt, challenged the assumption of a one-way channel between reader and text through which a text somehow impressed its meaning upon the reader. To speak of literary transaction meant that, for Rosenblatt, literary reading was "a situation, an event at a particular time and place in which each element [reader and text] conditions the other" (1978/1994, p.16).

Rosenblatt's choice of "transaction" over terms like "interaction" points to the progressive influence of John Dewey on her work, for it was Dewey and his colleague Arthur Bentley, who first developed this transactional terminology to re-think the supposedly linear relationship between organisms and environments. Dewey and Bentley were adamant that the focus of their interests rested *not* so much "in the operation of an organism upon an environment," or "in the operation of an environment upon organism" (Bentley, 1978, p.285). They were interested rather in the *ongoing* process, or the total situation of organism and environment conditioning and being conditioned by the other. Rosenblatt translated this interest in an ongoing process of conditioning in terms specific to literary reading, arguing in *Literature as Exploration* (1938/1995):

> In the past, reading has too often been thought of as an interaction, the printed page impressing its meaning on the reader's mind or the reader extracting the meaning embedded in the text. Actually, reading is a constructive, selective process over time in a particular context. The relation between reader and signs on the page proceeds in a to-and-fro spiral, in which each is continually being affected by what the other has contributed. (p.26)

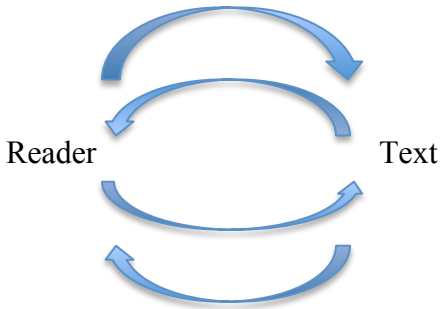
For Rosenblatt, the poem, novel, short story, literary essay--or whatever the literary work may be--existed not in the text itself, which to her, was only a collection of signs. The real "work" of literature existed in the transactional event of reading, in that "to-and-fro spiral" between reader and text in a particular space and time.

Rosenblatt's emphasis on the non-linear relationship, as well as the continual reciprocity between reader and text, has done much in the English language arts curriculum to push back on the legacy of more extreme and often misconstrued interpretations of New Criticism: the search,

through a close reading of the text's content and form, for the one "correct" reading. A "reading" of a literary text was, for Rosenblatt, not so much a noun--the meaning to be found in a text-- as it was a verb: the active *constructing* of meaning made in the transactional event between reader and text. For Rosenblatt, the reader came to the text already as a seeing, thinking, feeling human being, whose evocation of the text mattered as much as the literal signs on the page.

In that sense, then, Rosenblatt's transactional theory appears to challenge the hierarchical logic of the rational-instrumental frameworks and traditions for literature I outlined in Chapter 1. I have often imagined Rosenblatt's transactional theory, if I had to diagram it, treating literature as a relationship between reader and text that looks something like the relationship outlined in Figure 3. True to her rejection of a linear relationship between reader and text, this diagram captures the recursive spiraling between reader and text. And, contrary to the more hierarchical configurations of the curricular frameworks I outlined in Chapter 1, the reader—coming to the text already as a seeing, feeling, thinking, experienced human being—is not empty until filled up by the text. In other words, in Rosenblatt's model, it seems the reader and text can conceivably "transact" on equal planes. Both reader and text prove equally essential to the literary reading process.

Figure 3. A visual of the reader-text relationships implied in Rosenblatt's transaction



English Educators' Translation of Rosenblatt's Theory: Inequality Perpetuated

Still, for Rosenblatt, there was no lens of equality as there is in Rancière's project, to guide her conceptualization of literary reading as a transactional event. To "transact" implies a desired outcome, and for Rosenblatt, that outcome—the primary goal she was after in her delineation of transactional theory—was meaning:

> *Meaning* emerges as the reader carries on a give-and-take with the signs on the page, As the text unrolls before the reader's eyes, the *meaning* made of the early words influences what comes to mind and is selected for the succeeding signs. But if these do not fit in with the *meaning* developed thus far, the reader may revise it to assimilate the new words or may start all over again with different expectations. For the experienced reader, much of this may go on subconsciously, but the two-way reciprocal relationship explains why *meaning* is not "in" the text or "in" the reader. Both the reader and the text are essential to the transactional process of *meaning* making. (1938/1995, p. 27, emphasis added)

Transactional theory's legacy as a way of making meaning of texts is evident in the way Rosenblatt's work has been cited in curricular and pedagogical materials designed to enhance students' strategies and skills of literary interpretation. For example, Appleman's (2009) *Critical Encounters in High School English* cites Rosenblatt's work in a chapter devoted to teaching students to apply the basic tenets of reader response to "strengthen their interpretive possibilities." Even Beach *et al*. (2012) classify Rosenblatt's transaction under their "Reading Processes or Strategies" framework for the English language arts curriculum, noting how educators have used her transactional theory to help students devise different processes or strategies for responding to and interpreting literature. Without the equality that pulsates throughout Rancière's project, the literary text—even in a transactional set-up—can function as a

tool for the development of strategy or skill, thereby perpetuating the inequalities embedded in literature's more instrumental curricular frameworks.

Without the equality that pulsates throughout Rancière's project, Rosenblatt's transactional theory has remained open to yet another relational dynamic between reader and text that perpetuates inequality. There has been, to borrow from Willinsky, "a certain imperfection in the adaptation" of Rosenblatt's work, or perhaps "a selective use made of it"--one that concentrates on the "isolated experience of the reader" (p.125). Consequently, many pedagogical and curricular instantiations of Rosenblatt's work have resulted in a hierarchy of its own: one that privileges the reader's subjectively felt response to text at the expense of the form and content of the literary text itself. This hierarchy has coincided also with a bifurcation of a reader's felt response from the act of close reading. For as much as Rosenblatt herself advocated for a reading of the responses of close readers--those still engaged with the text itself--pedagogical and curricular instantiations of her work have fostered illusions of an entirely independent reader (Blau, 2003). These illusions, along with an analysis of their possible origins, comprise the focus of this section and the next.

Examples of the kinds of unequal relationships between readers and texts that privilege a reader's personal subjective response have emerged in the scholarship focused on reader response pedagogies in middle and secondary English language arts classrooms. For example, Juzwik (2013) found fault in what she conceived of as a literature unit conducted in the reader response tradition, claiming that her reader-centered lessons on *The Diary of Anne Frank,* resulted in students' less-than-meaningful transactions with text. She focused in particular on two assignments within her unit-long study of Anne Frank's diary: a writing assignment inspired by students' reactions to Anne Frank's loss of her pen that invited students to reflect on a time

they lost an object that was important to them, and a culminating assignment inviting students to compose diary entries corresponding to ten days in their own lives. Not surprisingly, students' responses tended to reflect their own lives more than that of Anne Frank, suggesting students had not grappled with the complexities of a text that, given its relevance to the Holocaust, was a far cry from the comforts of a late twentieth-century American middle-class life.

Juzwik's (2013) assignments and her students' responses to them resonate with Lewis's (2000) illustration of a rather troubling ethical implication of overly personalized reader response: the tendency for readers to see in texts only that to which they can relate. Using an example from a class discussion about Christopher Paul Curtis's racially-charged text *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963*, Lewis described how the class discussion "used the aesthetic pleasure of personal response to devolve into a discussion of universal appeal" (p.261). In a discussion about the narrator's Buster Brown shoes, noted for the delight they arouse as he imagines trampling on the White figure etched into the soles, Lewis's students—mostly White—seemed most interested in commenting: "I had Buster Brown shoes." Caught up in their own enjoyment of reminiscing and relating, these students overlooked the narrator's important act of resistance written into the description of the shoes. These examples from Juzwik and Lewis make visible the reality that, as much as reader response-based pedagogies have worked to correct what Rosenblatt (1993) herself described a "text-oriented promulgation of an interpretation by a teacher," they have fostered illusions of an entirely independent and naive reader. In these cases of aesthetic transaction gone awry, the literary text fades into the background at best, or--at worst--out of the picture entirely.

Of course, Rosenblatt herself posited no such hierarchy. Rosenblatt certainly valued the "never-to-be-duplicated" readings of *this* particular reader in *that* particular moment. However,

realizing what had quickly become a common misappropriation of her work, she also stressed that a reader's aesthetic transaction with text was not about "abnegating the possibility of responsible readings of texts" (1993, p.382). In other words, Rosenblatt was interested in readers' felt responses, but more specifically the felt responses of *close readers.* In fact, Rosenblatt was quick to point out the intersections of her own reader response-oriented theories with the theories of the New Critics, who were—as noted in Chapter 1—staunch advocates of close reading: "The New Critics and I seemed to start out on the same path by deploring the neglect of literature as an art resulting from the traditional preoccupation with literary history…" (1990, p.102). In other words, Rosenblatt found herself in harmony with a camp intent on combatting the preoccupation with literary history and authorial intention that had shifted readers' attention *away* from the literary text at hand. Rosenblatt concurred with the New Critics that the reader had a specific task: to engage in a close reading of the text in order to arrive at a valid interpretation consistent with the organic unity of the text as a whole.

Nonetheless, with the pedagogical and curricular instantiations of reader response theory having privileged readers' subjective, felt responses at the expense of the text itself, there has tended, in English language arts, to be an assumed bifurcation of reader response from formalism—a rigorous close study of the text's content and form. The rhetoric at play in Common Core author David Coleman's pitch for close reading provides a telling example of this polarity. Reporting the results of an informal study conducted throughout Texas and Vermont, Coleman asserts:

> What we found was [...] that 80% of the questions kids were asked when they were reading are answerable without direct reference to the text. Think about it, right? You're reading a text, and you talk about [...] what it reminds you of, or what you think about, or

> what you criticize, or perhaps how you feel or react to it--because anything to avoid confronting the difficult words in front of them… (2011, p.10)

In this commentary intended to advocate for close reading, Coleman pits a reader's reminiscing, her thoughts about text, her criticism, and her feelings--all those things that Rosenblatt saw as part and parcel to the reader's transaction *with* text-- as somehow separate from the text itself. Stotsky *et al*.'s (2010b) Arkansas-based study of literary pedagogy and achievement exuded a rhetoric similar to Coleman's, crediting Arkansas students' poor literature performance to too much reader response based pedagogy and not enough close reading. In a similar spirit of separation, Lois Tyson's (2011) *Using Critical Theory,* a guide written for practicing teachers of literature, has a chapter dedicated to reader response and a chapter dedicated to textual analysis. These actions of a reader "responding" to text and a reader closely reading a text remain, at least in some of the field's pervading rhetoric, at odds with one another.

Rancière's Invitation to Reimagine Aesthetics with Equality

One immediate question, then, is how one might make sense of the evolution of a hierarchy and a bifurcation that runs contrary to some of Rosenblatt's original writings. Given both the Rancièrian lens of equality that I bring to this project, and the way equality intersects with Rancièrian aesthetics, I would like to take a close look at Rosenblatt's treatment of aesthetic reading as a way of answering that question. Both Rosenblatt and Rancière work closely with a philosophy of aesthetics, but whereas Rancière's aesthetics--like all things Rancièrian-- is grounded in equality, Rosenblatt's is grounded in experience.

Willinsky's (1991) analysis of Rosenblatt's framing of aesthetic reading seems a generative place to begin. For as much as Willinsky praised Rosenblatt for moving literature instruction beyond the dry *explication de texte*, he also critiqued what he perceived as an

increasingly narrow focus throughout her career. He saw in Rosenblatt's earliest work, *Literature as Exploration,* a defense for reading literature that held much promise for linking literature to democracy. However, this linkage, he felt, had been lost in the reception of Rosenblatt's later work on aesthetic reading. While I do not wish to dwell on the strand of Willinsky's argument having to do with literature's role in a democracy, I do think his assertions bear relevance for nuancing "aesthetic reading," which he felt had been framed by Rosenblatt in existential terms and that focused increasingly throughout her career on the private, "isolated experience of the reader" (p.125).

Rosenblatt's theory of aesthetic reading was, in many ways, an opportunity for her to deepen her theory of literary transaction introduced earlier in her career. In *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* (1978), where Rosenblatt offered one of her more detailed elaborations of the difference between efferent and aesthetic reading, she discussed what she called *aesthetic transaction.* For Rosenblatt, efferent reading took its meaning from the Latin term *effere,* meaning "to carry away." Aspiring toward more pragmatic ends, the reader directed her attention "outward…toward concepts to be retained, ideas to be tested, actions to be performed after the reading (1978/1994, p.24). Though Rosenblatt tended to place efferent and aesthetic reading on a continuum, she still managed at times to portray them in mutually exclusive terms, claiming, "the text may be read either efferently or aesthetically" (p.25). Aesthetic reading, distinct from efferent reading, "stir[s] up affective aspects of consciousness" (p.33) as the "reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with the particular text" (p.25).

This experiential take on aesthetic reading reified one of Rosenblatt's focal assertions throughout all of her career: "The reading of any work of literature is, of necessity, an individual

and unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of some particular reader" (1938/1995, p.32). For Rosenblatt, literary reading might necessitate both efferent and aesthetic reading, but to read a work of literature, the reader *must* broaden her scope of attention to include the personal, affective aura surrounding the words that comprise the text. This focus on what she termed the "aesthetic experience" seemed to imply that the "meaning" made in the literary transaction might extend beyond an interpretation of the literary work to an interpretation also of self:

> During the aesthetic experience [...] We can participate in the tensions, the conflicts in values, the choices, of the characters we have conjured up by means of the texts. Reflection on these, and awareness of our own responses to them can lead to self-understanding, self-criticism, perhaps a clarification or a reinforcement of values (1981, p.22).

There was, then, a slight leaning toward the self and the reader's *individual* experience throughout Rosenblatt's elaboration of aesthetic reading that has been translated into pedagogical and curricular terms that have tended to diminish the importance of the text itself. Many borrowers of Rosenblatt's work on aesthetic reading have tended, as Willinsky pointed out, to make selective use of her work--to see quite literally the image from a Wallace Stevens poem that Rosenblatt herself alludes to in *The Reader, the Text, the Poem:* It was "as if there was *no* book/Except that the reader leaned *above* the page" (Stevens, 1964, p.358, emphasis added).

The source of Rosenblatt's notion of "aesthetic" reading was a field that Rancière proclaimed *not* to be the source of his own delineation of aesthetics: the field most often conflated with the philosophy of art. Rosenblatt's elaboration of aesthetic reading exhibited a rootedness in conversations of philosophers like John Dewey who claimed that art did not exist

in the art object, so much as it existed in the experience of those encountering the art object (Faust, 2000). As I noted in Chapter 2, Rancière's notion of aesthetics—originating from a different source from Rosenblatt's--is inextricably bound with equality. Whereas Rosenblatt's notion of aesthetics allowed her to locate art in experience, Rancière's aesthetics identifies art--including literature, a language art---as giving rise to a new sensible experience wherein equality can be discerned. In the section that follows, I use this Rancièrian notion of aesthetics to reframe how literature might be grounded--not only, as Rosenblatt imagined it, in experience--but also in equality.

A Literature Without Hierarchies

Distinguishing between representation and aesthetics

I feel it is important to qualify my above statement by acknowledging that literature, which I am conceiving here as a language art, has not always *actually* been received or even created, for that matter, on the grounds of equality. One of Rancière's greatest contributions to the arts has been his delineation of three different artistic "regimes." These regimes are not synonymous with specific temporal periods. Rather, they function for Rancière as a means of specifying what counts in art, and how art becomes active or not in distributing a sensible founded on a relationship of equality. Of the three regimes--which Rancière labels the ethical, the representative, and the aesthetic--it is only the aesthetic regime that involves art in the mobilization of equality. Scholars have referred to these regimes, particularly the distinctions Rancière draws between the representative and the aesthetic regimes, as a "gateway" (Deranty, 2010) into Rancière's rich aesthetic philosophy.

Art identified with the representative regime perpetuated what Rancière (2006) referred to as a "hierarchical vision of the community" (p.22). This hierarchical vision stemmed in large

part from the way the representative regime abided by strict conventions and rules, many of them codified in Aristotle's (1449) *Poetics*. So, the literature that abided by a representative logic adhered to a strict arrangement of form that was expected to mimic, to a certain degree, the real world. For example, noble characters belonged in noble genres of tragedy, because "tragedy," wrote Aristotle, "*is* the imitation of an action that is serious and complete." The more "serious" actions fit for tragedy belonged in a "dramatic, *not* a narrative form" (pp. 22-30). In addition to dictating a strict congruence between subject matter and genre, between action and modality, the representative regime also established a rather tight connection between *poiesis*--the text's manner of making—and *aesthesis*--the effects it produces. So, to use tragedy again as an example, the tragedy's dramatic form was intended "to elicit [the audience's] pity and fear." Literature, in other words, abided by a logic that paired content and form and attempted to transfer directly from artist to spectator particular knowledge or feelings.

What matters most about the representative regime for my own argument is its role in perpetuating *in*equality—thereby paving the way for the aesthetic regime's revolutionary overthrow of hierarchical conventions. By demanding a specific correspondence among subject matter, form, genre classification, and audience reception, the representative regime made literature complicit in perpetuating inequality by respecting categories of high and low:

> The representative primacy of action over character or of narration over description, the hierarchy of genres according to the dignity of the subject matter...these elements figure into an analogy with a fully hierarchical vision of the community. (Rancière, 2006, p.22)

Demonstrating commensurability with the norms that govern society, the representative regime sustained hierarchies, where the "high" people—for example, those who understood and appreciated the literary work—distinguished themselves from the lower, less refined

masses. The seating arrangements in Shakespeare's Globe Theatre offer a helpful illustration of this "high" and "low" classification. The groundlings in the Globe Theatre arrived at "low" (bawdy, earthy) interpretations of Shakespeare, whereas the more elite patrons, seated above the groundlings, arrived at loftier, more refined interpretations.

Whereas the art of the representative regime generated a hierarchical vision, the art of the aesthetic regime—as "a rejection of the hierarchical relation" (Rancière, 2009b, p.2)-- gives rise to a new sensible experience of equality. There were, in the aesthetic regime, fewer mediating conventions with regard to artistic subject matter, expectation of form, and genre classification. Anyone or anything could become the subject of art. Rancière used Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* as one of his most cited illustrations of the workings of the aesthetic regime, noting how Flaubert treated all things—from the details of Emma Bovary's love affair to the descriptions of her hairpins--with the same care. There was in Flaubert's novel—very much in contrast with the stipulations surrounding tragedy in Aristotle's *Poetics*-- "no border between what belongs to the poetical realm of noble action and what belongs to the territory of prosaic life" (Rancière, 2008, p.237).

Importantly, too, the literature of the aesthetic regime untied the knot that, in the representative regime, linked *poiesis* to *aesthesis*. Rather than determining the effect a work of art might have on its spectators, the aesthetic regime troubled this cause-and-effect relationship, thereby creating a space for viewers to assume an active role in the process of spectatorship. For Rancière, then, the literary texts of the aesthetic regime supplied experiences of equality. They challenged the division of the world into unequal capacities. One way of reading the shift from the representative regime to the aesthetic regime, then, is to read it as grounds for faith in the

possibility of literature functioning in terms of equality—including assumed equality between reader and text.

Imagining literature as a verification of equality between reader and text

I have taken the time to delineate Rancière's distinction between the representative and aesthetic regimes because, to me, the difference between the two regimes illuminates the way literature can function as a set of relationships that either perpetuate inequality or verify equality. Rancière's delineation of an aesthetic regime, or the way literature intimates an order premised upon the cancellation of hierarchies, bears implications for my own argument intent on imagining a relationship between readers and texts that overthrows the hierarchical models of literary reading implied in rational-instrumental frameworks as well as the reverse hierarchies embedded in many of the pedagogical and curricular instantiations of Rosenblatt's aesthetic transaction.

In the following sections, I elaborate how it is that a literature curriculum, much in keeping with Rancière's aesthetic regime, might verify equality between reader and text, so as to reframe Rosenblatt's aesthetic reading not only as an activity grounded in experience, but also an activity grounded in equality. I consider how educators' treatment of literature as inviting translation, more than explanation, might imagine literature as being premised upon a community of equals. These ideas, while important in showing how literature might be grounded in equality, also have important implications for mending the bifurcation of reader response and formalism.

Treating literature as defying explanation

One way that literature might be viewed as verifying equality of reader and text is in its defiance of explanation. I'll begin by characterizing explanation as Rancière did: as a mode of

inequality. Rancière's writing about explanation illuminates explanation's complicity in what he calls the police order—the maintenance of the way things are: During explanation, "one establishes a certain linguistic relation with truth" (Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p.116). This relation is one that Bingham and Biesta label a "direct line" between language and meaning that leaves little room to redistribute the sensible by inserting oneself or others differently into an established configuration (p.116). The distribution of the sensible maintained by the explicative order is one founded on inequality. After all, the primary aim of the explicative order is the reduction of intelligence, which in and of itself points to a larger social order: "a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, the capable and the incapable" (Rancière, 1991, p.6). To explain something to someone is "first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself" (Rancière, 1991, p.6). In other words, the explicative mode operates from a deficit perspective, a "hierarchy of inequalities," (Rancière, 2004, p.52) that, despite aiming to reduce inequalities in intelligence, only verifies inequality.

Many of the traditional curricular frameworks that govern the teaching of literature, like those I outlined in Chapter 1 where literature is mediated by and directed toward knowledge, conceive of literature as something to be explained. For example, Jane, one of my interviewees who shared her experience reading *The Little Prince* conveyed her disappointment in some of the curricular guides designed for use with de Saint Exupery's allegory. Many of the questions contained in the guide asked students to *explain* the symbolism of the rose, or to *explain* the oft-quoted line, "You are responsible forever for what you have tamed."

Jane's reason for mentioning these questions and her disappointment in their unwillingness to move beyond explanation had to do with the way they so strikingly contrasted her own experience of re-reading *The Little Prince,* after reading it for the first time twelve years

prior. She felt the allegory, though as simple as ever in its presentation of language, had grown increasingly complex with time. She turned my attention to one passage in particular--a passage where the Little Prince comments on the overly quantitative obsessions of adults:

> Grown-ups like numbers. When you tell them about a new friend, they never ask questions about what really matters. They never ask: "What does his voice sound like?" "What games does he like best?" "Does he collect butterflies?" They ask: "How old is he?" "How many brothers does he have?" "How much does he weigh?" "How much money does his father make?" Only then do they think they know him.

After reading the passage aloud, Jane noted: "I mean, I just can't *explain* that passage to anyone. All I can do is savor it, kind of chew on it, you know—even though the questions are simple." Jane pointed to the white space on the page, just below this passage. These white spaces, which she called "little puffs of air," appeared at many places throughout the text, and she described how she treated those white spaces as a "breathing space" to just "rest and savor" such simple yet profound passages.

Continental philosopher Charles Bingham (2011), using William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow" (1923) as an example, helps to illuminate what Jane noted about passages in *The Little Prince*--passages that "you just can't *explain.*"

> The poet does not explain or make clear a wheelbarrow, or rain water, or white chickens. It is not as if there were such a thing as a particular barrow, a particular drop of water [...] And the reader of the poem is not called upon to understand exactly what the poet has in mind. (p.518)

Jane knew that her task in reading *The Little Prince* was not to understand de Saint Exupery's allegory. In fact, so many of the individuals I interviewed about their literary reading

experiences noted how those works of literature corresponded with--as one person so eloquently phrased it-- "certain seasons of [their] life." In other words, over time, certain passages from the text, or even the text as a whole, assumed different meanings. These passages and texts evinced a certain layered-ness that defied explanation, and opened up a space for activities more aligned with rumination, or, to borrow from Jane's description, a kind of savoring. The poem, notes Bingham, is "*shared*" by the reader, "but not *understood*." To understand would imply a relationship of inequality--one in which the text (or perhaps, in the context of English language arts classrooms, the teacher of the text) as all-knowing, *explains* and generates understanding for the reader: the one who knows less. But the artist does not explain: "The artist needs equality as the explicator needs inequality" (Rancière, 1991, pp. 70-71).

Imagining literature as being premised upon a community of equals

When educators treat literature, as Jane did, as though it defies explanation, they imagine literature as being premised upon a community of equals. Why the artist needs equality as the explicator needs inequality has to do with the fact that the literary artist works in the gap *between* language and experience. The literary artist, rather than explaining experience, as I articulated above, presents an experience, finding all the while that no language can do complete justice to that presentation. The literary text, then, might be conceived of as a *translation* of an experience—one that invites the reader to *counter-translate*.

> [The artist] analyzes, dissects, translates others' expressions, [and] he tirelessly erases and corrects his own. He strives to say everything, knowing that everything cannot be said, but that is the unconditional tension of the translator that opens the possibility of the other tension, the other will. (Rancière, 1991, pp. 69-70)

In other words, a literary text is the fruit of a creative labor, the labor of "finding ways through language to point to what cannot be put into words" (as cited in Zwicky, 2003, p.85). That the literary artist "strives to say everything, knowing that everything cannot be said," keeps open the possibility of the reader functioning as a kind of artistic counter-translator. One might imagine literature, then, as being premised upon a community of equals: translators (writers), counter-translators (readers), and translations (texts) replete with language that, in its defiance of explanation, assumes a certain materiality—a life of its own.

Redefining Close Reading: The Inextricability of Aesthetics and Formalism

When Rancièrian aesthetics is used to reframe literature, as not only a site of experience, as Rosenblatt conceived of it, but also a verification of *equality*, the hierarchical privileging of reader over text seems more obviously troubled. Moreover, attending to the formal qualities of the literary text, the materiality of its language--an action which Rosenblatt had to defend in her own elaboration of aesthetic reading--becomes an essential act in a reader's aesthetic response to text. The congruence and continuity between a reader's aesthetic response and formalism is the topic I would like to take up in the final section of this chapter. This mending of the bifurcation between reader response and formalism has implications for cancelling the hierarchies embedded in pedagogical and curricular instantiations of Rosenblatt's work, but also for reimaging close reading in terms very different from the version spelled out in standards documents that have made it the dominant currency of literary reading.

Close reading, in its standardized form, is to "read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it" (NGA, 2010, p.10). However, if literature, imagined as a verification of equality, defies explanation, then close reading is a "making sense" of literature in more than logical terms. It is about the reader engaging the language and form of

a literary text to sense an experience that defies language yet that an artist has somehow made perceptible *through* language and form. Within this framing of close reading, the formal qualities of a literary text are less tethered to the procedural and declarative knowledge I discussed in Chapter 1. They are not qualities to be identified and explained, so much as they are the gaps between language and experience where readers may insert themselves and participate in the creative labor of literature. They are the means of making words speak between and beyond the literal signs on the page.

I will illustrate this inextricability between a reader's felt response to text and formalism with an excerpt of a lived account from Dan, a high school English teacher in his fourth year of teaching. In my two-hour conversation with Dan, we talked at length about his reading adventures with J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. For Dan, reading *Harry Potter* was like growing up alongside the series's title character. Having read the first three books in a single summer, he proceeded to read the remaining four books one summer at a time, as each was released. Each summer, he--like Harry, Ron, and Hermione--found himself a bit more advanced in age and wisdom. Rowling's fifth book in the series was the one Dan wanted to discuss in our interview: *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix.* He was thirteen the first summer he read it, and the increasingly imminent threat of Lord Voldemort propelled him through all 870 pages in a 24-hour period. Two summers later, after he finished the seventh and final novel in Rowling's series, he re-read all seven books, returning once more to a scene in Book 5 that he could still—ten years later—describe in great detail. As he recounted to me:

> There's this scene where Neville's mother, stuck in an insanity ward for life, hands him an empty candy wrapper. And, what I remember is Neville slipping that candy wrapper in his pocket as if it was the most precious thing in the whole wide world. I cried when I

> read that scene the first time, and I cried again the second time. I just ached when I read it, and I've often asked myself in the years following that reading: What's worse? To be orphaned, or to have parents who are physically alive but mentally and emotionally absent?

Dan clearly had a visceral response to this scene, and I was quite struck by instances like his where an interviewee could talk in such depth about a particular moment within a literary text. Curious to learn more about what it was that triggered this scene's staying with him all these years, I asked Dan if he would walk through this scene with me. What I share below is the result of that conversation.

The scene punctuates Chapter 23: "Christmas on the Closed Ward," when Harry, Ron, Ginny, and Hermione pay a visit to St. Mungo's hospital where Ron and Ginny's father, Mr. Weasley, is recovering from spell damage on Christmas Day. Caught in the midst of an uncomfortable dispute between Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Harry, Ron, Ginny, and Hermione venture off in search of tea, only to find they have stumbled upon the long-term resident ward. There, they run into Professor Lockhart, their ex-Defense Against the Dark teacher, who has devolved into a pathetic state of mental instability.

This run-in with Professor Lockhart is the crescendo to the final scene that Dan could remember so well: a scene in which the young wizards cross paths on the same ward with their peer and classmate, Neville Longbottom. Neville's presence on that ward is not by accident, though, for he is there to visit his parents, racked by insanity. In contrast to Professor Lockhart's almost fool-hearted glee at seeing visitors on his ward, Neville, we learn, is mortified, for he has admitted to no one that his parents are alive but insane. And, so we, as readers, feel Neville's

excruciating embarrassment all the more poignantly when Ron engages Neville, completely oblivious to the circumstances:

> With a sudden rush of understanding, Harry realized who the people in the end beds must be. He cast around wildly for some means of distracting the others so that Neville could leave the ward unnoticed and unquestioned, but Ron had looked up at the sound of the name "Longbottom" too, and before Harry could stop him had called, "*Neville!"* Neville jumped and cowered as though a bullet had narrowly missed him.
>
> "It's us, Neville!" said Ron brightly, getting to his feet. "Have you seen? Lockhart's here! Who've *you* been visiting?" (Rowling, 2003, p.512)

Ron's question drips with dramatic irony. The juxtaposition of his own obliviousness, against both readers' and Harry's knowledge of the answer to that question, creates in readers an almost desperate feeling. We feel Harry's "sudden rush of understanding," and his urgent inclination to distract the others so that Neville may leave in peace. But Ron's naive enthusiasm, combined with his "Who've you been visiting?" moves Neville front and center, and extends the duration of this painful confrontation. There is an irreversibility to Ron's question, and we know it, because—somewhere in our own lives, though we're not sure where, we've asked those kinds of cringe-worthy questions. As "Neville took a deep breath, looked up at the ceiling and shook his head," Rowling notes, "Harry could not remember ever feeling sorrier for anyone," and--as readers--neither can we (Rowling, 2003, p.513).

In the short page and half that remains, Ron, Ginny, and Hermione suddenly see what Harry has intuited from the beginning. Caught in this realization that they have stumbled upon something deeply private, yet unable to reverse their presence, they witness Neville's mother walking down the ward. "She no longer had the plump, happy-looking face Harry had seen in

Moody's old photograph," Rowling tells us, and "She did not seem to want to speak, or perhaps she was not able to, but she made timid motions toward Neville holding something in her outstretched hand."

And, in what Dan described as a moment of "tragic tenderness" between mother and son, Rowling juxtaposes dialogue and action in a way that forever humanizes unassuming, round-faced Neville Longbottom:

> "Again?" said [Neville's grandmother], sounding slightly weary. "Very well, Alice dear, very well—Neville, take it, whatever it is…"
>
> But Neville had already stretched out his hand, into which his mother dropped an empty Droobles Blowing Gum wrapper.
>
> […]
>
> "Neville, put that wrapper in the bin," said [Neville's grandmother]. "She must have given you enough of them to paper your bedroom by now…"
>
> But as they left, Harry was sure he saw Neville slip the wrapper into his pocket.
>
> (Rowling, 2003, p.515)

Neville, we know, is ashamed. His grandmother's "Again?" signals her own annoyance with what seems to have become a habit on the part of Neville's mother. And yet, Neville stands there, hand already outstretched, in anticipation and acceptance of a gift that--in form--is utter paltriness. Readers can almost imagine, as Dan admitted to having imagined, a pile of gum wrappers somewhere in Neville's room back home, each one precious for having come from his mother.

And finally, Rowling closes the door, leaving only Harry, Ron, Ginny, and Hermione standing there in a state of stark realization:

> The door closed behind them.
>
> "I never knew," said Hermione, who looked tearful.
>
> "Nor did I," said Ron rather hoarsely.
>
> "Nor me," whispered Ginny.
>
> They all looked at Harry.
>
> "I did," he said glumly. (Rowling, 2003, p.515)

Ron's loud and drawn-out engagement with Neville just two pages prior is replaced with silence. Not a single one of the young wizards is able to utter more than three words, and indeed, for an experience like the one just encountered, there really are no words.

From Aesthetic Transaction to Literary Communion

Dan's account is one that attends to the formal qualities of the literary text, but not for the sake of "unlocking" the author's meaning as the New Critics were so intent on doing. His close reading seems disinterested, too, in achieving the outcomes of the now-standardized version of reading closely: to make logical inferences or determine what the text says explicitly. In fact, neither the question that Dan generates from this passage—"What is worse? To be orphaned, or to have parents who are physically alive but mentally and emotionally absent?"--, nor the image of candy wrappers piled in Neville's room back home--is contained anywhere in Rowling's passage. For Dan, the dramatic irony, the artistic juxtaposition of dialogue, the contrast of loud and elongated chains of questions with short, wordless whispers are not in the text to be understood, so much as they are there to compensate for the failure of words to fully capture an

experience. The formal qualities of the text are the products of Rowling's "striv[ing] to say everything, knowing that everything cannot be said."

But it is that striving to say everything, while knowing that not everything can be said that Rancière claims "opens the possibility of the other will"—in this case, the reader's will. To attend to the formal qualities of the text might mean, as it does in Dan's case, dwelling in the gaps between language and experience *and* infusing those gaps with his own experience, his own abilities to feel, to imagine, to evoke. Dan's tears, his aching, his visions of candy wrappers piled in some sacred corner of Neville's room, and his philosophizing about parental illness are all uniquely *his* responses to Rowling's passage. But they are responses *to the text*—not necessarily aimed at understanding, or interpreting, or logically inferring—so much as at entering that space between language and experience that the formal qualities of literary texts tend to occupy.

Dan's reading hinged, it seemed, upon a relationship of assumed equality between reader and text. Indeed, there is a way in which Dan's account takes us back to an important, though I believe overlooked, phrase of Rosenblatt's description of aesthetic reading. Rosenblatt, as I previously mentioned, defined aesthetic reading as a kind of reading in which "the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during *his relationship with the particular text*" (emphasis added). Whereas Rosenblatt focused increasingly throughout her career on what the reader was living through *while* reading, Dan's account directs our attention to the relationship: his relationship, as reader, with the text of Rowling's novel. That relationship seems, to me, to overthrow the hierarchies of rational instrumentalism. Dan's reading was not an instance of the text, through its formal qualities, impressing its meaning upon him. He was not an empty vessel waiting to be filled up by the text or some knowledge the text might afford him.

His relationship seems also to overthrow the hierarchies apparent in pedagogical and curricular instantiations of reader response theories. His subjectively-felt response did not emerge independent of or in total disregard to the text.

Dan's account illustrates, to me, how literature simultaneously reveals and revels in *all* being(s) on the same plane. Dan's reading of Chapter 23 was akin to a kind of fellowship between reader and text—a participation in something that, in keeping with the spiritual connotations of communion, was inherently *common* to him, and yet somehow simultaneously bigger than him. This participation in something common to the reader, yet simultaneously beyond the reader, is evident in observations like Dan's about "knowing" there is an irreversibility to Ron's question because "somewhere in our lives, though we're not sure where, we've asked those kinds of cringe-worthy questions." Observations like this one suggest that Dan's engagement with *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* was, for him, a participation in being-ness—or perhaps becoming-ness—bigger than himself and bigger than the confines of Rowling's plot: It was a participation in the pain-ridden embarrassment of witnessing someone else's suffering. I think it is fair to say his engagement with the text had a more spiritual than rational depth to it. Dan's experience was not an experience of logical inference or explicit extraction. It was, perhaps, more transcendental than instrumental. His lived account carries with it the suggestion that reading literature might very well invite a kind of relationship between reader and text well outside the frame of rational-instrumentalism, with connotations different even from Rosenblatt's transaction. His reading of that passage from *Harry Potter* might be more akin to participation in a kind of intimate fellowship: a *communion* with text.

In this chapter, then, I have broken beyond the frame of rational-instrumentalism that has historically shaped so much of the literature curriculum in English language arts. I began with

Louise Rosenblatt's seminal theory of aesthetic transaction, because—in theory—it expresses interest in readers' personal engagement with texts, a phenomenon more overlooked in rational-instrumental frames. However, applying a Rancièrian lens of equality to the pedagogical and curricular instantiations of Rosenblatt's work suggests that even Rosenblatt's work has been taken up in ways that further literary instrumentalism or generate hierarchies that privilege a reader's subjectively felt response at the expense of the literary text.

Using the equality of Rancière's aesthetic regime to reimagine literature first and foremost, as a set of relationships of equality between reader and text, I came to see literary content and form as that with which a reader engages, but for reasons beyond logical inference or gaining knowledge. The reader engages the literary text by virtue of its gaps between language and experience—gaps that she can infuse with her own imagination, thoughts, feelings, and experience to participate, in fellowship with the text, in an aspect of being-ness bigger than herself. Literature, it seems, is well-suited to revel in the equality of beings, remaining open to this chapter's central concept: readers' and texts' entrance into a kind of communion.

CHAPTER 4
TRANSUBSTANTIATIONS: WHEN WORDS BECOME FLESH

"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

Introduction

Part of the problem I have identified with the curricular frameworks and traditions that have tended to govern the teaching of literature is the degree to which they want to transmit directly from text to reader certain sentiments or forms of knowledge. Rooted in an assumption of inequality, these frames are what Rancière, in his own work on education, refers to as "stultifying" (1991). They run counter to one of the most generative, and as I hope to show in this chapter, life-giving actions of the aesthetic regime: its untying of the knot that binds *poiesis*, the text's manner of making, and *aesthesis*, the text's reception. This untying frees up a space in literature for the reader—any reader for that matter-- to participate in, to play with, to reinvent the text to make real the "possibility of a spectator's gaze other than the one that was programmed" (Rancière, 2007, p.267).

In the previous chapter, I inscribed a lens of equality onto literature, treating literature as if it were a language art grounded not only in experience, as Rosenblatt imagined, but also in equality. By applying an ethical lens of equality to the work on literary reading Rosenblatt has already begun, I was able to begin to imagine how equality between reader and text might lend itself to literary communion. Joseph Tanke (2011), in his own delineation of Rancière's aesthetics, argues that aesthetic art does two essential things: "It engenders a form of equality in its production and reception," and "it carries the promise of life reconfigured" (p.92). I devoted my attention in the previous chapter primarily to the former, but now—having introduced literary communion as a function of equality between reader and text—I wish to elaborate ways literary communion carries with it one of the promises of equality: the promise of a life reconfigured, or,

perhaps more fittingly in light of its sacramental connotations, the promise of transubstantiation. My goal in this chapter, then, is to flesh out another dimension of literary communion: the idea that literature might not only revel in the coming together of reader and text on equal planes, but also how that coming together might render impossible things remaining what they once were.

I use as my central theoretical concept in this chapter, emancipation. This concept, I feel, invites us into the space opened up by the aesthetic regime's untying of the knot between *poiesis* and *aesthesis,* where the reader is free to enact the "possibility of a spectator's gaze other than the one that was programmed." I use emancipation to trouble more traditional frameworks of literature instruction that claim to be emancipatory, namely critical frameworks. However, I also emancipate myself, to some degree, from Rancière's articulations of emancipation, which—to my reading—appear grounded in primarily rational-intellectual terms. Reading one reader's account of her engagement with Peter Shaffer's (1973) play *Equus,* I find that Rancièrian emancipation can only take me so far in my analysis. This reader's story, I conclude, is really more of an account of transubstantiation, in which words become flesh, delivering on the promise of a life reconfigured, as reader and text find it "impossible to remain what [they] once were" (Gadamer, 1975, p.34).

The Fleshiness of Words

> I grew up a word-haunted boy. I felt words inside me…I mouthed them and fingered them and rolled them around my tongue. My mother filled my bedtime hour with poetry that sang like Sanctus bells. [The words] clung to me and blistered my skin. I could arrange each day into a tear sheet of music composed of words. I used words to fashion a world that made sense to me.
>
> (Conroy, 2010, p.84)

Author Pat Conroy's description of words lends a very different connotation to literary language than the one implied in the different curricular scenarios of literature I have discussed thus far. Words, in those scenarios, are treated in more rational, disembodied ways, more fit—in the case of formalism—for analysis, than being "mouthed," "fingered," or "rolled around one's tongue." Recall from the previous chapter how Rosenblatt, in her delineation of aesthetic transaction, referred to words as "signs":

> Meaning emerges as the reader carries on a give-and-take with the *signs* on the page. As the text unrolls before the reader's eyes, the meaning made of the early words influences what comes to mind and is selected for the succeeding *signs*. (1938/1995, p. 27, emphasis added)

Conceived of as signs, words might help readers arrive at a defensible interpretation of the text, but they are not to be handled, held, and rearranged so that readers might use them, as Conroy says, to fashion a world that makes sense to them. Conceived of as signs, words ask only to be, as Collins laments in his oft-cited poem, "tied to a chair," or "beaten with a hose," to "find out what [they] really mean." Conroy's word-haunted confessions keep alive the materiality of language and suggest ways words might take on a reader's flesh, the way words allow readers to—as Collins phrases it—"waterski/across the surface of a poem" or "walk inside the poem's room/ and feel the walls for a light switch." Believing in the fleshiness of words, one can see how readers do not just think, analyze, or interpret the language of literature. They embody it. They live it.

These more embodied versions of literary reading appeared in several of the lived accounts that people shared with me throughout this project. Recall, for example, Jane's reference to "savoring" passages throughout *The Little Prince.* Dan commented on the "ache" of

reading that one scene from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix.* Both his account of reading and my own account of reading Twain's *Diaries of Adam and Eve* involved human tears. Memorable, too, was an account that Lisa shared about her experience reading Tolkien's *The Hobbit.* Her mother, having moved the family to a cottage in the Northern part of their Midwestern state, decided that reading *The Hobbit* might compensate for their lack of TV and other more popular forms of entertainment.

> We would come together as a family—there were 10 of us children altogether-- for an hour or so at a time, some us on the floor, others of us on chairs and couches, and we would take turns reading it chapter by chapter, our voices rotating. It was special because there we were in the woods. Sometimes we were snowbound, and all you could hear was the voice of whichever one of us was reading, and we'd listen—kind of lean in, you know--because we were so anxious to hear what would happen next. My brothers even got to the point where they had come up with their own voice for Gollum. To this day, we *still* make Gollum jokes with one another when we see each other. You know, "My Precious," things like that.

Lisa's account speaks to the way readers give voice to words, although not in the hierarchical sense of professing or proclaiming the Scriptural Word. Her account seems to speak more to a particular dimensionality of words that, even in non-performance-based literary texts, requires the human voice to be brought to full realization. Having described that specific reading event with her mother and siblings as a rotation of voices, Lisa's account was akin to performance artist's Anna Deveare Smith's (2001) observations about the "rhythmic architecture" that the human voice can lend to language (p.36). In a way, it calls to mind a stanza from Billy Collins's poem, "Books," in which the speaker claims to "hear the voice of my mother reading to me/

from a chair facing the bed, books about horses and dogs,/ and inside her voice lie other distant sounds, the horrors of a stable ablaze in the night,/ a bark that is moving toward the brink of speech." That these images from literature are housed *inside* a mother's *voice* serve as a reminder, like Jane's, Dan's, and Lisa's accounts, of the lived dimension of language, of the ways literary texts quite literally take on readers' flesh.

There is perhaps no better imagining of the way words might take on readers' flesh than the excerpted poetry of Margie, a research participant who-- up until this point--has not appeared in this project. Her account will factor quite heavily into this chapter, but for now, I offer only her words as teacher, as reader, as poet:

Thirty years ago
I took a vow
Not to be tone deaf in the classroom.
And so I listen more than I speak,
Breathing spaces for you to fill
With wonderings, certainties,
Even silences.
And this year I discovered
That words come hardest to me
When I try to talk of works that have moved me
The most poignantly, the most profoundly.
I reentered the worlds of Williams and Kingsolver
And Albee and Shaffer
With you

And began to realize and remember

How these works have lived under my skin

Intimately flowing between muscle and bone,

A lover within my own flesh.

(Non)Emancipatory Frameworks for Literary Reading

I shift gears here for a moment to discuss those frameworks in English language arts education that proclaim to be "emancipatory," namely those frameworks that advocate for a critical approach to literature (e.g., Appleman, 2010; Tyson, 2011). My discussion of these purportedly emancipatory frameworks carries implications for what I described above as the fleshiness of words, but first I wish to unpack the relational dynamics of these emancipatory frameworks using Rancière's lens of equality.

Hierarchy #1: Expert mediation

I use as an example the framework implicitly constructed in Deborah Appleman's best-selling *Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents.* Now in its third edition and written for practicing teachers, Appleman's text argues for the explicit instruction of theory in the English literature curriculum, including theories of Marxism, New Historicism, and deconstruction. In the introduction that frames her book, Appleman is adamant that her critical approach to the study of literature is not intended to perpetuate, under a different name, the continuation of transmissive models of education. Her vision for critical encounters with literature is not, she says, one in which the teacher is purportedly the "master explicator" of more theory-driven interpretations of culturally sanctioned texts.

In fact, she expends significant energy throughout the text's introduction explaining how it is that the explicit teaching of contemporary literary theory might help to authorize student-

readers. For example, she cites Bonnycastle's (1996) work, noting how studying theory "means no authority can impose a truth on you in a dogmatic way" (p.34). Continuing on, she cites Griffith's (1987) work on the application of literary theory, noting how literary theory promises to "offer pupils a sense of power over their environment" (p.86). This environment might even include the classroom environment, for the implications of teaching critical literary theory are such that teachers must be willing to "give up" their "ultimate authority" (Appleman, 2010, p.11). In short, the vision of literary reading that Appleman offers in *Critical Encounters* is one that seems to want to overthrow the hierarchical models of reading that privilege the text over the reader. By advocating for a redistribution of interpretive power in the classroom, and by actively encouraging a multiplicity of interpretations, Appleman's text seems almost to want to make real the "possibility of a spectator's gaze other than the one that was programmed" (Rancière, 2007, p.267).

Nonetheless, it is certainly possible to see how Appleman's text, faithful to the traditional logic of emancipation, might be complicit in that which Rancière perceived as ethically troubling: its perpetuation of inequality. The eventual divide between Rancière and his own teacher, Louis Althusser, stemmed in part from what Rancière perceived to be an inherent inequality in Althusser's linking of theory to emancipation. Committed to the equality that already is, Rancière saw in Althusser's scholarship a disconnect between his desire to eradicate inequality and his method. Rather than working to eradicate inequality, Althusser, from Rancière's point-of-view, *sustained* inequality by insisting that revolutionary movements could not proceed without revolutionary theory. Rancière's ultimate criticism of Althusser—that his logic only shifted the *source* of inequality, from that of class to that of knowledge (Panagia, 2010)—spoke to what Rancière perceived as the fundamental problem with treating equality as

an end goal: Equality-to-come only sets the stage for continued inequality as it *reinscribes* inequality under the guise of seeking to eradicate it. Rancière's complaints against Bourdieu followed a similar pattern. Especially critical of what he termed Bourdieu's "tautology" (Rancière, 2003, p. 366), Rancière railed against Bourdieu's assumption that only the sociologist could reveal to the "excluded" the reasons for their exclusion.

Brass's observations about *Critical Encounters* raise the possibility that its framework, and perhaps critical pedagogy more broadly—for as much as it professes to emancipate readers from authorizing forces—might also be complicit in perpetuating inequality. As Brass notes, Appleman purports to break with normative power relations in the English language arts classroom, but she also extends them. Teachers and students, observes Brass (2010), are not "simply…defining themselves or 'critically' assessing their 'degree of complicity within a variety of competing ideologies'" (p.714). They are simultaneously being governed by expert-mediated languages and techniques designed to assist them in monitoring and understanding their complicity in normativity. In my own careful read of Appleman's introduction, I found reason to agree with Brass's observations. Appleman, at one point, refers to "the *remediating* lens of literary theory" (p.8, emphasis added)—a lens that *teachers* must "actively sponsor" so as to "*allow*…students to begin their own odysseys toward their own theoretical maturity" (Emig, 1990, p.94). Readers, in other words, require the active sponsorship of teachers—presumably more theoretically mature in their outlook on the world—to become liberated from the policing mechanisms of ideology. What this amounts to, in a Rancièrean set-up, is that readers need inequality to become authoritative equals. As Rancière makes clear, though, the only thing perpetuated through the logic of this framework is inequality and there can be, then, no emancipation.

Hierarchy #2: The superiority of rationalism

Appleman's framing of a critical approach to the study of literature also sanctions a particular kind of knowing that suggests the supremacy of reason. One of Brass's key observations in his argument about the ways Appleman's text is itself implicated in an act of governing is how adolescents in *Critical Encounters* "are constituted as politically enlightened, intellectually deft, socially responsible and no longer complicit with dominant ideologies *when* they embody the *analytical rationality* and techniques of academic disciplines and theory" (p.716, emphasis added). In short, readers are emancipated from the policing mechanisms of ideology through the use of reason, specifically rational analytic techniques. This criticism is not unique to Appleman's work and is one often leveraged against critical pedagogy more generally (See e.g., Misson & Morgan, 2006).

Critical pedagogy's privileging of analytic rationality is not surprising in light of the dominant Cartesian paradigm that has tended to govern U.S. schooling. Yagelski (2011) has identified as the central problem of the American education system its tendency to champion the self as "autonomous observer/knower" (p.17). Yagelski's scholarship looks closely at the Cartesian framework's impact on writing instruction in the U.S., observing how writing is often taught "as if it were an empty vehicle to carry meaning"—a simple chain of thought, turned language, turned text (p. 24). What Yagelski observes about the impacts of the Cartesian mindset on writing instruction carry over, I think, into the realm of literature instruction, including literature instruction that claims to be emancipatory. The analytic rationality of frameworks like Appleman's seem built on the Cartesian assumption that reading literature is a matter of analyzing texts that are a product of that same simple chain: thought, turned language,

turned text. Theory intervenes in order to assist readers in uncovering the ideologies complicit in both the thought and language that gave rise to the text.

What These Hierarchies Mean for Critical Curricular Frameworks

Applying a Rancièrian lens of equality to critical frameworks of literature instruction helps make visible relationships of inequality between readers and texts. Contrary to Rancière's logic of emancipation, critical frameworks do not locate the emancipatory capacity in the reader. The emancipatory capacity, it seems, is located in rational theory and also in part in the teacher who, at the outset, is presumably more "expert" or "theoretically mature" than the reader. The distribution of roles deemed sensible within a critical framework is such that the reader is fundamentally passive and the text, requiring the mediating device of theory, is somehow beyond the reader. Theory's function is to help the reader "understand" and perform that which she is presumably not already doing: actively participating with the text.

The participation that critical frameworks for literary reading imagine, too, seems not to pay heed to what I have identified as the fleshiness of words. Readers might use theory to rationally analyze the workings of ideology within text, but there is no sense of texts taking on readers' flesh, no sense as there is for Margie of how these works might "live under our skin," "intimately flowing between muscle and bone." There is, in short, a constraining estimation of readers' and literary text's capacities, and one might argue—borrowing terminology from the previous chapter—a reinstatement of the hierarchical logic of the representative regime. As such, critical approaches to literature, and perhaps Critical English Education more broadly, abide by a logic that, within a Rancièrian framework, is non emancipatory. The logic at play in these frameworks is what Rancière calls "stultifying," keeping readers and literary texts in fixed places within an established hierarchical order.

Reimagining the Emancipatory Potential of Literary Reading

To imagine literature as that which is conducive to emancipation rather than stultification requires, I think, returning to the space Rancière wrote about in conjunction with the aesthetic regime: the one created by de-linking a text's manner of making (*poiesis*) from an audience's reception (*aesthesis*). Recall from Chapter 3 that this untying cancelled the supposition that literature's content and form could determine a reader's response. In short, it opened up the possibility for readers to do more than simply de-code texts. It opened the possibility for readers to play with texts, to re-write them, or to quote Rancière's *Emancipated Spectator:* "compose their own poem" with the poem before them.

Much of Rancière's work in the area of aesthetics has construed the arts in general as being conducive to a spectator's emancipation, but literature, for Rancière, seemed especially conducive to a reader's emancipation in light of what Rancière termed the "wandering letter:"

> Literature is the reign of writing, of speech circulating outside any determined relationship of address. Such mute speech, said Plato, rolls along this way and that without knowing who is right to speak to and who is not right to speak to. The same goes for this new literature that no longer addresses itself to a specific audience, one sharing the same position within the social order and drawing ordered rules of interpretation and modes of sensibility from that ethos. Like the wandering letter […], it circulates—without any specific addressee and without a master to accompany it…freely available to anyone who feels like grabbing hold. (Rancière, 2011, p.12)

By conceiving of literature in this light—"as circulating…without a master to accompany it"—Rancière freed literature from an authorizing figure capable of "policing" readers' use of it.

That literature might be free from a "policing figure" seems generative, of course, for my own project intent on imaging how relationships between readers and literary texts might look different from the relationships of inequality inscribed in the literature curriculum's more instrumental frameworks. Even the very image of the "wandering letter" seems to challenge models of literary reading that conceive of reading as working "within the four corners of the text" (Coleman and Pimental, 2012). It seems to complicate the prescribed notions of legitimacy attached to the very specific kinds of procedural and declarative knowledge to which literary texts are so often subordinated in the school curriculum, including the rational analytic application of theory advanced by critical frameworks. In short, Rancière's notion of the wandering letter recognizes in literary reading a freedom from any policing authority that--in the quest to de-code authorial intention, rely on expert-mediated theoretical intervention, or perfect the latest skill or strategy--demands the reader "see *this* thing, feel *that* feeling, understand *this* lesson of what they see, and get into *that* action in consequence of what they have seen, felt, and understood" (Rancière, 2007, p.277).

Several of the accounts readers shared with me throughout this project helped animate this Rancièrian concept. Readers' accounts sometimes documented instances of literary texts circulating and re-circulating throughout a life, forging relationships, opportunities, and texts impossible for any authorizing force--other than their own wills--to ever have anticipated. Margie's account was perhaps the most evocative telling of this kind of experience, and so I share her account, both as an illustration of literature's "wandering letter," but also in anticipation of theorizing what I call transubstantiation.

The "Philosopher-Queen": Introducing Margie

There are many descriptors I could assign Margie, among them reader, teacher, poet, musician and mother. When I met Margie for the first time, she was standing on the brink of retirement. It was June 13, and it had only been four days since she had packed up Room 610, her English language arts classroom at the local public high school, for the last time. Facing an open road of time and possibility, she spouted off a litany of possibilities for the year ahead: piano practice, membership in not one, but *two* poetry writing groups, and a possible home-grown mother/daughter book club. The most fitting descriptor for Margie--after having spent so much time in conversation with her, her poems, and even several of her students, --is perhaps one derived from a speech delivered on the eve of her retirement: Philosopher Queen. From her colleagues' perspective, Margie was a life-long learner, a musician, a poet "willing to bring her whole life – all her vulnerabilities, her dreams, her creativity and life experience, her triumphs and her defeats, her unbridled passion into the classroom." Her classroom, they argued, was "frenetically and deliciously alive."

These descriptions of Margie made sense against the backdrop of insight I had gained into her lived experiences after nearly nine hours of interviews. All of our interviews transpired in a local bookstore, and—in retrospect—such a setting could not have been more fitting. In our first interview together, she described her college education as the truest of liberal arts educations given her method of course selection. Refusing to be steered by program requirements, or even course descriptions, Margie would roam the aisles of the university bookstore browsing the titles of books organized by course. When she found a cluster of books that piqued her curiosity, she looked for the corresponding course number and enrolled. Eventually, Margie had enough credits to graduate as a theatre or education major,

and though she chose a career path in education, she never abandoned her love for music and drama. To her, teaching, music and performance were inseparable.

As evidenced by her poem that appeared earlier in this chapter, Margie defied the conventional tropes of literature instruction so often played out in middle and high school English language arts classrooms. She wanted, as she said in our second interview together, for the study of a literary work to be "More than just, 'OK, we did that. Now we can check it off the syllabus.'" Margie wanted her students to make something with the literature they read. As she noted in our second interview, "I always wanted to have them do something *they* created, so that the link between themselves and the literature was solidified, in many cases forever. I wanted to have them do something to like, put it on their *bones*, so it's in their *bone* and *muscle*" (Interview, July 14, 2015).

When I asked Margie if she could talk about a specific work of literature that was in her own muscle and bone, she shared with me her experiences with *Equus,* the 1973 play by British playwright Peter Shaffer. Inspired by a British newspaper clipping about a seventeen year-old boy arraigned for blinding six horses, Shaffer's play unfurls primarily through the dialogue between the young boy, Alan, and a child psychiatrist, Dr. Martin Dysart, who has been tasked with understanding the roots of Alan's actions. In his quest to make sense of Alan's actions, Dysart begins to ponder his own decisions in life—a life that he perceives as being quite small. Alan's story, then, becomes just as much the story of Dysart's tragic realization of how he might have lived a more daring life.

Reading *Equus*

Margie was a freshman in college, enrolled in a modern drama course the semester she read *Equus*. Her professor, Arthur, had included it on his syllabus that term. Having already

taken another course with Arthur the semester prior, Margie was well-versed in his pedagogical expectations, perhaps best summarized in the statement atop each of his syllabi: "Voyeurs need not apply." Margie had shed, she said, all voyeuristic tendencies at the threshold of Arthur's classroom, where she learned to read "with every ounce of [her] being."

It was Act I, scene 10 of *Equus* that Margie, in our second interview, recalled most vividly—a scene where Dysart, the psychiatrist, asks Alan to talk about his first experience with a horse, hoping that Alan's answer might begin to make sense of the crime that has resulted in his arraignment. Alan eventually succumbs to the invitation, taking the psychiatrist back in time to the beach, where, a few years prior, Alan had been digging in the sand, unnoticed by his distracted parents. A stranger rides by on horseback and asks Alan if he would like to ride, and—as Shaffer's stage directions indicate, "Alan nods, eyes wide" (p.38). He then slips into a trance of memory, prompted by the psychiatrist Dr. Dysart's question:

> DYSART: How was it? Was it wonderful?
>
> *Alan rides in silence.*
>
> Can't you remember?
>
> HORSEMAN: Do you want to go faster?
>
> ALAN: Yes!
>
> HORSEMAN: OK. All you have to do is say 'Come on, Trojan—bear me away!'…Say it then!
>
> ALAN: Bear me away! (Shaffer, 1973, p.38)

Like Alan, who succumbs to the memory of being swept away on the back of a horse, Margie, in our interview, let the memory of her first reading of that scene completely overtake her. She recalled how Arthur, mimicking the actions of Alan mounting the stranger's horse, mounted the

table at the center of the classroom. "It was beautiful, just beautiful. Arthur was up there literally doing the scene--literally riding that horse. He said to us, "Ok, I'm Alan on that horse. What am I *feeling?* What am I *seeing?"* (Interview, July 14, 2015). As she remembered this first reading of *Equus*, Margie's own hands moved as if she too were riding the horse, as if Shaffer's play, and her experience reading it, still intimately flowed between muscle and bone.

There were few words to Act I, scene 10, but the picture Margie had crafted for herself of Alan's being borne away on the horse dripped with detail: The shoreline stretched as far as the eye could see, the water glistened, wind rippled through Alan's hair as he galloped at a height removed from his parents. What Margie imagined as she read that scene is perhaps best articulated in her own piece of literature: a poem she gifted to her senior English language arts students over thirty years later. Her final stanza, proof again that *Equus* still flowed between her muscles and bones, is an allusion to *Equus,* out of which she carved a litany of hopes for her own students:

I wish you the Alan-atop-the-horse-at-the-beach kind of love,
Free and unrestrained by a bit in the mouth,
That bareback kind of love that feels everything.
Mostly,
I hope that you give yourself permission to,
Give yourself the freedom to
Gallop in the heat of the wind
With your hair flying behind you,
At sunrise when the light is almost blinding
Or at midnight when the fog of the night

Permeates your pores.

And it is then,

At that very moment,

That I wish for you

Bold and daring hands

That are willing to let go the reins.

The depth at which *Equus* flowed between Margie's muscle and bone seems evident in her affect-laden diction throughout her poem: mention of fog that "permeates" pores, references to a "bareback kind of love," "the heat of the wind," "blinding light." There is a kind of "fleshiness" to Margie's language that points to one way that Shaffer's words have become flesh. But the depth at which *Equus* flowed between Margie's muscle and bone was never so apparent to me as it was when she shared with me the reverberations of Shaffer's play throughout her marriage. "That play," Margie told me as our conversation about *Equus* continued, "was actually the reason I got divorced." Margie had been married to a Vietnam veteran, who suffered, she said, from PTSD. "I kid you not--," she said, "there were nights he went to bed with a gun next to his head." After pleading with him to stop, after hiding the gun in the closet, after years of therapy—all to no avail—Margie made the life-altering decision to divorce him. I kept telling myself, "Only you can shrink or grow your life, Margie. Only you."

The phrase, "Only you can shrink or grow your life," had become for Margie a kind of mantra to live by, but it had originated in her reading of *Equus,* where she had become haunted, she said, by Dysart's gradual and tragic realizations about how small he had made his own life.

In light of *Equus*'s detectable reverberations throughout her poetry and marriage, I was not surprised at all to learn that Margie, like Arthur, had integrated Shaffer's play into the AP literature course she had taught at the local public high school for the past 17 years. Each year, too, until the year he died, Arthur visited Margie's class, performing for her students the scene he performed for his own class that spring semester of Margie's freshman year.

Really, I find it impossible to convey this account of Margie's reading of *Equus* without also talking about Arthur. He was, of course, the person who introduced her to *Equus.* But his presence throughout her lived accounts seemed so much more deeply and intricately woven than that. From the semester of that fateful modern drama seminar, until quite literally the hour of his death, Arthur was what Margie described as a "key player" in her life. Not surprisingly, then, his name surfaced in each of our three interviews together, sometimes with accompanying tears. To Margie, he was "the dearest of friends"—a statement to which even some of her poetry lends credence. In her poem, "Your Last Class," it is Arthur that Margie addresses, writing to him from the space of his own living room where she had come to keep him company in his final days of life:

> And I am the daughter of your classroom,
> The student who refused to be a voyeur,
> The one who rejects learning as passive tourism.
> I am the closest you will come to a legacy,
> And I have come to hold your hand as you die.

Throughout our interview, where she re-enacted for me the scene from Act I that Arthur had animated so many years prior, and that she had continued to animate throughout her life, Margie fulfilled the lines of her poetry: She was indeed Arthur's legacy. *Equus* still flowed between her

muscle and bone. It still pulsed through her "Bold and daring hands" "willing to let go the reins."

From Emancipation to Transubstantiation

Margie's account suggests that both she and *Equus* had come to occupy that emancipatory space opened up by the untying of *poiesis* from *aesthesis.* Hers is an emancipated reading of *Equus,* because it is Margie herself who, in the spirit of Rancièrian emancipation, seized Shaffer's text and formed new texts of her own: new poems, new friendships, new marital arrangements. Her account—an intricate confluence of past, present, and future phases of her, Arthur's, and others' (e.g., high school students, her ex-husband) lives—is a testament to Margie's freedom from demands that she "see *this* [one] thing, feel *that* [one] feeling, understand *this* [one] lesson." Had Margie's reading of *Equus* transpired within a purportedly emancipatory framework like the one Appleman constructs in *Critical Encounters,* it is conceivable that Margie's account would have been very different in flavor, involving perhaps the application of some sort of critical lens to Shaffer's play. But Margie's account speaks to a kind of unmediated relationship between reader and text as authorized equals.

While Rancieriean emancipation helps make visible the relationship of equality between reader and text in Margie's account, alternative to the assumed inequality between reader and text in the alternative critically-inspired scenario, I do not believe it accounts for the full extent of what transpired in Margie's emancipatory reading: a literal embodiment-- or "fleshing out"-- of *Equus*. In other words, Margie's account—though animating the logic of Rancièrian emancipation—might also involve more than Rancièrian emancipation can account for, in that it overthrows the supremacy of reason.

Rancière's recalibration of emancipation as something one does for oneself is cast, for the most part throughout his writings, in more rational intellectual terms. For example, in one of his more detailed discussions of emancipation, Rancière uses as recourse Joseph Jacotot's portrait of the ignorant schoolmaster. An exclusively French-speaking instructor, Joseph Jacotot found himself confronted with the unique pedagogical task of teaching a class of students who spoke only Flemish. Inhibited by the language barrier from receiving explanatory instruction from their French-speaking instructor, Jacotot's students relied solely on a bilingual text of the work they were learning. Navigating between the French text on one side and the Flemish text on the other, the Flemish-speaking students responded successfully in *French* to their reading assignments:

> They had looked for the French words that corresponded to words they knew and the reasons for their grammatical endings by themselves. They had learned to put them together, to make, in turn, French sentences by themselves: sentences whose spelling and grammar became more and more exact as they progressed through the book; but, above all, sentences of writers and not of schoolchildren. (Rancière, 1991, p.4)

Jacotot's students' autodidactic behavior suggested that the schoolmaster's "mastership" did not rest in his transmission of knowledge, but simply in his command to read, re-read, and respond. Jacotot's framework, argued Rancière, was an emancipatory framework, with the students *freeing themselves* from the explanatory crutches of a schoolmaster.

The vision of emancipation contained in this example that has become almost iconic throughout Rancière's writings is one imbued with the language of rational intellectualism: The students had *learned* to translate from Flemish to French. The indicants of their emancipation were proper spelling and grammar—the products of a sound capacity to reason. Even Rancière's

later work on the intersection of aesthetics and emancipation preserves this kind of language, where, talking about the theatrical spectator as active, Rancière writes, "he *observes*, he *selects*, *compares*, *interprets"* (2011, p.6). But pausing for a moment to consider Margie's actions that comprise her reading: she imagines, she evokes, she feels, she poeticizes, she divorces, she befriends, she teaches. How difficult it is, she noted in that first excerpt of poetry I shared in this chapter, to find rational language to talk of literary works "that have moved me/ The most poignantly, the most profoundly." In other words, there is something about her engagements with literary works like *Equus* that transcends, and possibly even defies, reason. Margie's actions and observations suggest ways in which Rancière's casting of emancipation in more rational intellectual terms might render it incapable of fully capturing the essence of Margie's account. Margie's account seems to overthrow not only the inequality of more traditional notions of emancipation, but also the hierarchy of rational intellectualism that, in my own read of Rancièrian emancipation, remains somewhat intact.

Margie's account evokes—perhaps more than emancipation—*transubstantiation*. As I aspired to make clear in my opening chapter, my elaborations of what I call *literary communion* take some inspiration from the connotations of the Catholic Christian term communion, as it relates to the Eucharistic sacrament. The Eucharist, or communion, as I noted in Chapter 1, is a sacramental extension of the Incarnation across space and time through which Christ continues to commune, in an embodied way, with the Church (Barron, 2011). Catholic Church teaching, then, subscribes to the phenomenon of *transubstantiation*—the literal transformation of the substance of bread and wine into the substance of Christ's body and blood. I'd like to borrow both the connotations of transformation and flesh associated with *transubstantiation* as it relates

to communion, considering how, in reading literature, words can—as my opening epigraph suggests—"become flesh and dwell among us."

If we reflect again on Margie's engagement with *Equus*, there are ways her account evokes a sense of words becoming flesh. To borrow lines from her own poetry, hers is an account of a literary work that has "lived under [her] skin,/ intimately flowing between muscle and bone,/ A lover within [her] own flesh." The "fleshiness" of Margie's poetic diction resonates with an account that might be read as her own "fleshing out" of Shaffer's drama across a span of many years. In that space between reader and text that the aesthetic regime helped to imagine as a productive site of play, imagination, and reinvention, a literary work always stands poised for further elaboration and adaptation. Regardless of what Shaffer's authorial intentions or Arthur's pedagogical intentions might have been, Margie—through her own capacities to imagine Alan's coastal horseback rides, to feel Dysart's hauntingly tragic realization-- made of *Equus* the mantra, "Only you can shrink or grow your life." This mantra is one that she adapts into stanzas of her own poetry, replete with its own fleshy language ("I hope you give yourself permission to/Gallop in the heat of the wind/ With your hair flying behind you,/ At sunrise when the light is almost blinding/ Or at midnight when the fog of the night/ Permeates your pores"). Flowing between muscle and bone, it is also one that takes on the flesh of a life-altering decision to end her marriage.

In showing that words can become flesh, Margie's account also evinces the kind of transformation inherent in transubstantiation. Given my focus throughout this project on the relationship between readers and texts, I wish to comment briefly on what might be perceived as transformations of both *Equus* and Margie in light of their communion. *Equus's* inhabitance "under [Margie's] skin" itself suggests a kind of change in Margie's overall composition. One

might argue that she performs that change when she makes the pivotal decision to end her marriage. She redefines herself by reconfiguring relationships that carried implications for her own identity. By choosing to "grow her life" by ending her marriage, Margie transformed herself from "wife" to "ex-wife."

Equus, of course, remained the 1973 play by Peter Shaffer. It also, though—as evidenced by Margie's account—became one piece of a larger constellation of people and decisions and poetry. It became, for example, a solidifying force in the friendship between Margie and Arthur. More than a discrete and static object of interpretive analysis, *Equus* was for Margie always in the process of *becoming*: a mantra to live by, the inspiration for her own stanzas of poetry, and perhaps—with time—something else that neither she, nor I, nor her once-living teacher Arthur could have imagined in that freshman seminar when Margie and *Equus* communed for the first time.

In the previous chapter, I elaborated how literary communion is prefaced on the idea of reader and text coming together as equals, but in this chapter, the sacramental idea of transformation—more specifically, transubstantiation—has been my focus. I have tried to live up to a claim I laid out at the end of Chapter 1: that literary communion is a kind of "transformation" in which reader and text "do not remain what [they] were" (Gadamer, 1975, p.34). Rancièrian emancipation is helpful in imagining an unmediated relationship between reader and text, one made possible by the de-linking of *poiesis* from *aesthesis,* in which the reader is free to play with, re-imagine and re-invent the text. Margie's account illustrates this kind of emancipated relationship with Shaffer's *Equus,* but it also suggests something far more sacramental about literary reading that, in my read of Rancièrian emancipation, is not accounted

for: the way words can become flesh and dwell among people in ways impossible for things to remain what they once were.

This chapter, then, carries implications for the structured hierarchies of the literature curriculum's rational-instrumental frameworks that tend to "police" the positions and capacities of the people and objects comprising the literary network. Margie's account tells a story of literary reading outside the frame of rational instrumentalism where literary texts are mediated by and directed toward knowledge. Hers is a story of emancipated reading not mediated by theory, and—as such—an account that troubles the ethical implications of purportedly emancipatory frameworks like those that govern the critical literature curriculum. In many ways, the presence of her account here in this dissertation is evidence of literature's "wandering letter." Shaffer's words have become flesh and dwell among us.

CHAPTER 5
THANKSGIVINGS

So literature […] can become a harbinger of the possible. (Greene, 1994, p.218)

A Final Echo

There are opportunities in our lives that come around only once, and when we see them, we know them, and we say, "Yes" before they pass us by. I had one such opportunity quite a few years back, when one February evening my father called me to share some good news: Our family friend, Nelle, had been invited by the University of Notre Dame to receive an honorary degree for her literary accomplishments. The degree would be bestowed upon her in just a few short months at the annual Commencement ceremonies. I was delighted, of course, to learn she would be recognized for her work. Delight soon gave way to speechlessness, though, when he followed up with a question: Would I be willing to accompany her to Notre Dame, and throughout the weekend in its entirety? After all, she had no family members in the kind of physical shape it would take to get from Monroeville, Alabama, to South Bend, and she wanted a friend—preferably someone familiar with the campus—to join her. Few people would decline the invitation to witness, in person, the joyful celebration of a friend's accomplishments. And I dare say nobody would decline the invitation to accompany the one-book-wonder, the woman-turned-enigma by media and critics alike: Nelle Harper Lee.

The weekend was, as I imagined it would be, a bit like a fairytale. There were shakings of hands with world leaders, politicians, award-winning musicians, and peacemakers. There were meals that people had planned and sweated over for months. There was unsurpassed joy in Nelle's face, as 8,000 hands went up into the air, each holding a copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, at the bestowal of her honorary degree. Nelle later remarked, that if I ever looked out on a clear

night to see an old lady jumping over the moon, I might as well wave. It would likely be *her* still reeling with delight.

As we parted ways at the end of the weekend, Nelle handed me a gift. Over the years, particularly as my experiences as an English teacher, teacher educator, and scholar of English Education have evolved, I have thought more deeply about the gift Nelle handed me that day. I have often thought about those things she might have given me: an autographed copy of her book perhaps, or some piece of the South, the land we both called home. But she didn't. She gave me a paperback copy of one of her own favorite books, a pen, and—with it—a notecard. Written upon it were four simple words: "Dearest Kati, More words."

This story of her gift is, in some ways, a fitting coda to the chapters I have just finished and a helpful beginning to this final chapter: an evocation of "thanksgivings." Her handing me the gift of book, pen, and "More words" was a moment of re-orientation for me, a Rancièrian redistribution of the sensible. We had just concluded a weekend celebrating Nelle Harper Lee as author, and, though I had been with her as her friend, I also could not help but see some "authorizing" aura about her. Her literary capacities and accomplishments seemed somehow beyond my reach.

But Nelle's gift said otherwise. I might argue that, in handing me that book, in combination with pen and a gentle push for "More words," Nelle eluded the distribution of roles and capacities deemed "sensible" by the curricular frameworks that govern literary reading. Her gesture carried a powerful set of assumptions—namely that I came to literary texts *already* as an active thinking, sensing, experienced human being. I might do more than de-code a text, or admire its literariness, or "unlock" the author's meaning, or critically engage with theory. I might join my own flesh with that pen and find that I had something equally creative to offer.

Literary Reading as Gifting

I reference this autobiographical narrative because it serves both as a punctuation mark to the previous chapter, and a framing device for this current and final chapter, where I'd like to focus on, among other things, the idea of "gift" as it relates to literature. Gift, like transubstantiation, can carry with it a sacramental connotation. The words that mark the sacrament of Confirmation are, "Be sealed with the *gifts* of the Holy Spirit." In matrimony, reconciliation, and baptism, the newly married, reconciled, and baptized are believed to receive the gift of divine grace. Gift also shares a particularly significant connection with the sacrament of Communion. The term Eucharist, after all, comes from the Greek word *eucharisteo*, meaning "to give thanks" for a gift freely given. Three of the four Gospels mention Christ "giving thanks" while breaking bread with his disciples at the Last Supper, the meal believed to be the institution of the *sacrament* of Eucharist:

> And when He had taken some bread and *giving thanks*, He broke it and gave it to them saying, 'This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' (Lk 22: 19, emphasis added)

To speak of the Eucharist or Holy Communion, then, is to speak of a kind of thanksgiving for a sacrificial gift.

I would like, in this final chapter, to imagine how it might be that what I have termed literary communion between readers and texts reframes literary reading as a free exchange of gifts between readers and texts. In doing so, I am imagining how literary texts might "offer" or "give" of themselves to readers, evoking the idea of text as offering, much like Jimmy Santiago Baca's poem, "I am offering this poem to you/ Since I have nothing else to give." But I am also imagining how readers might offer or give of themselves to texts. That orientation toward

literature offers one final attempt at deepening my elaboration of literary communion and one final glimpse of reader-text relationships that look and feel different from the instrumental dynamics of the literature curriculum I outlined in Chapter 1. And so I begin by contemplating the relational dynamics of gifting as a way of unpacking what it might mean to conceive of literature as a free exchange of gifts between readers and texts.

Johnstone (2004), drawing upon phenomenology, has suggested there is a kind of "dual subjectivity" to gifting. In a more Cartesian set-up where there is a subject-object split, the subject might be assumed to be the source of knowledge and value, while the object is set apart as inert and devoid of value until acted upon by the subject. In many ways, pedagogical misappropriations of reader response theories—like those I outlined in Chapter 3—enact this kind of subject-object binary. Recall, for example, from Chapter 3 how reader response pedagogy often privileges the reader's subjectively-felt response over the textual object.

An alternative subject-object relationship, still Cartesian in its division of subject and object, might impose the object on the subject, reducing the subject to passive receiver. This relational dynamic is one that Rosenblatt worked to overcome by balking the notion that the text somehow impressed its meaning upon the reader. And yet, there is a degree to which formalism, which I discussed in Chapter 1, preserves this imposition of the text upon the reader, where the reader is beholden to decoding only that which is somehow "contained" within the four corners of the text. Even literature's more critical frameworks that purport to be emancipatory seem to ride on an assumed relationship between reader and text very much in the spirit of this Cartesian split. The reader remains a passive receiver of text *until* she possesses an authorizing theory.

In a framework of gifting, on the other hand, there is, claims Johnstone, a kind of equality of subject. His framework of gifting is one of "dual subjectivity:" The giver is subject, the

receiver is subject, and the object is the giving and receiving together with the entity which is given (p.5). If we conceive of literary reading as an act of gifting—as dual subjects reader *and* text giving and receiving together—then there is, from the outset, an overcoming of the separateness of reader and text in more hierarchical models of literary instrumentalism. This overcoming of separateness of reader and text is in sync, I believe, with this project's unifying metaphor: literary communion.

Reflecting back

I'd like to use Johnstone's analysis of the relationships implied in gifting to revisit Chapters 3 and 4. I would like not only to summarize these earlier chapters as a concluding chapter should do, but also to re-see parts of those chapters as speaking to a kind of dual subjectivity of reader and text always already giving and receiving together. In Chapter 3, for example, I shared Dan's account of reading Chapter 23 of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix.* I shared that account as a way of illuminating how conceiving of literature as grounded not only in experience, but also in equality, might mend the bifurcation of reader response and formalism. Dan's account inspired a kind of reimagining of close reading different from that of the New Critical tradition intent on "unlocking" the author's meaning, and different also from the now standardized version of "read[ing] closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it" (NGA, 2010, p.10). His reading, I argued, was a kind of dwelling in the gaps between language and experience, where through his own intermingling of feeling, experience, and imagination with the text's formal qualities, he participated in a dimension of becoming-ness bigger than himself.

There are ways in which this entrance into what I called a kind of *communion* with text positioned Dan and the text *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* as dual subjects, giving

and receiving together. Dan, for example, *gave* his own imagination to the text. His own visions of gum wrappers stashed in some corner of Neville's bedroom increased the depth of Ron's hoarseness, of Harry's glumness, of Hermione's tearfulness at the end of that heartbreaking scene in Chapter 23. Dan's aching raised the decibels in Ron's voice as he asked Neville, "What are *you* doing here?"

And yet Dan also *received* that which the text itself gave: a linguistic rendition of an experience that "one takes to be universal," yet that has "never been precisely articulated before" (Bingham and Biesta, 2010, p.68). The dramatic irony, the artful arrangement of dialogue, the gradual paring down of syntax to underscore the speechlessness of the young wizards as they process what they have just witnessed were all offerings. They were outgrowths of Rowling's willingness to dwell in the gaps between language and experience, patiently trying on ways to say things that she knew could never be fully said.

As I attempted to make clear in Chapter 4, this giving and receiving is not meant to be interpreted as linking, in some pre-programmed way, the text's manner of making with the reader's manner of reception. The very idea of "gifting" connotes a kind of freedom from reciprocity. Here, again, I find Johnstone's elaboration of the idea of gifting illuminating:

> The notion of "gift" implies a relationship both to the one who gives and to the one to whom it is given. One cannot give a gift unless what is given belongs to one as giver; while to give a gift to another, means that it now belongs to that other, or that the other has the gift. But to have something, means that the receiver may freely use (*uti*) and enjoy (*frui*) what is given as she wills. Thus…a gift is not something given "with strings attached," it is not a disguised form of controlling the other, but a freeing of the other for enjoyment of the gift received. (p.13)

Johnstone's imagery of gifting as a kind of giving with "no strings attached" calls to mind Rancière's theorizing of the aesthetic regime as, among other things, an untying of the knot between *poiesis* and *aesthesis.* To conceive of the text as gift is to imagine the reader freely using and enjoying the text as she wills. It is not the expectation that she de-code the text's meaning, that she logically infer what the text says, or that she admire the author's masterful command of language. To conceive of text as gift is to understand—indeed hope--that the reader might flesh it out as she sees fit, in a way comparable to Margie's fleshing out of *Equus* as a kind of mantra by which to live.

The reader's fleshing out the text is, one might argue, a kind of sacrificial giving of the reader to the text. As Roland Barthes noted, readers "rewrite the text of the work with the text of [their] lives" (1985, p.101). There is a tradition, too, in Western culture of "gifting" literature to people we care about. Not surprisingly, a few of my research participants' accounts were about literary texts that had originated as gifts from teachers and significant others. If, as Johnstone asserts, "one cannot give a gift unless what is given belongs to one as giver," then it would seem to follow that somewhere along the way, readers have left a piece of themselves in the texts they gift to others. Even works of literature themselves have made similar intimations. Among the characters in Alice Walker's *Temple of My Father* are a husband and wife, both avid readers. Any text that the husband read that was important to him, his wife made a point to read also, because she saw it as an extension of him. And any text she read that was important to her, she shared with her husband. However, her husband never read the books she shared with him, and with each addition to the pile of unread books on his desk, it was as if a piece of her died—suffocating between closed book covers. This idea of reader and text giving and receiving together is again consistent with the more sacramental notion of communion that brings about

what has been described as a kind of "mutual abiding" (CCC, 1349). Reader and text echo to some extent another line from John's Gospel often invoked in Catholic Christian teaching to elaborate the relational dimensions of communion: "Abide in me, and I in you" (*Jn* 15:4).

Literary Communion as Risk-Taking

This idea of gifting--of a literary text giving to a receptive reader what belongs uniquely to it and a reader giving to a receptive text what belongs uniquely to her--is one that seems to elude a distribution of competencies and roles deemed "sensible" in the literature curriculum's more rational-instrumental frameworks. Recall from Chapter 1 that literature's more traditional curricular frames thrive on the stability of relations between and among people (teachers, students, published authors), objects (texts), and modes of perception and signification (favoring rational knowledge as the primary mode of "sensing"). I outlined those predictable, stable relations in Chapter 1, noting how literature is often mediated by knowledge and taken up for knowledge. Readers function primarily as analysts of texts, which remain the products of someone else's—the author's—creative capacities. Teachers assume the authority to mediate a reader's analytic interpretation and/or judge its validity. But there is little that is predictable or stable about literary communion and its openness to a kind of "no strings attached" gifting between readers and texts. Gifting, Johnstone reminds us, is "not a disguised form of controlling the other," and so conceiving of literary reading as reader and text giving and receiving together poses a challenge to the policing mechanisms of literature's more rational-instrumental curricular frameworks.

In the previous two chapters, I have focused almost exclusively on the reader and text in my attempts to elaborate literary communion. But Biesta (2013) has described what he calls the

"beautiful risk" of education, and it seems that literary communion poses what might be a beautiful risk for all who are implicated in the literature curriculum—teachers included. The "products" of literary communion defy measurement, and they have a way of manifesting themselves across a lifespan, not just within the artificial constraints of a 16- or 32-week course. Margie's story illustrates this, and my own story illustrates this. India's story—not yet shared—illustrates this characteristic of literary communion as well.

For India, it was Mark Mathabane's *Kaffir Boy*--his autobiographical account of growing up in South Africa—that, as she said, "became a book that would forever live inside" her. She read it in high school, while attending an elite boarding school on the West Coast—a context that seemed significant in light of the parts of Mathabane's book that moved her the most profoundly. The gruesome details of Mathabane's struggles for education "jarred" her, she said, from any complacency about her own educational opportunities. But it was really not until 4 years later that *Kaffir Boy* began to leave any semblance of a detectable trail in her life. Presented with a fellowship application opportunity, India not only seized the opportunity to write her way through the application, but also used passages of Mathabane's autobiography to do so. Her essay earned her the funding to travel to South Africa the following summer to participate in a nature education program, and, in the years since, she had returned two more times to teach and participate in the African Leadership Academy.

For teachers of literature, "outcomes" of literary reading that manifest themselves 3 months, 4 years, and 32 years beyond a course serve no utility in the realm of teacher accountability, and so to patiently await these fruits—that may only ever exist as possibilities—is indeed a beautiful risk. Margie's story of reading *Equus* and my own story of reading *The Diaries of Adam and Eve* serve as reminders that there may be few things about literary

communion that a teacher gets credit for within the confines of a single academic semester. My grandfather's eulogy did not factor into Tom Werge's course evaluations. Neither Margie's divorce, nor her poetry counted in Arthur's tenure files. No teacher at India's school received credit for her travels and work throughout South Africa.

The stories of reading that I have used to deepen my elaboration of literary communion suggest that literary communion poses a kind of risk for readers as well. A rational-instrumental framework's more fixed, hierarchical order depends, in part, on readers—even under the label of "close reading"--maintaining a safe, almost detective-like distance from the text. The curricular materials of these more instrumental frames—materials like comprehension and interpretation questions that demand analysis and summary—operate "within the four corners of the text" (Coleman and Pimental, 2012), fostering an illusion of stability and control. To analyze and summarize is, in effect, to describe what is. But the accounts that I have used to deepen my elaboration of literary communion speak to literature's participation in a kind of intervention. Readers, as I have already mentioned, enter into and dwell in the gaps between language and experience—gaps that analysis and summary are more quick to gloss over. And when readers intermingle with the text in that way, literature, it seems, does more than emanate meaning, convey ideas, or garner appreciation. It actually exhibits a potential to *intervene* on life. It begins to "live under [our] skin," as Margie attests. Dan's tears, Margie's divorce, India's newly-formed ties to South Africa were all signs of the impossibility in literary communion of things remaining what they once were.

I would be remiss, of course, if I did not also acknowledge the possibility of literary communion posing risks that are far from beautiful—indeed downright dangerous. I have discussed emancipatory reading as a kind of reading in which readers are themselves free to play

with texts, reinvent texts, seize texts and form new texts of their own. And the notion of text as gift, as I have already mentioned, implies an assumed freedom on the part of the reader to do with it as she feels moved to do. Of course, there is nothing to guarantee that a reader's "fleshing out" a text will operate in the best interest of others. There is nothing to guarantee that the new texts she composes with the text before her will not be used to do harm. As Willinsky (1991) reminds us, "time in the company of great writers can certainly fail us" (p.68), and—as an extreme example of this failure—he cites the work of George Steiner (1967) who has documented the high literary taste of many a concentration camp worker in Nazi Germany. "I find myself unable to assert confidently that the humanities humanize," wrote Steiner (p.68). Steiner's research on the links between Nazism and literature serve as a reminder that Rancière's ethical framework might spur the imagination of relationships between readers and texts grounded in equality, but it cannot guarantee the morality of those who comprise the relationship, nor can it guarantee the goodness of intentions that undergird their "fleshing out" of texts.

A Matter of Faith

Wherever there is risk or uncertainty, there seems a need for faith. In his letter of response to my own "thank you" for having introduced me to Twain's *Diaries of Adam and Eve,* Tom Werge reminded me that "All the rest comes down to faith, hope, and love." And perhaps he was right. Perhaps this project itself comes down to faith, hope, and love. There are certainly ways to read my elaboration of literary communion as a kind of soul-searching question: "What are you—as teacher, as reader, as curriculum designer-- faithful to?"

Applebee (1993) implied a similar question at the conclusion of his report on the state of literature in the secondary school:

> As we begin a second century of teaching literature, it is time we examine these enduring characteristics of literature instruction, asking which are appropriate and essential and which have continued because they have remained unexamined. (p.203)

Recent trends in the secondary English language arts curriculum, such as the marginalization and the instrumentalization of literature, posit a faithfulness to the goods of a knowledge economy (Machlup, 1972), among them skills, ideas, *measureable* knowledge. The resurging emphasis on close reading in official U.S. curricular documents like the Common Core State Standards also hints at a kind of faithfulness to that which the New Critics found admirable about formalism: its rigorous and codified *method* for the literature curriculum.

But literary communion—imagined within a Rancièrian ethical framework—exhibits faithfulness to other things. Chief among those things is a faithfulness to equality as *already.* This faithfulness to equality as *already* triggers its own doubts, among them a doubt in blind, "unexamined" (Applebee, p.203) faith in curricular traditions that perpetuate inequality. Out of a faithfulness to equality as *already,* one begins to examine more critically overly text-centric or overly reader-centric patterns of a literature curriculum. One begins to examine more critically the ways that literature might serve as a channel by which to impart knowledge that readers presumably lack, or the ways that this investment in imparting knowledge treats certain kinds of knowledge as presumably superior to other kinds. And finally, one begins to imagine how literary reading might be otherwise: how it can be, at times, and under certain assumptions, more sacramental than instrumental.

Because equality as *already* functions as an ethical lens, there is really no method by which to arrive at literary communion. It happens, by virtue of the unmediated relationship between reader and text as assumed equals, in ways that are not controlled—indeed not even

anticipatable. There may be conditions more conducive to literary communion than others. For example, it is conceivable that a reader may be less likely to commune with a literary text that is more overtly didactic in its language. After all, in a text that draws more direct lines between language and experience there may be less space for the reader to do her own imagining, playing, and reinventing. Still, though, these are only "mights" and "mays." Without a method and a definitive set of sufficient conditions, the teacher who values literary communion and remains open to it must herself be a faithful person by virtue of investing in a phenomenon that cannot be guaranteed.

I made the explicit point in Chapter 1 that I had not set out in this project to prove that literary communion exists in the world. Rather, having become aware of when and how relationships between readers and texts perpetuate inequality, I set out to imagine how a relationship of equality might be different. Again, full of faith that some of my own experiences with literature had been different from the experiences conjured up in a more rational-instrumental framework, I began with my own experiences, and then the experiences of others, to theorize literary communion as one such possibility.

The stories woven throughout this dissertation, then, have served to help imagine literary communion as an alternative to more rational-instrumental literature frameworks, not to prove what literary communion is. They have highlighted those things that a lens of equality invites into the curricular frame that might otherwise remain invisible or inaudible. In essence, they point to moments and signs that anyone open to the possibility of literary communion might consider more keenly attending to. It is possible that these accounts redistribute the sensible--not only in their reimagining of close reading, reader response, and emancipatory frameworks for literature instruction—but in the way they redirect English teachers' faith. These accounts

suggest that teachers might place their faith in certain practices, activities, and even silences that might, in more rational-instrumental frameworks, be more easily passed over in the English language arts classroom. I outline some of these practices, activities, and silences below.

Listening for the music

I discussed in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, the pervasiveness of formalism in English classrooms throughout the U.S. and the degree to which the literature curriculum has concerned itself primarily with students learning to analyze an author's craft. Applebee's (1993) finding—that "literary analysis was the primary focus in literature courses: close, objective, and text-centered" (p.125)—continues to hold true with the emphasis on close reading in U.S. standards documents.

Brian Doyle, a professional writer and—like me—a former student of Tom Werge, posits that there is something to be gained in asking questions outside the frame of textual analysis. The "deeper education" might unfold, Doyle contends, in response to the question, "What music does the text get going in ourselves?" Reflecting on his own experience in Tom Werge's seminar, Doyle concluded that Werge had figured out "It was easy enough to pick apart the *craft* of the thing, to identify the tools that had been wielded by a brilliant man from Missouri in service to laughter and fury and rage and reverence." Having made that discovery, Werge built a course around what he perceived as the source of the most powerful reading experiences: "writing that is about the reader, that takes up residence in the country of her heart, that speaks to his innermost self, … that shivers, and rattles, and rivets."

In most English classrooms, out of faithfulness to the craft of the text and the skills of analysis, teachers listen for the keenness of a reader's interpretation. However, accounts like Margie's reading of *Equus,* or Dan's reading of *Harry Potter,* or my own reading of *The Diaries*

of Adam and Eve lend a legitimacy to the question, "What music does this text get going in the reader's soul?" As a result, they invite teachers to listen not only for the keenness of a reader's analysis, but for the music—perhaps the "rhythmic architecture" (Smith, p.21) of a reader's voice sharing a particularly moving, shivering, riveting, or rattling passage.

Embracing the absence of words

Words, it seems, are the dominant currency of the literature curriculum. They are the "stuff" that literary texts are made of, and Applebee's (1993) study of the secondary literature curriculum revealed a prevalence of word-based response to literature: oral discussions, careful line-by-line analysis, answers to comprehension questions. Words seem to function as the primary products of the literature curriculum, in that they are the means by which to measure students' mastery of ideas, critical capacities, or analytical prowess.

I do not wish to undermine the value of words, but I do wish to underscore that which is posited by many of the lived accounts of reading throughout this project: that the language of literature can sometimes be wordless. Margie's poem is a reminder that the literary works a reader finds most moving are sometimes those for which there are no words. Her poem reframes, as generative, those moments in a discussion or a paper where a reader struggles to find the right words. Dan's account suggests that the moments in a literature discussion that drip with a "fleshier" language like tears are perhaps the moments to run with—not the moments to quickly pass over in pursuit of the reader with the more coherent answer.

Allowing literature to beget literature

These accounts also give English educators pause to consider the *kinds* of words asked for in the literature classroom. If the language of literature is sometimes wordless, if occasionally there really are no words with which to talk about the works that move a reader

most, then perhaps it is worthwhile to ask readers not to produce analytical prose in response to literature, but to dwell—as writers—in the gaps between language and experience. Perhaps in the English language arts classroom, readers might respond to literature with *their own literature*. It is no coincidence that the readers I interviewed for this project shared with me their accounts of reading in a more narrative mode. Their narratives and Margie's *Equus*-inspired poetry serve as examples of the kinds of writing in response to literature that might come to find a more prominent place in the literature curriculum of the English language arts classroom.

Giving Thanks

In the Catholic Mass, the congregation, nearing the end of the Eucharistic prayer, proclaims in unison: "It is right to give thanks." That act—giving thanks—seems a fitting one with which to end my own elaborations of literary communion. I have just completed what might best be termed a "theory" for the literature curriculum. In his concluding remarks to his nation-wide study of the literature curriculum in secondary schools, Applebee (1993) remarked, "If we are to shift the emphasis in instruction from the teacher and the text toward the student…then we need a much clearer set of theoretical principles to guide instruction" (p.201). The field of English Education, argued Applebee, had yet to come up with a *coherent* theory to guide the literature curriculum. Drawing on both New Critical text-oriented traditions and reader response theory's reader-centered traditions, teachers made a "practical compromise" that resulted in an "eclecticism" that "produce[d] tensions and inconsistencies" rather than a "coherent and integrated approach" (pp. 201-202). My hope is that literary communion—imagined through a lens of equality—might resolve the tensions and inconsistencies in what has often been a severance of reader from text in the literature curriculum. Reimagining close reading in a way that mends the bifurcation of reader response and formalism seems a step in the

right direction in resolving those tensions and inconsistencies. So too does a reframing of literary reading as dual subjects—reader and text--giving and receiving together

Of course, as Willinsky observes, "to change some part of the approach to literature…is to shake the set of disturbing ideas about power and authority" (p.15). And indeed, with Rancièrian equality as this project's unifying lens, it would be difficult to claim that the significance of a theory of literary communion is limited only to the literature curriculum. For Rancière, the primary goal of an analysis of the literature curriculum would be to determine what kind of world it defines and whether it is a world founded on equality. As it turns out, the world defined by rational instrumental frameworks—even those like critical frameworks that claim to be emancipatory—is a world that perpetuates inequality. What literary communion offers, then, is not just one alternative vision for the literature curriculum grounded in ethics, but renewed faith in what Maxine Greene asserted for an audience of English Educators many years ago: that "literature…might be a harbinger of the possible" – the "possible" of an education that proceeds from equality as *already*.

Bingham (2011) has argued that education has reached what he calls a "crossroads" moment: a moment of hyper-curricularization, where the assumption is that anything thinkable can be "packaged" (p.515) as knowledge and transmitted to learners via language. Literature, it seems, is no exception to this trend. In an age when anyone can simply jump online and "watch, practice, learn almost anything—for free," (p.516) education—in order to remain relevant—must begin to orient itself around something more than the transmission and construction of knowledge. Education must live out its relational role, its "crucial human role of drawing people together" (p.516). Literary communion takes seriously this relational role. It is, after all, the fruit of imagining how relationships of equality between readers and literary texts might be

different from the relationships of more rational-instrumental frameworks that perpetuate inequality.

It is right, I think, to give thanks to Rancière for a notion of equality replete with possibility. But I must also give thanks to teachers like Tom Werge and texts like *The Diaries of Adam and Eve* that convinced me long ago that there were depths and dimensions and relationships to reading with which the K-12 English language arts curriculum could do more, or perhaps otherwise. I give thanks to Margie and Dan and Lisa and India and Jane for their stories that renewed my faith in my own literary reading experiences. I give thanks to them for adding more depth and dimension and nuance to the possibilities that might exist for literary reading. I give thanks to authors like Pat Conroy and J.K. Rowling and Mark Mathabane who had the faith to release their texts into the world like a breath that becomes air. The stories and passages that appear throughout this project are proof that readers somewhere have returned them to breath. These texts' words continue to circulate, to become flesh and dwell among us. And finally, I must thank *you*, my readers. For you I give thanks, and in the spirit of communion, I say simply this: "More words."

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