ENGLISH TEACHING AS LITERARY TEXT

By

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ABSTRACT

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The Common Core State Standards prompted particularly vigorous debate and handwringing around the role (and future) of literature in the US secondary English classroom. The rise of the knowledge economy in secondary English, along with an increasing obsession with scientific measurement, resulted in the marginalization of literature, which has and continues to be instrumentalized to the myriad other aims of English teaching: to improve morality, cultivate a productive workforce and intelligent citizenry, perpetuate an elite class, and counteract social inequality. Put differently, *literariness* has little do with these justifications and so with literature's place in the secondary English curriculum, though literature—for now—does. In this study I turn away from the familiar *literature* and towards the strange *literariness* in order to think about what the latter may offer secondary English teaching and scholarship. I understand literariness as a question of texts' value, how they come to matter (and not) in persons' lives. Each of the chapters in this study takes up literariness in order to think and write about English teaching in ways that embrace the aesthetic and relational potential of the work.

The dissertation opens with an introduction to literariness, situating the project within broader conversations of English teaching and scholarship. The second chapter examines how literariness emerges through a close reading of a single text and my own experience with it as a teacher, student, reader and writer. I analyze the implications of this approach to a more ethical close reading – how it animates literariness in the context of a life – and advance literary resonance as a concept of value for English teachers and researchers. The next chapter moves beyond my experience to examine literariness in the lives of four practicing secondary English teachers. The text is comprised of a series

of vignettes which literarily weave together interview data, participant-authored essays, and language drawn from fiction and poetry. I read across the four stories to considering literary possibilities that emerge for teaching life; the complicated intersections of teachers' experiences as students, readers and writers; the political obligations of English teachers in the classroom, and the role literary writing can play in "singing" the lives of teachers and their students. The fourth chapter turns towards the writing of scholarship, considering the (un)literariness of English teaching research and in the process addressing two crucial questions: Literary for whom? By whom? As the story of the chapter's writing unfolds, I reveal the problematics of a literary framing: how the frame may reflect less the literary value of scholars' writing than my own particular positioning. The chapter concludes pointing to the limitations of a too-formalist literariness for achieving the varied goals of education researchers. The dissertation's final chapter plays with the notion that the failures of English teaching and research create conditions by which we might envision and enact more beautiful, just, human and humane English teaching going forward. Reading across chapters and implicating them within major conversations in the field, I offer insights into how literariness helps educators and researchers position themselves usefully for the future unknown.

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> They heard somewhere in that tenantless night a bell that tolled and ceased where no bell was
> and they rode out on the round dais of the earth which alone was dark and no light to it and
> which carried their figures and bore them up into the swarming stars so that they rode not
> under but among them and they rode at once jaunty and circumspect, like thieves newly loosed
> in that dark electric, like young thieves in a glowing orchard, loosely jacketed against the cold
> and ten thousand worlds for the choosing.
>
> Cormac McCarthy, *All The Pretty Horses*

This passage does much to say where I found myself, a reader and writer and 17-year-old boy reading McCarthy's novel for the first time. The book had a profound impact on my life, setting me on a trajectory to study English as an undergraduate and later teach secondary English classes along the Texas-Mexico border, the very same land that serves as the setting for McCarthy's novel. In an earlier study (Jarvie, 2019) I wrote:

> What I learned from reading *All The Pretty Horses* at 17, an apathetic if bright student, was that
> literature and its appeal were larger than what my high school teachers offered. McCarthy's
> novel introduced me to the glowing orchard of literature; like John Grady, I felt myself a thief
> newly loosed in that dark electric, loosely jacketed against the cold and ten thousand worlds
> for the choosing. (p. 97)

There is a long tradition of overemphasizing the role of a single, pivotal text in the lives of readers (*the book that changed my life*) and while this novel has long been vital to the story I tell myself about myself, it hasn't been the only text that's mattered. Italo Calvino and Samuel Beckett and Jennifer Egan played parts too, Daves Eggers and Foster Wallace and Junot Díaz, Colson Whitehead, Borges and Vonnegut and Faulkner and a bevy of poets. More recently, Foucault. But importantly, my passion for the

glowing orchard has not been formally or genre bound: I came to understand the music I listened to, the films I watched, the art I saw and the experiences I had with the people I encountered as roughly coextensive with—all in conversation with, on a more or less immanent plane—each other, as contributing to the same sorts of questions: how to live, and why, and what to say about it. It was natural to me that this became the work of English teaching: As a teacher I was concerned that my classes were *literary*, that students worked through, responded to and related with literature, in a broad & general, multimodal & expansive, canonical & diverse, popular & avant garde sense.

I share this not so much to make the case for why English teachers should teach this way—not yet—but instead to explain why I found the actual work of teaching American and World lit. in a high school classroom so strange. So much English teaching has little interest in this conversation. Instead, subject area English in U.S. secondary classrooms has largely moved on from its original aim of saving young Protestant souls (though perhaps not entirely; see: Brass, 2010; Burke & Segall, 2017), and now is most often justified as providing essential skills for a productively literate workforce and intelligent citizenry (Gere, 1992). This is notably embodied in the rise of the Common Core State Standards, which, critics have argued (and I agree with them), are concerned with technocratically building and ordering students into more efficient and effective persons. Questions of the mind and heart—as Wallace memorably put it, "what it means to be a fucking human being" (McCaffrey, 1993, p. 4)—have increasingly little place in the (formal) secondary English curricula of today, and especially so in the advent of the Common Core, with its demand for "consistent, real-world learning goals" for English Language Arts intended to "ensure that all students, regardless of where they live, are graduating high school prepared for college, career, and life". One startling way this thrust has

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manifested itself is with an open antagonism towards personal and creative purposes for teaching reading and writing[1], i.e., what I think matters about literature.

I was surprised and dispirited then to get to graduate school and see how un-literary so much research on English teaching was, and instead so coldly scientific, with its vocabulary and concerns and methods. At an early conference presentation at the annual meeting of the Literacy Research Association, I asked, "Why is literacy research so scientific? Why isn't it very literary?" The question was met with particular hostility from one member of the audience, a veteran scholar who doubled-down, asserting that my concern should be about how to make literacy research *more* scientific, not less. Well. It didn't feel much like the work of English to me.

Looking back now, I was naïve. My unconventional path, as an alternatively-certified English teacher whose undergraduate education was conducted almost exclusively in an English department, in a College of Arts and Letters, at a tony private university without an undergraduate teacher prep program at all, does a lot to explain why I found this strange. The un-literariness of English teaching is perhaps not nearly so strange to the vast majority of teachers produced in traditional teacher prep programs today, for whom social scientific research very early on framed their understandings of teaching. Still, the question of the literary, its place and relevance and abjectness and absence, in English teaching is one worth asking I think, and this dissertation will attempt to ask it, over and over again, with respect to a variety of different issues and formations.

"Literary" and "literariness" are not terms often used to talk about secondary English classrooms; "literature" is. This dissertation owes much to McKenzie (2018) and Macaluso (2016), whose dissertations took up questions of literature in secondary English classrooms in different ways but both against a common understanding of where the field is at with respect to *literature* as a concept.

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[1] "Nobody gives a shit what you think and feel", College Board President David Coleman famously quipped, of the apparent disdain for personal and creative essay writing in the new Common Core standards he engineered, during an address to the State Board of Educators in New York (Coleman, 2011).

McKenzie explains that the Common Core prompted particularly vigorous debate and handwringing around the role (and future) of literature in the secondary English classroom. Moreover, Macaluso helpfully notes that "with the advent of the Common Core State Standards in 2011… 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" (2019, p. 132). Framing this particular instance as exemplary of the broader shift towards making contemporary secondary English teaching useful for today's "knowledge economy"—the manufacturing of economically useful ideas, dispositions, and skills—Macaluso argues that "the increasing linkages between literacy and a knowledge economy do not bode well for literature's place in the secondary English Language Arts curriculum" (p. 2). Similarly, Alsup (2015) argued that the rise of the knowledge economy in secondary English, along with an increasing obsession with scientific measurement, has resulted in the marginalization of literature. Across their research, these authors note that literature has and continues to be instrumentalized to the myriad other aims of secondary English teaching: to improve morality, cultivate a productive workforce and intelligent citizenry, perpetuate an elite class, and counteract social inequality (Gere, 1992). *Literariness* per se has little do with these justifications and so with literature's place in the secondary English curriculum, though *literature*—for now—does. In what follows I turn away from the familiar *literature* and towards the strange *literary*, this to think about what the latter may offer secondary English teaching and scholarship.

A History of Literariness

Literariness (n.)—the properties of a text that make it literary; the qualities of a text that make it count as "literature" (Baldick, 2008). What exactly those qualities are is an issue much contested historically. While 'literariness' is a relatively modern term, if we understand it as a question of the properties of a text that make it worth reading – a question of texts' value -- then we can trace the conversation back to

antiquity. As Bruns (2011) details, Plato spent much time defending the role and place of poetry in his republic. A few centuries later, Horace provides the terms for the value of poetry that would remain dominant for centuries: that it instructs its readers as well as delights them. The seemingly natural union of moral teaching and pleasure that Horace attributed to literary works, as did generations of critics who followed him, no longer holds so easily together for those who take on the question today (p. 11).

In the more recent history in which secondary and university English curricula are grounded, the term 'literature' has been most often used to distinguish between texts of special importance, those worth reading in, for example, collegiate English courses and written about in scholarship. This importance is often framed as being tied to the formal properties of a text, its aesthetic or artistic qualities, such as its use of poetic devices like meter, rhyme, and other patterns of sound or repetition, or the extent to which the text makes sophisticated use of literary devices (e.g., imagery, metaphor, tone). In the early 20th century, this emphasis on literary form was espoused by the influential Russian Formalist school. Roman Jakobson first used the term 'literariness' in 1919, declaring that 'the object of literary science is not literature but literariness, i.e. what makes a given work a literary work'. To scholars like Jakobson, literariness, or the distinction between literary and non-literary texts, is accomplished through 'defamiliarization' (Ekegren, 1999, p. 44). Through this lens a main characteristic of literary texts is that they make the language unfamiliar to the reader and deviate from ordinary language. Defamiliarized language draws attention to itself: as our perceptions are often automatic, it forces the reader to notice the unfamiliar through a variety of different techniques i.e. wordplay, rhythm, figures of speech, etc. (Lemon 1965, p. 5). Following Russian Formalism literary texts were seen as the ones that use language in aesthetic and estranged ways, while non-literary texts were those that used everyday language precisely and accurately. They consisted of

everyday texts, such as newspaper or magazine articles, letters, brochures, advertisements, reports, or editorials.

In the middle decades of the 20th century, the largely American New Critics (e.g., Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren) further developed a formalist brand of analysis which proved immensely popular and came to be institutionalized as the dominant approach in US universities. This approach insisted that literary scholars should be concerned with the component formal parts of a literary text and should de-emphasize the use of intuition and imagination. Through a New Critical lens, the defining features of a literary work do not reside in extra-literary conditions such as history or sociocultural phenomena under which a literary text might have been created but instead in the form of the language used. Because New Criticism isolated the text and excluded historical and biographical contexts, critics argued as early as 1942 that this approach to criticism was flawed for being overly narrow and for "disabl[ing] any and all attempts to relate literary study to political, social, and cultural issues and debates[1]" (Adams, 1971, p. 1350). In the 60's and onwards cultural studies (critiques of the raced/classed/gendered etc. construction of what counts as 'Literature'; the turn towards pop culture as worthy of scholarly study) and postmodern theory (deconstructions of language and texts) did much to undermine the old-guard understanding of what counts as literary, exposing the dominance of formalism as largely white, male, heteronormative, European, etc. It should be noted however that, while these critiques were largely integrated as a norm of scholarly discourse in the humanities, an orthodox literary formalism persists in school curricula, bookstores, and the popular imagination. In the 1970s, in the advent of these critiques some scholars moved away from the solely linguistic theory adopted by the Russian Formalists and started acknowledging the role of the reader. A body of work emerged out of poststructuralists' (e.g., Roland Barthes) emphasis on the active role a reader takes in constructing texts termed 'reader response theory' (e.g., the work of Louise Rosenblatt). Many of these scholars, including Jonathan

Culler, Stanley Fish, and Umberto Eco, asserted that literariness cannot be defined solely on the basis of linguistic properties found within a text but that the reader is also a crucial factor in the construction of meaning (Zwaan 1993, p. 8).

Thus, the search for a definition of literariness has developed in two directions. The first direction is the Russian Formalist's approach which assumes that there is a difference between literary and ordinary texts with features specific to literary language. The second approach rejects this assumption, as those linguistic features can be found in any other instance of language use. This approach moves the interest from grammatical structures, syntax and semantics, to that of pragmatics which analyses the author's and the reader's view on the text (Nöth 1990, p. 350), in other words the way that context contributes to meaning. A turn towards literariness might be thought differently, then—not as a return to the values upheld during a romanticized golden-age of formalist literary study before Theory, but rather as a radical extension of the implications of postmodern theories and cultural studies, one that treats literary texts both formally and pragmatically, that attends to both the text *as text* and also engages deeply with its intersections with particular readers. This history of the issue I've provided here is uneven and we're more or less there now, with most critics occupying space somewhere between those two poles. Put differently, we might understand this dynamic as representing the aesthetic and political impulses, respectively, towards reading and texts. Of course this may yet be a false dichotomy and there are plenty of examples in which aesthetic texts prove political or in which the political styles itself aesthetically.

Definitions

> A definition is a sorry thing, but
>
> we will all be redefined.
>
> Dean Young, "All Told"

For definitional purposes I draw heavily on Campbell's (2018) more recent argument for literariness as a concept of scholarly value. This case for literariness is firmly in the pragmatic camp, blending the formalism of Jacobson with the pragmatism of Eco and postmodern litterateurs like Milan Kundera and Italo Calvino and the poststructural philosophy of Jacques Rancière. I'm drawn to that kind of eclectic approach to thinking the concept, as that is to me what it means to work in a literary mode, cutting across familiar logics to craft something singular: as Zawacki (2010) writes, "poetry [and literature, too] is the refusal of concept and category, of positivism". (p. 227). Which helps explain why I understand the high priests of poststructural critique, Derrida and Foucault, to be profoundly literary. As the latter explains while the human sciences turn language into an "object of knowledge", through this lens literature "has no other law than that of affirming—in opposition to all other forms of discourse—its own precipitous existence…has nothing to say but itself, nothing to do but shine in the brightness of its being" (Foucault, 1970, p. 300)

Campbell's framing begins with the assertion that literariness is crucially not a concept "tethered to a concrete work or text… [but rather] an appropriation of literature as a value to be found in anything." In keeping with this, I agree that "literariness extends beyond our interactions with art and art-making, just as literature is bigger than fiction or poetry… it is a form of praxis that we must continually strive to enact." Still, a framework for literariness emerges with distinct traits which I'll apply for my own purposes in the subsequent chapters of this study.

Through this lens, one primary way literature is often understood as literary is because of its language: the arbitrariness of its words unfolds, marking in the text "the freeing of language and representation such that everyone is now entitled to intervene in any form of discourse, use or be addressed by any language and be the subject of representation" (Corcoran, 2010, p. 17). Or, as Scholes (1982) explains: we find "literariness in an utterance when any one of the six features of communication [sender, receiver, message, context, contact, code] loses its simplicity and becomes

multiple or duplicitous" (p. 21). More to the point, Campbell argues that "literary communication is, due to its fictional medium, non-essentialist. This is simply because a literary text is not a philosophical or scientific text. The literary text encourages a certain degree of ambiguity and under-determination." That ambiguity—what in my own thinking I've often labeled 'uncertainty'—is absolutely crucial, I think, to what makes literature *literary*. There are still other words we might use: Macaluso (under review), for example, describes a shift towards the literary as a movement "from certainty to mystery." Campbell further finds the concept of literariness linked to "*surprise*. Literariness surprises us by thwarting or delaying our normal expectations. It plays with the clarity and ephemerality we come to expect from language and our normal communicative mediums." Riffaterre (1983), meanwhile, speaks of the surprise of literature as a function of the *ungrammaticality* of a text, which "is what 'pulls us up short'…it is out of this sense of surprise and our ability and willingness to rise and meet the unknown, that literariness emerges."

I find it useful to add to this framework at least two more notions: enchantment and contradiction. The promise of enchantment, for philosophers and theorists in a variety of disciplines (e.g., Bennett, 2001) is that an affirmative mode of intellectual and affective engagement (Jarvie, forthcoming; McKenzie & Jarvie, 2018) may open up new possibilities for thought and living foreclosed by Modernity's tools of disenchantment. But this has long been what it means to call a work *literature*: as Borges (2002) explains, "we have in language the fact (and this seems obvious to me) that words began, in a sense, as magic." (p. 81). That is, literature enchants the world—that is what literary texts have done for me—in that it magically provides words, as Calvino (1988) puts it, a lightness as a reaction to the weight of living. The enchanting quality of literature is necessarily subjective; it resists abstraction and speaks for itself.

The literary also plays fast and loose with contradiction—it makes of texts a space that can usefully contradict itself, running over and around and through the lines rationality has drawn,

"through, perhaps, another experience of the possible" (Derrida, 2005). Here and unsurprisingly I think of Whitman's (1892) celebrated lines: "Do I contradict myself? / Very well, I contradict myself. / I am large, I contain multitudes". Or, as Fitzgerald (1945/2009) understands it, literariness is a matter of holding "two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time" (p. 69). The usefulness of literariness lies in, among other things, its possibility and willingness to contradict, to embrace the resulting uncertainty as generative rather than a problem. This bit about contradiction to round out my framing is crucial to understanding what's so exciting and useful about a literary frame to the work of English teaching and research.

The Usefulness of Literariness

In making a case for the need for new and different approaches to qualitative research, Lather & St. Pierre (2013) outline the hallmarks of conventional social science: "We believe we need to guarantee the value and rigor of…inquiry … systematicity, process, audit trails, the clarity of language, value-free knowledge (objectivity, bias), the accumulation of knowledge, triangulation, coding data, and data itself" (p. 631). Put another way, we might conceive of much conventional social science research, education and secondary English scholarship very much included, as certainty-seeking: it operates under the assumption that rigorous science can lead us towards ever more likely probabilities which point (asymptotically) towards some future certainty. It is structured by an underlying impulse towards certainty rather than uncertainty. Dewey (1929) first called this approach to education research "the quest for certainty" (p. 21). Building on Dewey's concept, Gordon (2007) explains that:

> the quest for certainty in education has contributed to the narrowing of the curriculum, the proliferation of instructional practices aimed at teaching to the test, and the marginalization of important dimensions of our being (such as developing the imagination and a sense of mystery). (p. 38)

Yet as the novelist Milan Kundera (1988) explains, the quest for certainty obscures and obfuscates the complexity of human encounters, and actually prevents us from getting to the 'truth of things':

> Man desires a world where good and evil can be clearly distinguished, for he has an innate and irrepressible desire to judge before he understands. Religions and ideologies are founded on this desire… they require that somebody be right: either Anna Karenina is the victim of a narrow minded tyrant, or Karenin is the victim of an immoral woman. This 'either-or' encapsulates an inability to tolerate the essential relativity of things human, an inability to look squarely in the absence of the Supreme Judge. (p. 7)

Thus the usefulness of literariness lies in its possibility and willingness to contradict, to embrace uncertainty as generative rather than a problem. To that end, Campbell (2018) argues that "adopting general literary values…can help serve to dissolve the rather ubiquitous hold this 'quest [for certainty]' has on our thoughts and practices." That is, "literariness arms us against the logic of non-contradiction, because, well, life doesn't neatly fit into opposing pairs." It is a mode for instilling complexity, a space for new possibilities to emerge, I think, with respect to both secondary English teaching and research.

Insofar as it capable of such interventions in thought, the literary also holds political promise as a mode of critique. Literariness, Campbell argues is a political tool that each of us possesses by nature of being human "to perceive resemblances even between things that are far apart". Umberto Eco (1979) argues that this critical promise is tied to the literary (aesthetic) function of language: "the ambiguity contained in the aesthetic message—the calling into question of the legitimacy of the code—is indispensable for language to transform and develop." (p. 104) Which is to say: approaching through the lens of literariness, treating something as a literary text, encourages through its very ambiguity interpretive engagement. Thinking with the literary asks us to treat the world as discursive text, as literature, as a book itself. In this vein Murphie (2016) argues:

There is perhaps a more useful, ethical, and anarchival understanding the world as a book. It is this: the ongoing continuity and novelty of the world, as this literally moves from moment to moment, and is made available for other vectors of feeling (also world) to engage with. It's a partnership with(in) world. Any serious reader with feeling will understand this, and will have been moved by it."

Yet, in the same breath, Murphie admits that with too much interpretation and overcoding things soon "rigidify: The understanding of the world as a book to be read too easily becomes the authoritative concept of an already read world without movement or change." The interpretive turn is one long taken up and institutionalized by qualitative researchers; in becoming research, it calcified its interpretations, seeking validity. The literary resists this validity-seeking impulse, because "even when it does set out with didactic ambitions, all it can ever do is present one more possible world — one amongst a plurality that is the whole of literature and by extension, the universe of discourse itself" (Campbell, 2018). Instead of validity, literariness suggests and presents new possibilities of, as Rancière (2004) would say, distributing what is sensible, what is imaginable.

In sum: literariness in secondary English teaching opens up new ambiguous, multiplicitous, mysterious, enchanted, surprising, ungrammatical and contradictory possibilities that resist certainty; just as for Campbell (2018):

> the literary practice is a continually renewed process, a new possibility in the aesthetic order, a state of things not yet realized, but that now seems somewhat possible. It is in this utopia, this assemblage of imaginary worlds we call literature — worlds that still have 'real' causal significance, which affect our world in very direct ways — where we find a model of plurality that can breathe life into our own. (para. 19)

Each of the chapters in this study takes up literariness as a lens to animate the inquiry, drawing on aspects of this framing (particularly a formalist attention to language, enchantment, and ambiguity) in

order to think and write about English teaching in ways that resist certainty and embrace the aesthetic and relational potential of education research.

Overview

> *Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten.*[2]
>
> Ludwig Wittgenstein

My method in this project is a literary one which puts aesthetic pressure on the writing and itself gestures towards literariness, that it might be read as such by readers. In departing from the methodological norms of most dissertations in education, I act as *bricoleur*, borrowing from a wide range of approaches to engage the study in a literary manner. For example, the vignettes in Chapter Three were informed by observation data gathered in the spring of 2019, in which I sat in a secondary English classroom weekly, taking literary ethnographic fields notes. Such work meant thick description (Geertz, 1973) of course but also writing "fragments of discourse intended to evoke in both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality, and thus provoke an aesthetic integration…in a word, poetry" (Tyler, 1986, p. 126) On the whole the study is less a hybrid humanities/qualitative methodology than an original approach, and so acts as an ordering of things in the secondary English classroom, just as any research project is. But it's important to me that that ordering is a literary one, one which knows, following Foucault (1970), that

> while the human sciences turn language into an "object of knowledge", literature "has no other law that that of affirming—in opposition to all other forms of discourse—its own precipitous existence…has nothing to say but itself, nothing to do but shine in the brightness of its being" (p. 300)

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[2] "One really ought to do philosophy as poetry." Or, "The only way to philosophize is to poem."

That is, this project follows the laws of itself; it will become something literary in tracing examples across various places: theoretical scholarship, empirical sites, interview transcripts and personal revelations. The methods, approaches, and practices used follow accordingly.

I begin this project in earnest by applying a quintessential literary practice: close reading. In the second chapter, a self study titled "The Black Box", I examine how literariness emerges through a close reading of a single text and my own experience with it as teacher, student, reader and writer: Jennifer Egan's 2012 short story "Black Box". I examine various literary properties of the text, including the story's unusual form (it was originally serialized on the New Yorker's twitter account), the implications of its genre (sci-fi/spy fiction), the narrative voice, and the central metaphor of a black box. Reading through these, I consider how the story came to shape my imagination and practice as an English teacher. A final section of the chapter considers the limitations of such a formalist approach to close reading, exploring how a novel framing of close reading as relational work makes ethical readings and pedagogies possible. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the implications of that approach to ethical close reading – how it animates literariness as part of a teacher's literary life – as well as advances literary resonance as a concept of value for English teachers and researchers interested in thinking about the relationship among teachers, students, and texts.

The next chapter, "How Our Music Marks Our Time", moves beyond my own experience to examine literariness in the lives of four practicing secondary English teachers: Danny, Jocelyn, Holly, and Sam. Drawing particularly on enchantment (Bennett, 2001) as an essential aspect of literariness, the chapter plays with the trite notion that reading is magic, that literature casts a spell on the reader. The body of the text is comprised of a series of vignettes— "Little League", "The Family of Things", "Vote for a Teenager", and "Helplessness" — which literarily weave together interview data, participant-authored essays, and language drawn from fiction and poetry. An epilogue reads across the four stories to examine how literariness and enchantment operate in each, considering poetic

possibilities that emerge for teaching life; the complicated intersections of teachers' experiences as students, readers and writers; the political obligations of English teachers in the classroom, and the role literary writing can play in "singing" the lives of teachers and their students.

The fourth chapter, "Unbearable Whiteness: Notes on a Literary Problem", turns towards the writing of scholarship, considering the (un)literariness of English teaching research and in the process addressing two crucial questions: Literary for whom? By whom? Building from the conference anecdote noted above, in which I ask scholars of English Education why research is the field wasn't very literary, I perform a reading of a major article in the field, Kinloch, Burkhard, & Penn's (2017) "When School Is Not Enough: Understanding the Lives and Literacies of Black Youth", published in *Research in the Teaching of English* while I was working on the journal's editorial team. I apply literariness as a frame to make sense of writing in the article, with a particular focus on to literary aspects of attention to form, ambiguity of meaning, and surprising response. The inquiry initially points to the ways Kinloch, Burkhard, & Penn write in keeping with the aesthetics of social scientific research, while also surfacing literariness in their quoted scholarship, participant dialogue, and varied meanings of the manuscript's title. As the story of the chapter's writing unfolds, I gradually reveal the problematics of my literary framing: how the frame I worked from reflects less the literary value of the authors' writing than my own particular positioning as a white man; and further how Kinloch, Burkhard, & Penn operate from Black literary traditions which understand literariness as a matter of the political engagement of language to change lives. The chapter concludes pointing to the limitations of a too-formalist literariness for achieving the varied goals of education researchers.

The dissertation's final chapter, "The Hatred of English, or Dreamrecovering", plays with the notion that the failures of English teaching and research create conditions by which we might envision and enact more beautiful, just, human and humane English teaching going forward. Reading across chapters and implicating them within major conversations in the field, I offer by way of concluding

some insights into how literariness helps educators and researchers position themselves usefully for the future unknown.

Implications

This study promises significant implications for the field of English Education. As noted above, the field has long been pulled in varying directions, from its initial mandate for explicitly religious (Protestant) literacy, to its reframing of English teaching as a matter of cultural heritage and citizenship formation, to the contemporary emphasis in the CCSS on translatable professional skills for college and career and the push for justice-oriented assets-based pedagogies at the university level. Lost in much of that churn is the literariness of English curricula and instruction; I follow recent studies by McKenzie (2018) and Macaluso (2016) in exploring how the instrumentalizing of literature strips it of much of its literary potential which may yet prove useful to English Educators and scholars. Specifically, my study suggests why a literary orientation matters in the work of English Education: in addition to the field's widespread embrace of the strengths of youth's literacy practices, I offer an assets-based approach towards practicing and pre-service teachers that builds on 'the glowing orchard' of experiences with texts and the intersections of those experiences with K-12 students, illuminating aesthetic, moral, personal, and relational aspects of the work largely glossed in the field today. Providing particular cases (my own, and those of practicing English teachers), I demonstrate how these aspects emerge from, inhere in, inform and shape the work of English teaching, rendering clear possibilities for promising trajectories for the field going forward. For example, the second chapter surfaces the notion of *literary resonance* as a useful frame for theorizing connection across difference, both with readers and texts as well as between persons, which helps rethink much-contested issues of identity and the Canon in the field of English today. From a methodological perspective, the study builds on Gallop's method of close reading as a literary and ethical practice for reading imaginatively

and relating more humanely, providing an empirical and conceptual basis for doing such work in English classrooms. Moreover, this dissertation also reveals the importance of doing literary work in the scholarly representation of English Education, as elucidated in the fourth chapter, speaking to the significance of literariness as a value informing research in the field in the interest of providing more compelling and humanizing visions of English teaching and learning. Across chapters I offer these and other implications which matter to practice -- to teachers' own practice, to how we prepare English teachers, to the research we do, and to curricular issues central to the field. In thinking with the novel concept of literariness and tracing it across chapters, I make the case for the beauty and importance of the work of English teaching in diverse contemporary contexts, rendering the profession to teachers, teacher educators, and researchers as creative, complex, compelling, and deeply personal work.

More broadly, the study holds meaningful implications for teacher education. Against the backdrop of rampant burnout and widespread teacher shortages in the U.S., and with accountability pressures increasingly demanding teacher educators and scholars produce evidence of value added, this study asserts the crucial importance of thinking broadly and holistically about the work of preparing pre-service teachers: as effective and dynamic professionals, yes, but also as concerned intellectuals and deeply moral persons to whom youth matter, and as creative and compelling storytellers capable of making the case for the beauty of the curriculum and of life as a teacher. How can we make the case that teaching is a worthwhile path to choose? What role can university teacher preparation programs and scholars of teacher education play in shaping that narrative? How can we make teacher education more responsive to the increasingly diverse pluralistic communities of today's globalizing world? And what does a push for greater equity and more humanizing pedagogy actually look like on the level of K-12 curricula, classroom practice, scholarly writing, and relationships with particular human beings in classrooms? I provide clear ways forward for doing this in the field of

English, examples which might inspire and be taken up by educators and scholars of other fields as we work together to envision and enact a more just, beautiful, and meaningful vision for teacher education, schooling, and beyond.

CHAPTER 2: THE BLACK BOX

> What makes something interesting enough to pursue is always the feeling that it's unfolding on several levels at once.
>
> Jennifer Egan

> This is a story about how I learned something, and I'm not saying this thing is true or not. I'm just saying it's what I learned.
>
> Childish Gambino, "That Power"

> Who are we, who is each one of us, if not a combinatoria of experiences, information, books read, things imagined?
>
> Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*

I come to this chapter asking Calvino's question of English teachers, wondering about their relationships to texts and those relationships' implications for teaching practice. While it is commonplace for English teachers to speak of a single book or handful of texts that "changed their life" (disclosure: I am one of these people), and there is certainly much nostalgia at work in the selection of texts for secondary English courses today (Jarvie, Watson, & Beymer, 2020; why else do we relentlessly assign *The Catcher in the Rye*?), I am not so much interested in the one of two favorite texts a teacher includes in their course each year. Rather I hope to take the longer view of the roles texts play in teachers' lives beyond the texts' explicit incorporation in curriculum and instruction. I turn here to my own experience as teacher, student, reader and writer with one story, performing a close reading in order to open broader understandings of the ways stories contour and distort experience, shape teacher identity, and inform teaching practice: how a particular text comes to inhere within a *literary life*.

Close reading may not be the most obvious way to do this. In its broadest sense the term refers to the slow and careful examination of the aesthetic properties of a text (looking *closely* at what is there), but to many 'close reading' evokes the dull trauma of formalist analysis devoid of subjectivity and context – of life – long institutionalized in university literature departments, secondary English classrooms, and standardized assessments. The widespread popularity of close reading as a method of literary study can be chalked up to either its democratic potential for making literature accessible (anyone can learn to do it; your boarding school experience with Emerson or *The Iliad* doesn't matter) or its alignment with a conservative agenda to treat texts apolitically and preserve the centrality of the Western Canon – and with it the unbearable whiteness of being in English classrooms. Regardless of your take, close reading of this kind privileges the text at the expense of the person. And it's the person who is exactly my focus here. My work, then, is to tell the story of a different kind of close reading, one in which an individual life unfolds within a literary encounter. Imagined differently such close reading – creative reading (Emerson, 1837/2014) – allows English teachers and scholars to understand the practice as a relational one, one we might yet repair (Sedgwick, 2003) in envisioning more literary and ethical English teaching practice.

You Will Not Be Able To Wait, but You Will Have to Wait

At 5:09 PM ET on May 24th, 2012, *The New Yorker's* fiction Twitter account posted a cryptic tweet, devoid of context (Figure 1):

Figure 1. Initial "Black Box" tweet.

At the rate of one 140-character-or-less sentence per minute, over the course of an hour each night for the next nine consecutive days, the account continued, gradually unfurling a sci-fi espionage tale by acclaimed author Jennifer Egan. The resulting short story, "Black Box", would subsequently be printed in the June 4th issue of the magazine.

That summer I was in the midst of my formative experience as a teacher. I had just finished an exhausting first year at a Catholic school in Brownsville, TX, where I had taught junior American Lit and Creative Writing. Graduating with an English degree I had turned to teaching as a way to continue to do what I loved—work with literature—but I found that surprisingly difficult. During the five-week crash course of my alternative certification program, English teaching wasn't framed for me as a literary or intellectual matter but rather one of application, delivery, and measurement. It didn't matter what I loved about the subject or what I thought the purposes of English were; what mattered was that I taught effectively, which meant backwards planning and performance assessments and above-all watertight classroom management. I did not enjoy this, for myself or my students. I struggled as a result.

So I returned to continue teacher prep courses in the summer after that first year, dispirited, confused and not a little cynical about the work of teaching. I didn't have a Twitter account in 2012 and I didn't subscribe to *The New Yorker*, but Egan's story nevertheless found me, by random in a course activity. My English methods professor[3] that summer asked us students to create found poems[4] which made some sense of our first years teaching. He passed out magazines for us to cut and tear, the June 4th *New Yorker* among them. I remember flipping pages until I saw the story's distinctive form, koan-like sentences well-suited to the task of collaging a poem (Figure 2). I snipped.

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[3] He was, as it turned out, an exception to the rule of the place.
[4] The literary equivalent of collage, in which words are appropriated from ("found" within) source material and manipulated into some new poetic combination.

Always filter your observations and experience through the lens of their didactic value.

Your training is ongoing; you must learn from each step you take.

When your mission is complete, you may view the results of the download before adding your Field Instructions to your mission file.

Where stray or personal thoughts have intruded, you may delete them.

Figure 2. Excerpt of "Black Box" as presented in the June 4th 2012 *New Yorker* issue.

I proceeded to work for half an hour or so, clipping and pasting and Frankensteining my way into saying something interesting, if murky, about how I felt about teaching and reading and writing and my life in that first year. I remember reading the resulting poem aloud at the end of the period and the exhilarating feeling of it, how I felt the way language could be combined mysteriously in ways I hadn't anticipated, helping me say what I couldn't before or otherwise, some thing I didn't fully know the meaning of. (Still don't.) I'd had that feeling before, when in undergraduate courses on postmodern fiction and translated poetry; in a memorable survey of contemporary film; or in my private experiences as a childhood reader; or, say, with the Italian novelist's work noted above; with movies; and much of the music I loved. The literariness of texts. How their poetry became not only apparent to me but deeply moving with unsayable promise, that which drew me to the work of English and teaching in the first place, and which, I'll argue, provides a different kind of justification for keeping the work going.

I finished that methods course and moved on to a second year of teaching, not thinking much of Egan at all really. I wouldn't read her bestselling novel *A Visit to the Goon Squad* (2011) for another year.[5] And I didn't read the full text of "Black Box" until well into doctoral work. I turn to the story

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[5] Though I did end up teaching the twelfth chapter in my high school course, a whole narrative brilliantly constructed out of PowerPoint slides. I've never seen anything like it, before or since.

now not primarily to claim that the text is pivotal to my own formation as a teacher but rather to consider closely the role it played, how it stuck and why I would continue to think about and write with it today. In what follows I perform a close reading of the story that elucidates the role the text played in my life, and thus a role a text might play in any teacher's life: that we might more closely consider the complicated ways this interplay works.

A Rich, Deep Crawl Space of Possibilities

Close reading starts with a careful attendance to textual form. The unusual structure of Egan's story—rich and ready statements, separated out to facilitate tweeting—provided me accessible material for crafting the found poem.[6] I had taken poetry courses and made such poems before, but I hadn't thought to make that part of the work of teaching. My encounter with Egan's story got me excited to take the activity back with me to my own secondary English classroom in the Rio Grande Valley, but the experience turned out to matter not just as a compelling one-off lesson: instead the practice of found poetry became representative, I think, of my teaching philosophy then and now, in which I ask students to aesthetically recombine and repurpose textual materials—broadly understood as multimodal, but also including memories, experiences, and aspirations—to fashion new texts, identities, and worlds for themselves. In other words, Egan's story helped me see the ways the cuts we make within and across texts and experience and even knowledge (Foucault, 1984) provide opportunities for new (re)makings of sense and self. Often I've found in my teaching that this repurposed found material comes from the teachers themselves, *their* texts, which students in turn encounter and make something of their own (Jarvie, 2019). In that sense, this self-making through and with encounters with (textualized) others is relational work, the work of building educational relations, and like Bingham & Sidorkin (2004) the more I've thought about teaching the more I've

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[6] This form also lends them to an easy appropriation as section headings for this chapter.

wondered: "Why do schools remain if not for meeting?" (p. 5) Found poetry constitutes one representative example of this broader relational philosophy in practice.

The particular form of "Black Box", necessitated by the story's initial publication on Twitter and subsequent translation to the printed page, and encountered within the context of this activity in an English methods course, afforded me one possibility to understand a textual pedagogical encounter as a relational one, in which I could generate something new for myself and, eventually, my students. In a subsequent interview (Treisman, 2012), Egan revealed her creative process, which involved writing out each statement within one of eight boxes per page, by hand (Figure 3). It should be no surprise then that in making my poem I found each statement – originally isolated within a literal black box – able to stand on its own, and so easily translatable as a poetic building block for my own work.

The formal representation of "Black Box" on the page aided my engagement in this way; I think this is true even moreso of the story's tweeted form – in which individual statements are presented with the option of "favoriting" or "re-tweeting" (re-posting on one's account) or replying. That is, the formal qualities of a tweet facilitate a reader's focused interaction with the particular statement, while actively hiding from view the tweet in its greater context: the work as a whole.[7] Of further note is that Egan's decision to write in boxes came about through a friend – a particular relationship intervening to differently shape the resulting text. Speaking

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[7] While this chapter isn't directly about digital literacies, there is certainly a compelling reading of "Black Box" to be done through than lens.
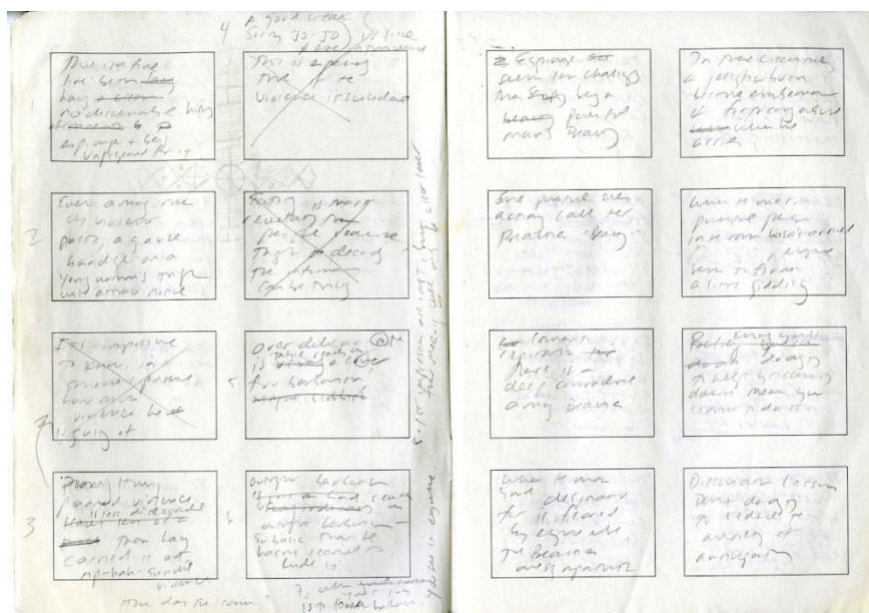
Figure 3. Egan's draft of "Black Box" (Kirtley, 2012, courtesy of *The New Yorker*).

of the story's origin, Egan (Treisman, 2012) explains:

> I write fiction by hand generally, and I actually wrote this by hand. Although when I started trying to do it, it didn't feel right to be writing these long lines. I noticed that a friend had a notebook that had eight rectangular boxes on each page, and she said that she would try to find one for me. (para. 2)

A closer look at the story's form, then, reveals the ways the text's literary properties depended, from the start, on a relational encounter, just as its formal elements are clearly implicated in relationship with my experience with the story and how it came to matter in my life.

The Goal Is To Dig Beneath Your Shiny Persona

In order to generate something meaningful, the act of crafting a found poem usually requires recognition on the level of content.[8] The poet looks through piles of textual materials and at some

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[8] One of the foundational assumptions of my own literary education is the impossibility of separating form from content, just as Beachy-Quick (2010) asserts—cribbing from a very, very old argument—that ethics and aesthetics are one and the same (p. 85). I don't dispute that here but instead follow in the vein of most English teachers who find the parsing of form

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point finds what they need: some words of relevance in the otherwise chaotic mess of the task at hand. Remember, then, that the prompt of my assignment was to craft a poem about my prior year teaching. At first glance, Egan's story might be hard to envision as relevant to myself and that year in Texas. The plot of "Black Box" follows an unnamed American spy (after publication, Egan revealed the character's name is "Lulu" [Treisman, 2012, para. 5]) as she carries out her mission on the coast of a futuristic Southern France, sometime in the twenty-thirties (para. 6). Egan's protagonist ingratiates herself with organized criminals, navigates violent sexual encounters, seduces leadership, vies with various mistresses and eventually steals valuable intel, leading to a thrilling escape by speedboat across the Mediterranean. The story ends with helicopters arriving to the rescue, our spy mortally wounded, her survival left up in the air. In between we learn of Lulu's great love for the husband she left behind; the social difficulties of her interracial marriage; frustration with her movie star father, with whom she has no relationship; and the various cybernetic enhancements which aid her mission.

None of which sounds much like my teaching (or life) then or now, but I can still squint and see relevance. The idea of teaching as a secret mission appeals in the current neoliberal moment, in which standardization, testing, accountability, etc. work to diminish the teacher's intellectual and curricular influence in the classroom. It takes a kind of spy to be one's own teacher behind the closed-door, presenting one way to government officials vis-à-vis test scores and policy mandates – the day's objective aligned to CCSS standards printed clearly on the whiteboard or at the top of the lesson plan, for administrators to see – while carrying out a secretive divergent agenda. Moreover, the notion of 'mission' is everywhere in education these days (rooted in Christianity; see: Burke & Segall, 2011), driven particularly of late by the kind of corporate reform culture (with its 'mission statements') in which I emerged as a teacher. Resonating with the rhetoric of my training is Hartwick's (2009)

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from content useful for literary analysis. Your critique of the futility of this is noted and well-taken, and ultimately anyway the argument of this chapter is that a close attention to form through reading generates useful ethical content for thinking about teaching, and vice-versa—that the two operate in some important sense inextricably within the English classroom.

assertion that "for many, teaching is a way they fulfill a sense of divinely inspired mission for their life" (p. 16). Like Lulu, my mission as a teacher was to accomplish "something larger than myself", a selfless sacrifice that approximates the "highest form of patriotism". Writing of Egan's story, Precup (2016) notes similarly the way this world "transforms ordinary citizens into heroes…any citizen can serve his or her country in whatever way necessary; they just have to make their bodies available and be willing to sacrifice them(selves) for the benefit of the collective" (p. 179). And so I did: as part of an alternative certification program, I was myself parachuted into a school on the Texas-Mexico border, largely left to fend for myself until the helicopters arrived in May.

Clearly, though, "Black Box" is not a story about a school teacher. But select any sentence (tweet) from Egan's story at random—which I've argued above the form invites us to do—and it's not hard to imagine how the work might resonate with a young educator. Pause, then. Step back from the context of this argument. Try, like Lulu does, to perform your "Dissociation Technique", and forget that "Black Box" is a story about a beautiful spy in the dystopian near-future. Hear instead: the idealism of beginning teachers, girding themselves with self-help slogans:

You are an ordinary person undertaking an extraordinary task.

In uneasy times, draw on the resilience you carry inside you.

Or echoes of high-minded teacher educators, deploying graduates out into the country:

A few of you will save lives and even change the course of history.

Human beings are superhuman.

A beginning teacher again, frustrated with their faith in an inadequate teacher preparation program:

You will reflect on the fact that these "instructions" are becoming less and less instructive.

Or one, who (like me), went off to teach in a multilingual context:

Profanity sounds the same in every language.

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Within the context of Egan's story, each of these lines is directed toward Lulu, Egan's disembodied narration managing the spy's psychic state as she fends off mafiosos, stanches gunshot wounds, and questions her commitment to a life of espionage. Out of context, though, I found it quite easy as a beginning teacher to apply them to my experience. It's not that the story is a covert teaching manifesto, per se, but rather "Black Box" lent its content to such an application – in the context of the moment, that 2012 teacher prep course, and my particular life – by virtue of its form, each line singled-out like poetic-fruit ripe for writing with. A close read of the text reveals this applicable property, and more importantly helps us start to understand why I worked with it in my poem, and how the text maps onto my particular experience as an English teacher.

Your Job Is To Be Forgotten yet Still Present

Written in the 2nd person—each statement directed at an ambiguous 'You'— "Black Box" reads as a kind of memory-laden mission log, the narrator speaking as if observing Lulu from a distant, future position while also betraying intimate knowledge of her psyche. As she encounters various plot obstacles (e.g., abandonment at a criminal compound; a furious woman holding a gun and a baby), the voice advises Lulu directly, with comforting expertise and directive confidence, e.g., "You will encounter this…", or "If this happens, do this…". Ostensibly this voice is that of Lulu's "Field Instructions", guiding her as she progresses through the mission. But its disembodied quality[9] comes to take on a prophetic eeriness. As the story unfurls, the voice anticipates what our protagonist will encounter; and despite its nuance, the voice is always right. Read through the lens of my experience, the voice is undeniably *pedagogical*[10]. Egan's spy is taught, over and over again and every step of the way, by a disembodied instructor, a spectral educator whose vision is nothing short of uncanny.

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[9] At least one commentator has argued "Black Box" is a posthuman story (Precup, 2016), Lulu's character representing "the fusion of flesh and technology and the re-conceptualization of the body as information" (p. 172).
[10] In a subsequent interview, Egan revealed that:

As an emerging teacher I longed for such a guide, as I imagine many do; the great disappointment of maturing as a professional (and person) is that we learn such guides don't exist. How comforting, though, to read a story where everything is spelled out so clearly. The voice[11] proves, by turns, poetic (*The Mediterranean is vast enough to have once seemed infinite.*); grandly philosophical (*In the new heroism, the goal is to transcend individual life, with its petty pains and loves, in favor of the dazzling collective.*); abstractly wise (*Experience leaves a mark, regardless of the reasons and principles behind it.*); and coldly pragmatic (*Assuming there is no artery involvement, wounds to the upper limbs are preferable.*). Stranger still: the voice of Egan's narrator demonstrates intimate insight into her psyche, including private memories of her husband, father, and childhood, as well as in-the-moment feelings of terror, amusement, resignation, and repulsion. As such, there are times in "Black Box" where it seems like Lulu is speaking to herself as some one or thing other than herself, where there is no other explanation than that her conscience has come online. For example:

> *Lying with girlfriends on a still-warm dock in upstate New York, watching shooting stars, is a sensation you remember after many years.*

Curious here is the passive voice: rather than "I remember lying…" or even "You sensed that…", we get this oddly impersonal construction, a rendering of a memory without the syntax of feeling or subjectivity. The next statement completes the movement back to the disembodied voice, wise and reflective and entirely separate from Lulu's perspective:

> *Hindsight creates the illusion that your life has led you inevitably to the present moment.*

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the working title of the piece was 'Lessons Learned.' The idea was that with each move [Lulu] makes, or each thing that happens to her, she has a kind of reflection, which has a bit of a didactic quality to it. I always imagined her observations happening in this very atomized way; that was just inherent in the voice itself. (Triesman, 2012, para. 4)

[11] I'm tempted here to start referring to it as "the Voice", mimicking typographically Egan's use of capitalization to signal mission-critical terms and futuristic technologies (e.g., Dissociation Technique; Subcutaneous Pulse System; Designated Mate; Black Box). The effect is not unlike the antiquated English practice of capitalizing nouns of importance.

Still, the voice demonstrates impossible knowledge of what's going on inside Lulu's head, and in that sense she's telling the story herself, to herself. Considering the appeal of this to a first year teacher, I understand that "Black Box" textualized for me something all teachers learn in time: that the relationship between theory and practice is not at all what we expected; that the impossible demands of teaching in far-flung future contexts we've never been to, with persons we've never met, render all educational theory weak[12]; that learning to teach, if we stay in it long enough, is every educator's own intellectual work (and we're better for it). In an important way, it may be that the act of becoming teacher cleaves our inner voice in two, like cell division, the event of my first year leading me to say to myself:

You will reflect on the fact that you must return home the same person you were when you left.

And also:

You will reflect on the fact that you've been guaranteed you will not be the same person.

And of course, as any graduate of a teacher prep program intimately knows (Fendler, 2003):

You will reflect on the fact that too much reflection is pointless.

In this sense, my experience with "Black Box" is something like that of Tim O'Brien's revelation at the end of *The Things They Carried* (2009):

I'm skimming across the surface of my own history, moving fast, riding the melt beneath the blades[13], doing loops and spins, and when I take a high leap into the dark and come down thirty years later, I realize it as Tim trying to save Timmy's life with a story. (p. 273)

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[12] "What a life adds up to is a problem and an open question." (Stewart, 2008, p. 72). Here's Stewart's rendering of the original Sedgwick (2003): *weak theory*:

comes unstuck from its own line of thought to follow the objects it encounters, or becomes undone by its attention to things that don't just *add up* but take on a life of their own as problems for thought…she calls this 'reparative' theory'….in contrast to 'paranoid' or 'strong' theory that defends itself against the puncturing of its dream of a perfect parallelism between the analytic subject, her concept, and the world (p. 72).

Which is to say: insofar as teaching involves the ambiguity of lives encountering each other, we'll fail to fully explain it. Which is fine.

[13] Helicopters, again. Close reading is really only noticing, and the thing about it is that once it's been learned, you have a hard time turning it off.

Such an insight can be learned through experience, certainly, but in my case, Egan's story, by way of the author's decision to have Lulu tell herself a story on the page through the disembodied voice of the narrator bearing down on her (all those "You's), provided an opportunity for me to see—or rather hear—it.

Imagining Yourself as a Dot of Light on a Screen Is Oddly Reassuring

Near the end of "Black Box", shit hits the proverbial fan, and the baby-holding woman shoots an escaping Lulu in the shoulder. The narrator's voice implores Lulu to remain conscious as she flees to the extraction point. *Your physical person is our black box*, writes Egan. *Without it, we have no record of what has happened on your mission.* Most immediately, this statement reflects the critical intel gathered by our hero during the mission; we've just witnessed Lulu perform a Data Surge, in which she removes a plug from between her toes (not making this up) and downloads information from a kingpin's phone, "feel[ing] the surge as the data floods [her] body". But we might also consider the imperative to preserve the "record of what has happened" as a reference to the disembodied voice itself, its speech over the course of the story grooving a neurological trace in Lulu's brain which may yet prove useful to other agents on future missions.

Likewise, a text can leave a record of a teacher's work and the life in which it occurs, and so Egan's central metaphor proves useful for theorizing the intersection of texts and teachers' lives. My work of *currere* (Pinar, 2003) here has begun to excavate that record in my own textual experience, to comb it and in doing so make sense of a life and how it emerges within the profession of teaching in conversation with particular texts. *Your Field Instructions, stored in a chip beneath your hairline, will serve as both a mission log and a guide for others undertaking this work.* In reading Egan's story closely, I've worked to make sense of my past as a beginning teacher: how the event of the found poetry activity in which I encountered "Black Box" shaped my future teaching philosophy; how the genres of science fiction

and espionage mapped onto my experience as a subversive teacher in a foreign land; how the particular demands of learning to teach cleaved my consciousness in two—a professional self and a personal one. And, how this work of (re)turning to the text, now, becomes an attempt at reading-as-self-recovery, a weak (because I could have chosen other texts, certainly) reparative (Sedgwick, 2003) approach to that split.

In aviation a black box is an electronic recording device placed in the plane for the purpose of facilitating an investigation in the event of a crash. Certainly too many novice teachers, especially those, like me, woefully underprepared by the all-too-brief preparation of alternative certification, crash-land in their classrooms. I don't mean to suggest, however, that the work of education scholars is to conduct that investigation—that'd be an autopsy—but rather that the crucial record of teaching upon which we ought to build scholarship rests in persons themselves. We are reminded (we somehow always need to be reminded) that "education is not an interaction between robots but an encounter between human beings." (Biesta, 2013, p. 1). As such I understand this work as of a piece with assets-based approaches to literacy and English instruction (e.g., Kirkland, 2013; Kinloch, Burkhard, & Penn, 2017; Watson & Beymer, 2019) which understand the in- and out-of-school lives of students and less-so teachers as assets to curriculum and instruction. Closely reading the capacious and complicated life of a teacher through the lens of a single text—a type of black box investigation—can make of the profession something different, reframing teaching as an extension of teachers' lives, as creative and communal, compelling, complex and deeply personal work in ways that prove fruitful for both teachers and students.

No Beauty Is Really a Beauty

In computing, however, "black box" has a different definition. Rather than a readily accessible record to be recovered, the term refers to a complex piece of equipment—a transistor, an engine, an

algorithm, the human brain—whose contents are mysterious to the user. Engineers can observe the box's inputs and outputs, but its implementation remains opaque; we're essentially in the dark. This second definition helps make sense of a major blind spot in my reading of Egan's story.

It took the honest feedback of a colleague who read both an early draft of this chapter and Egan's story itself to call attention to the absence of engagement with one of the story's primary themes: in her words, "the ways women are objectified", Lulu's body serving as "the main character" as she navigates "subjugation and sexualization". Rereading the story through this lens, my omission seems obvious, negligent. The story opens with a reductive, bodily description of what makes Lulu necessary ("giggles, bare legs, shyness") (para. 1), before reflecting on the comic sexism of violent masculinity: "some powerful men actually call their beauties 'Beauty'" (para. 2). Such commentary contextualizes the story's opening sequence, in which Lulu acquiesces to a violent sexual encounter in service to her mission. The Voice of her Field Instructions counsels her: "Throwing back your head and closing your eyes allows you to give the appearance of sexual readiness while concealing revulsion." (para. 6). Here the story first introduces the cybernetic equipment which aids the rest of the mission: Lulu performs her "Dissociation Technique" to distance herself from the experience of violation.

All of which powerfully shapes the story to come and the lens through which I read it. Starting with that scene, I clearly need to rethink, for example, the ethical imperatives of Lulu's mission, and the Voice counseling her, if it understands her body as a necessary sacrifice for the good of national security. I have to further reread the misogyny of the criminals Lulu deals with on her mission against the misogyny of a cultural ethos which understands women as expendable, whose trauma is to be expected. (Of the sexual component of her mission, Lulu is told directly: "'You will not be the same person' [para. 15] you were before.") Through this lens the story does not seem all that futuristic.

Rather, in the advent of #metoo accounts, we (really, men) are now publicly having an ongoing conversation about the ways Lulu's experience reflects the normalized violence women endure.

That I chose not to write about this is a kind of black box in itself, the inner workings of which are worth closely reading through here. I can understand the metaphor like this: as input, Egan's story; as output, the initial drafts of this chapter, which said little of gender and nothing of sexual violence or sexualization or subjugation or misogyny. The black box, the inner process that produced that writing. One immediate and primary explanation: my perspective as a man writing about the experience of reading this story made such ignorance possible. Feminist thought has long pointed to the ways that a man's life is largely about being by turns cognizant and ignorant of violence against women, of the ways our worlds are built and rely upon that violence, including one's own. That I reproduced that here in part, initially, is further confirmation of one of the strongest findings in cultural history.

Further my failure can also be tied, I think, to the ways I encountered the text, including through this process of close reading. My first encounter in that teacher ed course, in which I created the found poems, was a necessarily partial one, as I cut lines from one page of the story's 17 *New Yorker* pages. The ones I cut didn't involve the scenes which bring the story's thematic misogyny into sharpest relief; lines that did speak to that were ones I simply chose not take up in my poem and, subsequently, in my analysis here. I spent time above detailing the value of that activity for my learning, but it's clearly worth considering what is lost by that approach: how it made it possible for me to miss a major point of the story and, again, fail to attend to and disrupt misogyny. This subsequent rereading makes me consider the women who shared that teacher education classroom with me the day I encountered this story: what did they read in Egan's text? How might it have mirrored the precarious experiences of their lives? What does it mean to teach with that? And do they even need to closely read this type of story?

Taking up that last question, the choice to close read at all may have contributed to that failure. The primary criticism of close formalist analysis, particularly as it became institutionalized in the US by the New Critics (who were largely men themselves), was that its strict emphasis on literary form produced apolitical, and so culturally reproductive, modes of reading and writing. Critics in this vein understood the close reading approach as in direct conflict with, for example, modes of feminist critique which would clearly have pointed to themes I missed reading "Black Box". Yet, as feminist theorist Jane Gallop (2000) argues in her defense of close reading, we can also understand the value of the practice as calling us "to listen closely to the Other." (p. 17). In that sense, it may be that my reading of Egan's story is both a failure of close reading (as a patriarchal practice) and evidence of my own failure at close reading (in Gallop's way), of looking at what is actually on the page – namely, the precarious experience of women in misogynistic societies both future and present.

An Immediate Exit Is Advisable

Form, content, voice, metaphor: the close reading I've performed here has attempted to implicate the textual properties of a story with/in my experience, how that intersection might be understood as a moment in a literary life. In exploring the intersection of literature and the lives of teachers, this paper makes a case for the literary as a useful mode for being and teaching in classrooms, and for the literariness of the lives caught up in those classrooms: how the literary properties of texts inhere within, influence and implicate lives. Further, in complicating the work of teaching and blurring the lines between person and text, life and curriculum, practice and possibility, I understand this work as contributing to the broader project of imagining possibilities for the public good, of both teachers and students, in a time where rampant burnout, teacher shortages, and dehumanizing research and

pedagogy (Paris & Winn, 2013) demand new and concerted action which makes lives more livable[14].

Literariness, understood relationally, and as unfolded through a careful study of text, offers one way of giving some meaningful form to life as a teacher.

At the same time, this experience has left me ambivalent, and it's clear that a strictly formalist treatment of texts via conventional close readings are not enough, as my final analysis of the misogyny in "Black Box" demonstrates. Gallop's (2000) pedagogical vision of an ethical close reading helps to address this shortcoming, because for her close reading requires not only attending to "unusual vocabulary, words repeated, images, metaphors, etc." (p. 7) but also attending closely to the other in the writing. Theorized this way, the practice is not just about analyzing text but also about listening to and learning from the other, which harbors some hope for the practice as "a means to a more just treatment of others." (p. 17). This is because close reading requires us to read "NOT what SHOULD BE on the page but what IS" (p. 17, capitalization in the original); it is a method which (attempts to) reserve judgment, avoid generalized assumption and the essentialism of stereotype, and instead be ethically open to the other. Taking up this approach may have helped me to see Lulu's sexualization and subjugation as essential themes worth taking up in my reading and analysis. A Gallopian reading applies to texts as well as to encounters with others in our lives, and as such it offers a promising frame for educators and education researchers: as a way of taking seriously the literary experiences of a particular life with a particular text. Put differently, through this lens a close and creative reading is always already a relational one; there is no official curriculum meaningfully separate from the people in the classroom. It shouldn't be lost on us that it took feedback from my colleague to point to the necessity of this way of reading; it wasn't something I did as a man reading the text on my own. English

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[14] One limitation of this chapter study has been the focus on gender w/r/t to theorizing more humanizing close reading practices through Egan's, which I felt necessary given the story's content and my own reading of it. Still, part of this project of humanizing research and pedagogy going forward will require intersectional engagement with other aspects of identity and experience. See Chapter 4 for inquiry at the intersection of race and literariness.

teachers would do well, I think, to consider what this insight means for themselves, their students, and all the varied texts of their lives.

In addition, the surprising resonance of this work, the story of a cybernetic femme fatale (Figure 4) in twenty-thirties France, with me, a 22-year old man teaching English along the Texas-Mexico border in 2012, suggests teachers and researchers might nuance understandings of how we prize and act upon the notion of textual relevance in English classrooms. What I mean is that, from a pedagogical perspective, the text might not be a clear fit with me, e.g., given my experience, or along lines of identity or genre. A teacher might not pick out "Black Box" as relevant to my particular life; I'd likely not have picked it up myself without the intervention of my teacher and a little chance, as it wouldn't have seemed the most relevant to me. And yet my writing above embodies the significant ways the story *did* matter to me. Work on relevance over the last few decades has done much to diversify and humanize English classrooms, and I don't mean to be dismissive of that effort. I don't mean to suggest we shouldn't choose texts that are relevant to students' particular lives. But perhaps one limitation of the notion of relevance is an *a priori* one: identifying a text as relevant often works from a place of assumption – made by both teachers and students – e.g., that boys won't identify with a 'feminine' story; that diverse multimodal and multicultural texts are not the stuff of English class, that a given text "isn't for me", when of course these just aren't true. Still: it is crucial that teachers further diversify English curriculum, given the historical lack of textual diversity and the ongoing diversification of public school populations. I suggest then that we further complicate our sense of relevance and the heterogeneity of youth experience with an expanded sense of the possibility of *resonance*, a notion that seeks to understand textual connection *across* difference.[15] Careful study of the events in which this mysterious phenomenon happens (e.g., Beymer & Jarvie, forthcoming) would

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[15] Put differently, resonance, I argue, pushes curriculum to be *more*, not less, diverse as it challenges the at-times lazy resort to identity-as-stereotype, encouraging educators to engage with the abundance of differences which mark any particular person in the room.

help, and texts themselves often offer one place to start, just as Egan, writing about a sci-fi spy, could unmistakably evoke a vision of Odysseus pondering his place in the universe while sailing across the starry Mediterranean.[16] I'm no classicist, but the strange resonances within and across texts, times, genres and persons offers a *rich, deep crawl space of possibilities* for pushing the field of English education further toward more ethical and beautiful futures for all.

Figure 4. Accompanying art for "Black Box".

I end noting a final lesson learned. And though it's nothing novel, it's exhilarating nonetheless to have confirmed of lives lived in classrooms, just as with literary texts. What this kind of reading teaches us: that up close everything is poetry.

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[16] Of the story's resonance with antiquity, Egan writes:

> what makes something interesting enough to pursue is always the feeling that it's unfolding on several levels at once. The best-case scenario is one in which I don't have to look too carefully at what those levels are—I just kind of feel them happening. But one level that I was aware of and pleased about was a sort of mythological connection. I mean, she's by the Mediterranean; she has had physical enhancements to her body that give her exceptional powers; there's the explicit mention of the fact that she loved reading myths as a kid. I loved feeling, in this futuristic atmosphere, a connection to those ancient stories. (Triesman, 2012, para. 9)

CHAPTER 3: HOW OUR MUSIC MARKS OUR TIME

I'll teach you differences.

King Lear

You existed to me,

you were a theory.

Tracy K. Smith, *Life on Mars*

The notion that language is magic keeps popping up in everything I've been reading lately. Which is strange, given a dissertation diet of literature and literary theory: it's a sentiment I'd instead expect to find written on the wall of an elementary school classroom, in, say, the midwestern U.S., the type of empty inspirational rhetoric which saturates those spaces. In the schools of my past imagination, the platitude had on me the exact opposite effect: any teacher who ever told me something as treacly as "reading is magical!" did more harm than good to my future habits.

And yet: reading in preparation for this study, I found the idea in the late lectures of Borges (2002): "we have in language the fact (and this seems obvious to me) that words began, in a sense, as magic." (p. 81). And again while rereading the post-apocalyptic novel *Station Eleven* (Mandel, 2014), in which a theatre troop saves the fallen world with their words: "What they were always doing, was trying to cast a spell." (p. 151). I've further seen the metaphor used more than once to describe the language of poetry. Browsing Instagram recently, the New Yorker's account conjured a quote from Phillip Pullman: "Poetry is not a fancy way of giving you information; it's an incantation. It is actually

a magic spell." (Schwartz, 2019). It appears on the back cover of Volume 214, Number 4 of *POETRY*

magazine (Figure 5). And as a recurring motif in the best novel I've read in a long time[17], *The Topeka*
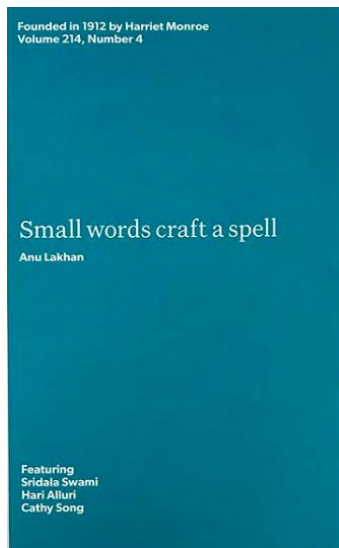

Figure 5. Back cover of July/August 2019 issue of *Poetry* magazine.

School (2019), wherein author Ben Lerner's protagonist Adam repeatedly returns to the idea as a way

of describing what he (and indeed, Lerner) is trying to do with language. Adam wants to be a poet

because poems are spells. At an early age, he draws on "his personal canon of poetry [as]…weak spells

to cast back at taunters". (p. 125) Later his budding interest in freestyle rap is framed in terms of such

spells, shaped sound unmaking and remaking sense that inflicted and repelled violence and made you

renowned, or renowned for being erased, and could have other effects on bodies: put them to sleep

or wake them, cause tears or other forms of lubrication, swelling, the raising of small hairs." (p. 126)

The plot of *The Topeka School* culminates with Adam's dramatic loss in the finals of a national debate

competition; he loses because he refuses to compromise the poetic functions of his speech in favor

of the strategic yet empty language favored by the judges. In that sense, Adam is a Romantic,

embodying the notion that reason without feeling is empty (Gorodeisky, 2016) speaking so as to center

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[17] It's my hope, in drawing across these and other texts in this chapter, that I might convey not that this notion of literary language-as-magic is all that common across literature, but instead that it was common, even ubiquitous, *to me*, in my reading – in that sense this notion is necessarily filtered through and depend upon the funnel of my own experience, a claim I make across the chapters in this study. We're learning the literature of differences.

Wordsworth's (1974/1800) old mantra that "poetry is the first and last of all knowledge" (p. 141). Throughout the novel, Adam is relentlessly (often futilely) trying to "bring the poetry" out of language. He is "searching forever", like Nietzsche (Prideaux, 2018), for some way to enchant the world as "dangerously fascinating, with as weird and sweet an infinity" (p. 7) as that which he encounters in literature.

This chapter marks a divergence, in form[18] and method from the rest so far. In what follows I offer four stories which attempt to cast a spell over the profession of English teaching. Such enchantment is one essential aspect of literariness, of what literary texts do well, at their best. The stories map literariness onto the lives of four practicing English teachers: Danny, Jocelyn, Holly, and Sam. In effect, I write it onto and into their lives: I (re)render the lives as literary ones through writing them. This chapter takes as its primary assumption that, if I can identify literariness anywhere in the experiences of teachers, it has to happen on the page, in writing—the site where language translates experience, where the magic happens. In other words, I attempt to bring out the aesthetic promise – the beauty— of English teaching through my research; like Labaree (2012) I believe that "in the last analysis, the esthetic component of being an educational researcher comes down to writing." (p. 82). This represents, too, a beautiful yet dangerous risk (Biesta, 2016): a Romantic exploration of teachers lives through literary writing may necessarily compromise some distance necessary and useful for engendering criticality.

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[18] A quick note on these stories: the writing skews towards the experimental (Marcus, 2005) side of the literary spectrum, as opposed to more traditional (Franzen, 2002) forms of storytelling. Some of that is due to my taste as a reader, having long been intrigued by the possibilities for telling stories differently since I first encountered avant garde writing in the courses of a creative writing professor who valued language play over all. Taste as a force shaping method might seem strange, but it isn't such a problem for this project. When working through the aesthetics of experience, the work necessarily entails the need to spend time dwelling in the subjectivity of taste. But my choice to experiment, with form and possibility, primarily serves a functional purpose. Like Marcus (2005), I hope here to revel (and likely fail) with/in the possibilities of language rendered differently by formal ambition, to animate and engage "the idea that writing might change [teaching, anything] into something newer, more vital." (p. 43). In other words, I attempt to be interesting by playing out on the edges of scholarly writing (Labaree, 2012), treating literary writing as an art form (Marcus, 2005), though that might make the resulting writing difficult. Teachers' lives are complicated, by their varied social identities and the particular encounters of their lives, and the writing should reflect that.

To write each I drew on interviews generated during each teacher's first year in a secondary

English classroom, as well as essays they'd written as students in my teacher education course, in

addition to my experience teaching and learning and being with each of them over the past two

years.[19]. I read through all this data and wrote about each teacher. Throughout, footnotes explicate

the story, illuminating how this notion of reading-as-magic, of literariness as a kind of enchantment[20]

(Bennett, 2001), contrasts with disenchantment[21] which pervades the profession of teaching today,

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[19] I parse my method, briefly, but it's worth noting that as a literary project this isn't the point: I'm not seeking replicability or generalizability, just as any novelist or essayist or poet isn't.

[20] "Enchantment entails a state of wonder", writes Bennett (2001. "To be enchanted is to participate in momentarily immobilizing encounter; it is to be transfixed, spellbound." (p. 5) The enchanted subject pauses, captivated with the presence and possibility of some event, some thing or one. She hears some remarkable snippet of a song and stops to listen. He stares helplessly at this person who he now, quite suddenly, loves. A captive pause in the face of any coincidence. We are enchanted by a confrontation with the infinity of a thing: how its unknowability may stretch on and on, origins unknowable, multitudes too vast.

Literature, for me and others, among other forms of art, does this. An encounter with literature can render the reader enthralled with the possibilities of language. Images of childhood captivation with literature continue to animate the public imagination around reading and the teaching of: a kid huddled under the comforter with a flashlight, devouring *Harry Potter*, or a disaffected loner finding solace in the misanthropy of Holden Caulfield. Yet sometimes books don't do this. What resounds in one reader may ring false in another. Those authors canonized with the most august acclaim may (and do) pass many readers by without much impact, much less the shattering effect we might expect.

One way to explain the variance in response: the critique that Literature, as it's been institutionalized, is not so much reflective of texts' intrinsic greatness; instead their acclaim is more directly a reflection of the historic and ongoing priorities of those institutions, values shaped by colonization, by the racial and cultural and sexual and national makeup of English scholars, by who has been permitted a seat at the literary table—and not. Instead, following Bates' (2002) analysis of Bennett, literary enchantment "is grounded in a subjective human response to the world; it is a possible aspect of human experience of the world." Which is to say: it's not a matter of objective criteria but rather one only rendered subjectively. I have many examples from my own experience: The opening pages of Wallace's *Pale King*; the final pages of Calvino's *Invisible Cities*; the PowerPoint chapter of Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*; many poems by Anne Carson, Dean Young, Tracy K. Smith, and Dan Beachy-Quick; much of the text in most of the novels of Cormac McCarthy. I'd be curious to know if that stuff enchants you too. If it doesn't, we may not share enough subjective experience. I'm interested in enchantment as the site of subjective affirmation, of pure positive difference between individuals. Enchantment might well fail. Literature and art often do. Perhaps not for everyone. Perhaps not next time: "No matter. Fail again, fail better." (Beckett, 1995, p. 87)

[21] "Principally", Weber (1981/1917) wrote, "there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather one can master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted." (p. 139) The sociological patriarch understood a Modernist culture of scientific rationality, which would become the dominant paradigm in industry, research, and technocratic society, as a project aimed at disenchanting the world: replacing the superstition of belief, the dogmas of religion, and the quackery of magic with reliably rational calculation. Not coincidentally, the study of education as a social science emerged concurrently with this tectonic shift. And while the uptake of scientific, "evidence-based" approaches to teaching has been uneven over the latter half of the 20th century, the rise (and rise) of standardized education reform and best practices research has carried Weber's banner forward. Calculable, data-driven instruction is the expected norm in these contexts, with data typically taking the form of test scores.

While such reforms have often succeeded in "disenchanting" educators of folk-pedagogical practices in favor of modern educational science, there has also arisen a pervasive climate of "disenchantment", in the sense of alienation and disaffection, in the state of the profession today. The U.S. nears its fourth of decade since *A Nation at Risk* (1983) spurred widespread standardized teaching reform, followed by accountability policy double down's during the Bush and Obama administrations, with almost half of all new U.S. teachers leaving the profession within five years, and job satisfaction at

which "discourages affective attachment to the world." (p. 3). Speaking of the event of enchantment, Fisher (1998) writes:

> [T]he moment of pure presence within wonder lies in the object's difference and uniqueness being so striking to the mind that it does not remind us of anything and we find ourselves delaying in its presence for a time in which the mind does not move on by association to something else. (p. 131).

This project centers around that notion of difference. *I'll teach you differences*, Wittgenstein wanted to write.[22] A case for the wondrous differences among educators stands a chance of (re)enchanting the profession in this time of profound disenchantment. This study wonders not whether or not we might consider a life lived teaching English that way – I take as an assumption that such a life (and any life) is always already that way – but rather how we might point to that through writing it. How can inquiry on English teaching participate in the project of affirming life over and over again (Nietzsche, 1887) as it comes to us? How can we convince administrators, policymakers, teachers and the general public that this profession matters so profoundly? How can we make teachers' lives more livable? And, equipped with that sense, what might that make possible for students through the work of teaching with them? In contrast to the sociological disenchanting impulse of other types of educational research, I hope here that writing, like literature, might cast a spell, evoking literariness, providing "models of plurality that might breathe life" (Campbell, 2018, para. 19) into English teachers' work, affirming new possibilities for beautiful and ethical teaching lives.

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an all time low (Dunn, 2013). Myriad studies testify to the largely detrimental effects standardization reforms have had on teacher preparation and classroom practice, leaving teachers exhausted, dispirited and discouraged as a result. Much research has linked this to the rapidly decreasing role teachers themselves play in contributing to the curriculum ([cites]), with high stakes standardization being increasingly tied to teacher pay, and scripted curriculum threatening to remove their voice entirely. It shouldn't be a surprise then, that a field founded on a principle of disenchantment would necessarily lead to the disenchantment of those living and working within it. "In the cultural narrative of disenchantment," Bennett (2001) writes, "the prospects for loving life—or saying 'yes' to the world—are not good. What's to love about an alienated existence?" (p. 4)

[22] Wittgenstein was so interested in differences, Moi (2015) relates, that he considered giving the *Philosophical Investigations* this epigraph, which in turn comes from *King Lear*.

Little League (Danny)

Danny's head hangs heavy. Dean[23] turns the page. Norm[24] doesn't remember how he read *The Great Gatsby* in high school. Danny couldn't fake any passion for the text. Dean wasn't actually in love, but felt a sort of tender curiosity. Norm broke each chapter into discussion points. Danny can't say anything in this house, old sport. Dean: "It sucked." Norm was able to really deep dive. Danny's head hangs heavy. Dean turns the page. Norm turns the page. Norm changes the track. Danny's got an indiscreet voice. Dean has a voice full of wonder. Norm's is full of money.[25] Danny shall take anything to drink. Dean gets some whiskey. Norm turns the page. Even now Danny can feel how angry and defeated the experience left him, how spoiled. For Dean the novel left the least impression. Dean isn't sure if it was the teacher's fault. It was definitely the low point of Norm's internship. Danny despaired. Dean turns the page. Norm doesn't remember. During Danny's student teaching, he had to cover the introduction and the first two chapters of the novel during his mentor teachers' paternity leave, and it sucked. Dean would have to teach it again. Norm recalls how the insights his students revealed made

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[23] The conceit of Little League is that these are all the same person: Danny, Dean, and Norm representing one teacher's varied selves, his experience as a student, reader, writer, and nascent English teacher. While modernist in era, *Gatsby* harbors a postmodern fixation with the self's fluidity and fracture, and the possibility of its (re)invention. As such the novel proves useful for interrogating the ways a life spent English teaching is the work of many selves: a reader, a writer, a childhood spent in English classrooms, a University undergraduate learning to teach, a professional; an adult reader; a lapsed writer; a colleague; a citizen; a friend.

[24] *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925) is, for better and worse, a pillar of secondary English classrooms in the U.S. So it was unsurprising that Danny referenced the text repeatedly in the lessons he created for my secondary English methods course and in the interviews conducted for this study. He talked about reading *Gatsby* as a high school student himself, how that reading informed his decision-making as a teacher tasked with teaching the novel to students of his own. In the same town, a decade apart.

 To refresh: the plot centers around the titular Jay Gatsby, a man as much an invention of the 17-year old runaway James Gatz as he is the embodiment of upward mobility and Jazz-Age excess. Gatsby is a tycoon, a bootlegger, a murderer, an innocent. A romantic and an idealist, hopelessly jaded. A New Yorker. From the Midwest. He is less a contradiction than many, many selves. Which is to say he's a character, one invented by Fitzgerald and also by hundreds of millions of student readers; in that sense he's always already "the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old [kid] would be likely to invent". (Fitzgerald, 1925, p. 98).

[25] Repurposing a passage from Fitzgerald's novel, the description of (the character Daisy's) voice is split across the the participant's three selves, suggesting tributaries down which drift his experience. Other lines appropriated from other texts pop up as well. The point of this overlapping, collaging-together of texts and experience is play, but and also to concretize what is too easily dismissed as metaphor: the ways texts operate with and in a life, how the two shape and inform each other and abut each other. How, given some history, they can't escape each other. And how literariness, introduced via form, might enrich, animate, delight, and enchant the ordinariness of experience.

him like the book. In my class, Danny taught a lesson on music streaming algorithms, how aesthetic experience becomes captured and quantified and repackaged for us, how our music marks our time. Dean turns the page. Norm can't stand this. Danny knows it's agony. Dean wanted his arms around her at luncheon when he began that talk. Dean is reading an earlier version. Norm, his eyes glittering with happiness, listens. Time is a created thing. Danny studied abroad in Japan this past summer. Dean's friends are wearing shirts with individual letters that spell out, when correctly sequenced, G – A – N – B – A – R – E – B – R – E – T – T – ! , which roughly means, "Go Brett!", for their friend (Brett) who was participating in a gaming tournament in Osaka. Danny stirs abroad. Norm believes one can know the whole world without looking out the window. Norm goes, "One can see the way of heaven." Dean thought to console himself. Danny's head hangs heavy. Norm traces the sonic fingerprint of hundreds of records. Danny considers how an alphabet might also be a kind of anthology. Dean was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life. Norm is a good traveller. Danny has a museum mouth. Dean makes promises like the seeds of everything he could be. Danny has a ghostly heart. Norm is still reconciling these ideas. Dean makes up for lost time. Those who speak do not know. If Danny is Daisy, and Dean is Jay, then Norm is the owl-eyed man, still drunk in that enormous library full of imported books. Danny eats the cold fried chicken. Norm sips his beer. Dean looks in through the window on that perfect scene. Danny is reading his way through the Old Testament now. Danny will read on until the ends of the Earth. Danny ponders a word made flesh. Dean colored his experiences through reading. Norm internalizes his educational experiences. Danny is a curriculum. Some theory. Dean, no theorist but he's getting there. Norm thinks he's Randolph Bourne. All those words; they, too, untranslatable: *alphabet, apology, anthology, 道*. Some study. Somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic roll on, Danny dreams; Dean streams the teenage poetry of early pop punk; Norm reads in the masterwork of Lao Tzu: Stop thinking, and end your problems.

The Family of Things (Jocelyn)

Have you ever tried to slide into the heaven of sensation and met you know not what resistance but it held you back?

Jocelyn kept the book with her every day. *Dream Work*, by Mary Oliver.[26] Paperback, 1986. Winner of

the Pulitzer in 1983. Audrey gave it to her. (A teacher gave it to her). Sitting outside at a bar on a sunny

afternoon in [redacted][27]. Audrey told her, "This reminds me of you." And she read Jocelyn the lines:

"Have you ever…"

Jocelyn kept the book with her every day.[28] She kept it in an old backpack just the like ones

her students[29] carried.

One particularly tough day, particularly tough for no real reason, she presided over a meeting

of the Poetry Club after school.[30] She sat taking deep breaths before the meeting

began.

"Ms. [redacted], what's wrong?"

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[26] I too recall Oliver from my teaching days: her "Wild Geese", anthologized in the now-disgraced radio host Garrison Keillor's collected favorites, *Good Poems*. They weren't all that good, but I liked that one. The poem begins, "You do not have to be good." (Truly, a great start.). It ends: "the world offers itself to your imagination, / calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -- / over and over announcing your place / in the family of things."

[27] Rather than pseudonymize, the text calls attention to what that staple of social scientific research does – fictionalize the truth, or hide it from us. The choice to omit is done with good intentions, I know, but it's a fictional distortion just the same, and, in protecting privacy, decouples the story from the particular. The effect is, quite literally, depersonalizing, rending person and place and context from the story to create a universalizing, generalizing effect. More on this dynamic in the next chapter.

[28] Language stitches together Jocelyn's story, in the plot and on the page. Repetitions fasten themselves, grasping handholds and forming chains. *Jocelyn kept the book with her everyday*. And moments later, *Jocelyn kept the book with her everyday*. We're chanting here, again, then: repetition as a kind of enchanting ritual. Repeating in this context establishes and affirms the significance of relationships: with Jocelyn and her book; between Jocelyn and her students. Jocelyn kept the book *in an old backpack like the ones her students carried*. In this, the two are linked by phrasing and also image: the backpack. The image is an important one, I think, if only because the problem of what to wear, what to carry and how to dress is often a source of much deliberation and anxiety for a young teacher. In our imaginations, if not in effect, it signals something about identity. Teaching English at 22, I wore a tie every day, with the hopes that it might signal my professional authority and help me get the students to take me seriously. (It didn't really; it definitely didn't stop many parents from remarking at conferences how much I looked like a student.) The bag a teacher brings is a marker of difference, then, yet the simile in this story marks it as emblematic of connection, teacher and student and bag as a part of the text's family of things.

[29] "Kids", she calls them.

[30] Surely of note – so many of the literary moments I've collected for this inquiry, or the poetic moments I've experienced myself, have been school-adjacent, popping up in the extracurricular interstices around schooling, but not, often-enough, in the daily work of official instruction. And when they do, they can constitute unsettling and unwelcome irruptions (Jarvie & Burke, 2015).

She sat for a second, breathing and thinking of resistance. (How resistance at base is only ever breath.) Of Oliver. She sat thinking of resistance in her classroom and of resistance in her own life. (She didn't think this in words; she wrote it later.) It was becoming harder to separate the two.

In the old backpack, she felt the weight of *Dream Work*. (Later, she'd write, the poem 'Whispers' called to her, or rather, whispered.) Jocelyn asked the students, the kids, if she could read them something. They were always so excited when she read them something. (Students are, in this way, kids. When the teacher reads aloud to them they are, for a moment, kids.) She read:

Have you ever tried to slide into the heaven of sensation and met you know not what resistance but it held you back? Have you ever turned on your shoulder helplessly, facing the white moon, crying [redacted]?

The poem ended and it was quiet. One young poet ("poet", now) sat breathing audibly, deeply. Later Jocelyn would write, it felt like resistance had left the room, even if just for awhile.

She'd write: I think about my past a lot, what has changed and what has stayed the same.[31] Where my family has been and where they are now. I've become grateful, she'd write. It's not mine anymore.

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[31] I do this too. It's always strange, seeing patterns of thought in our own lives emerge in the language of others. Articulated "the same—and yet not the same." (Wittgenstein, 1996). As if taught.

Vote for a Teenager[32] (Holly)

Yeah, definitely. I guess just this year I've been thinking a lot about how do we give space to the wrong

voice, or a voice that we don't agree with. Is it important to allow that voice in our space? How much

of it, how to

And guess what happened!

It's still happening in America, and that's what he's speaking to." Things like that. So I

was proud of them. Had joy.[33] And then a lot of things too, like, there's a lyric in the song: "celly,

that's a tool." Something. And they weren't really getting that. They were talking about people

videotaping fights in schools. Instead of

think a lot of them learned. And a lot of them *did* learn.

They were like, "Oh yeah, I see what you're saying. This is America now, not just in the past." The

further we got into talking about police brutality, and mass shootings, the more I knew what I was,

and so was capable of anything anyone could imagine. I loved that. Imagine

Of the times I heard it I was so engaged in the emotional experience with a strong awareness of my

overwhelming sentiment. A kind of feeling where I knew I would grow to be nostalgic for these

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[32] The title is taken from a recent exhibition by artist Cary Leibowitz (Glasstire, 2019). I found it fitting given the political content of the story, which excerpts from a class discussion of a music video for the song "This is America" by rapper and R&B artist Childish Gambino. Both song and video are notable for their aggressive engagement with contemporary (specifically anti-Black) racism in the U.S., a topic Holly, the unnamed English teacher in the story, sought to engage in her English course.

[33] The awkwardness of this fragment betrays its authenticity: this was lifted directly from transcript and transferred to story-page intact. One limitation with advancing the aesthetic as a value for scholarly writing is that it may elide the ugliness that marks everyone's experience. A beautiful story can be too clean, and some of the heart can fall out of it. Flaws, too, can support the work of connection in teaching: they suggest humility.

moments for a long time. It was only the last line of the poem that stayed with me, close: *that we don't know, but try anyway*. I was often reminded of that line during

Well, we live in [redacted].[34] We don't have a lot of Black people. We don't see it, you know, aren't exposed to it. So that would be taking care of it. That would be something similar to what I would've said. They said it pretty bluntly, straightforward.

the white horse in the background meant. And someone asked, "Did you notice the rider didn't have a head?" or it was dark, like a cloak or something.[35] So we talked about symbolism for awhile. We talked about the apocalypse Anything I might try might work. When a student would come to me with issues so awful I could not imagine they were happening to anyone I know

I would be struck and stuck[36]

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[34] There's some tension here between what Holly is trying to express and the author's redaction. One way of reading this is that it mirrors the dynamic of New Sincerity authors (Jarvie, 2019) who write fiction under the erasure of critical/post theories, whose every word is necessarily contradiction but who, like Holly, try anyway. Holly's story points to the ways this is part of the work of being a political teacher; in the fourth chapter I'll further explicate the ways this tension is apparent in research on English teaching, too.

[35] This is in Gambino's video, but in the fragmented context of this story, it recalls literary the Headless Horseman of Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow", a story long canonized in the secondary classroom and U.S. popular culture. It's always curious when allusions arise unexpectedly, as if setting out to tell a new story of a high school English classroom I can't escape the matter which always already comprises my imagination, by way of my history.

[36] In this moment where Holly admits she's at her most helpless, the writing becomes conspicuously poetic. It also felicitously coincides with some recent reading of mine, from Greg Seigworth's introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* (Gregg & Seigworth, 2009):

> I first met affect, as a concept, when a manila envelope arrived at my apartment's doorstep in rural northwestern Pennsylvania sometime in 1984. At the time, I was working as a sound engineer in a music recording studio. The envelope was mailed to me by a college friend, a bit older than me, who had gone on to graduate school. It contained an essay (I still remember it, quite vividly, as badly photocopied and then unevenly chopped by a paper cutter) entitled "Another Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the Empowerment of Everyday Life," by Lawrence Grossberg (1984). The piece was written in a vibrant but rather unwieldy theoretical language that detailed this passionate thing called "affect" in ways that I could not always quite follow, although fortunately the musical references were immediately recognizable and that helped me to roughly intuit the theory. While I puzzled over Grossberg's rendering of particular musical artists and genres, something about the theory must have leaped up from those pages and struck me, stuck with me… (p. 19)

There is a notable contrast here between the poetry of Holly's paralysis, highlighted by comparison to Seigworth's slow winding reminiscing, and the political urgency of "This Is America", a text marked by the immediacy and intensity of its call for action.

Special. Very special. I think more people participated in this Socratic, that was not graded, than the final that was graded. But also I think this difficult and sensitive knowledge, while it was engaging and modern and important I think it probably presented a set of reasons why

                                        it is so good—a new season, a new way to experience morning.

The long drive romanced me, slowly brought me back to life. It seemed like spring could be seeping through the morning rain…

                                         Thirty minutes before convocation[37] we were all in our classes. An instructor had us fill out envelopes addressed to ourselves and then we were to write a letter that would be mailed one year from then. I remember feeling emotional drained at that time, the end of a very long day, and I can barely remember what I wrote. I know I ended the letter with the words

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[37] A jump here to Holly's own graduation from her teacher prep program. In the context of the story, time is still linear; Holly taught "This is America" as a student teacher, then graduated. Yet ending the story with Holly's perspective as a student (albeit one on the precipice of shifting roles) renders time a bit wonky here, the usual chronological trajectory of education disrupted. Such is the mess of learning to teach, when a person like Holly has to straddle both positions.

Helplessness[38] (Sam)

Early in the fall semester I[39] gave Sam the material for the spring 10th grade curriculum—*Mockingbird*, *Catcher* and *A Raisin in the Sun*, that new one *The Hate U Give*, all the other novels, the story anthology and all the plans—and told her to read and fully understand the books before she even glanced at the lessons. 8 in all. I remember she looked back at me eager and clearly a little overwhelmed; I remember feeling that way, once, too.

I love *To Kill A Mockingbird.* It's my favorite text to teach. I know I quote from it too often ("Until I feared I would lose it, I never loved to read. One does not love breathing.") but I can't help myself. It's just so useful, so relevant. It provides good stuff for living with: how to be a father, a woman, a decent human being. How to not be racist, or less so. How to stand up for the things you believe in. For the kids here in Michigan: what the South was like. For the kids in 2018, what the Great Depression was like. I find it applicable for almost every occasion. Really, what other advice do you need: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view."

One day in November I remember Sam looking at me, curiously, when I started talking about Atticus during a discussion of *The Crucible.* I get that it's a cliché. There are other books. I hope she finds her own to be devoted to. But to me *To Kill A Mockingbird* is as American as it gets. And we need that, now. It's what we need now. More than anything it's why I teach English. I kept Sam most days after school, sometimes late. I feel bad about this – she's young, with her own life – but I know what it takes to learn to swim. Often she hit walls. She'd come to me feeling frustrated about something a

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[38] For awhile I've been moved and haunted by Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young's "Helpless", a song that winds its way through the bliss of giving up. Of finally just admitting that. Young telling another weird tale set in a lost town in Northern Ontario, the sentimentality of it all overwhelming: *blue, blue windows, beside the stars*. It occurs to me only now that the song is a Romantic anthem, and that that's exactly what I love about it. I didn't set out to be a Romantic.

[39] This story is written from the perspective of first year English teacher Sam's mentor teacher, providing some distance and a different angle at which to consider her experience than that of the teachers in the previous stories. The move forwards one of my commitments towards foregrounding literariness in writing about teachers: experimentation and play for its own sake. I don't know exactly what it does to writing from this perspective (though I can hypothesize, say, about the extent to which in foregrounds the relational aspects of a teacher's experience); that unknowing is exactly the point.

kid said, about the amount of time she spent giving feedback on piles and piles of essays, about a lesson she'd been excited about that fell flat. And I'd say what Atticus said: It's not time to worry yet. It's only November. It's your first semester teaching. I told her this *all* the time. I told it to myself.

I remember one lesson she was really excited about: we were reading Whitman and she had the kids listen to this folk band, Fleet Foxes. (I thought of Fleetwood Mac.) I remember the name because I looked it up afterwards. I haven't listened to new music in decades. The song she played for them, "Helplessness Blues", sounded like the 60's to me. Even the title is clearly an homage to Bob Dylan. I found that appropriately nostalgic for the occasion. I couldn't tell, though, how to square the lyrics with Whitman. The song starts: "I was raised up believing I was somehow unique / Like a snowflake distinct among snowflakes, unique in each way you can see / And now after some thinking, I'd say I'd rather be / A functioning cog in some great machinery serving something beyond me." The kids didn't know what to do with it. Sam asked questions that kept going unanswered, students just standing there still like flagstones. Increasing desperation in her voice. I stayed still and silent myself. Not time to worry yet.[40]

This kind of struggle wasn't a particularly uncommon event. But this time I wondered why did she insist? What did she see in this song and Song of Myself? I didn't get it. I didn't get how they're connected, but even more: I didn't get why she's so insistent on making the connection, why she's bent on asking the students to see it, too. What music she's hearing that the rest of don't.

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[40] Readers of this manuscript noted the problematic here: this enchanted moment, wherein Sam comes to an impasse, a classroom event like a sheer wall in front of her, unscalable, unreadable. One "so striking to the mind that it does not remind [her] of anything and [she] find[s herself] delaying in its presence for a time" (Fisher, 1998, p. 131). The enchanted literary moment, as I've envisioned it, is marked by affirmative mystery: We're drawn into some ambiguity, curious; we don't know, but try anyway. But this story points to the ways other affects attach themselves to those weird curricular irruptions that occur at a particularly poignant intersection of teacher practice, student learning, some text(s) and lives. I allow that literariness may not always or even mostly be comfortable for those experiences. This affective ambivalence is what makes it literary – the weak, subjective, contingent claims it makes to experience, as aesthetic texts do, rather than the strong, determining claims of informational writing. In this way literariness constitutes a different ontological stance. Just as the narrating mentor teacher refuses to worry and instead gives Sam space to work through the difficulty, the literary writer attempts to achieve literary goals— "to establish connection, produce sympathy, trigger change, affect the world"— not by "showing and revealing the world to [students, readers], but by being in the world with them" (Huehls, 2016, p. 24).

Epilogue

Imaginary gardens with real toads in them.

Marianne Moore, "Poetry"

The word *enchant* comprises the Latin roots *in-* (upon, against) and cantāre (to sing, compare) ("Enchant", 2019). One way of reading these stories is that they constitute songs built *upon* the experiences of teachers, singing *against* the reductive forces of disenchantment which diminishes their lives. "Little League", for example reflects one common meaning of *chant*: a collective repetition of song, as in ritual. The approach draws inspiration from a text from my own teaching history, a passage from Wallace's *The Pale King* (2011). That strange passage:

> from an even stranger unfinished novel about working at the IRS in the mid-1980s, the boredom of that, consists entirely of various workers, identified by full name, just turning pages. That's all it is, over and over again. (Beymer & Jarvie, 2020, p. 165).

"Little League" interpolates Wallace's approach in rendering Danny/Dean/Norm's experience. The stories he (they) told about life as reader, writer, student, and teacher through interviews, in course work, lesson plans, essays, and conversations become interwoven with texts referenced to create a new kind of literary text. The form of the vignette is marked by relentless, chant-like repetition. Simple sentence forms are used and reused to construct song; repeated syntax introduces new information but just as much establishes a rhythm. The introduction of variance in the midst of the repetition offers texture to the work, playing with the sound and its latent poetry. Yet as in Wallace the narrative circles back, while moving forward, repeatedly "turning the page". The effect is mantra-like: this work asks to be read aloud, chanted. The form calls attention to itself *as form* and to language *as language*, as a matter of meaning but also sound. In this way language is functioning not only or even primarily as conventional plot advancement but rather as play, as a matter of the distinctive resonances of words

that might "forge complex bursts of meaning, expressionistic rather than figurative, enigmatic rather than earthly, evasive rather than embracing…language wedded less to story than to poetic possibilities" (Marcus, 2005, p. 7). Across these stories, I'm interested in poetic possibilities for how we might think of teaching life: how, in Little League for example, Danny's experience between text and education blurs across his many selves, bleeding into each other across time and space, reflecting the disorientation any teacher feels in trying to juggle all of that and get their lessons done. "Head above water." Literariness on the page, in the story, attempts some beautiful if untidy ordering of that.

In "The Family of Things, repetitions also riff with variations to create texture and advance the poetry through rhythm. "Audrey gave it to her. (A teacher gave it to her)." There is something importantly more going on here, beyond just the jazz-like improvisation of notes on the page. It is renaming: Audrey becomes "a teacher". The sentence repeats with the new name, trying it out/on for the reader. Trying the sound on. In "When Death Comes", Mary Oliver (2004) writes:

I think of each life as a flower, as common

as a field daisy, and as singular,

and each name a comfortable music in the mouth (p. 10)

Naming and renaming, in the context of the poetic text, then, is itself an act of music-making, of setting experience to song. We can trace an arc of names across "The Family of Things": 'student' becomes 'kid' becomes 'poet' by the end. This tracing is pointed out explicitly through the parentheticals, an explicatory voice or ghost of a voice coursing through the text. I have always liked parentheticals for the way they insert another voice into the text (ditto: footnotes, as you know), destabilizing monovocality and moving towards polyphony instead. What the introduction of such voices does for teaching, I think, is breathe some space into stories in which we become trapped: in the drowning monologues of standards and best, those texts void of any and all contextual particulars, of color or names. Pure and dull and bland abstraction, politically neutered so as to pass. Maybe useful,

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but not life. Instead, the literary text expands our sense of the past and the teacher's place within it. Polyvocality on the page provides space to breathe. Similarly, lines from Oliver's poetry provide a respite, in the poem and in Jocelyn's classroom, letting some resistance leave the room. Or so she feels. Literariness in "The Family of Things" operates, microtherapeutically, for a moment, offering some solace; as well as transformatively, the the poetry helping rename and so reposition how Jocelyn sees her students and what's possible for them.

Resistance and transformation lurk in the subtext of "Vote for a Teenager", a story riven with absences: enigmatic emptinesses reminiscent of the redactions in "The Family of Things". The story might be described as a fragment, like one of those remnants leftover from some lost and ancient verse. (Figure 6). Or some namelessly tagged revolutionary poetry (Figure 7). The vacant space and withheld context around such

Figure 6. Fragments of Sappho's poetry, transcribed 2nd century BCE. (Newitz, 2016)

fragments invite imagination, require some contribution wherein the reader might write further into the text,

Figure 7. Graffiti in Paris, 1968 (Shiel, 2017).

filling the space. It's a formal occasion for wonder.

One day, while writing this analysis, I listened all morning to pundits squabbling over who would be the 2020 Democratic presidential nominee: what human could step in and fill that space to "beat Trump". Imaginations raged. Where impasses have left it difficult to speak, space invites the work of imagining to begin. Looking to the conviction and fury of gun-activist Emma Gonzalez, teenage survivor of the 2018 Parkland school shooting, and the righteous indignation of 15-year-old Greta Thunberg—who insists climate change is robbing us of our future—rather than any of the potential candidates, why not reconsider the options and imagine differently? Why not a teenager? (Figure 8)

Figure 8. Artwork from Leibowitz's 2019 show "The Queen Esther Rodeo". (Glasstire, 2019)

In "Vote for a Teenager", the literary page attempts to make space through productive absence. And yet, as Holly writes, there may be danger in this: is it important to allow "the wrong" voice to have space? She trails off, unsure, and something happens. Something is "still happening in America", she explains. The text tracks reflections on student responses to "This is America" with Holly's own self-actualization as a teacher. The literariness of the text goes hand-in-hand, as it often does, with its indeterminacy; "Vote for a Teenager" ends with a non-answer. In citing artistic figures here in lieu of actionable rhetoric, I offer that the literary text provides an occasion for political wonder, a flexible complement to the strong dogmas of critical pedagogy that may be what activist teachers need now. What it means, to Holly, to be a white teacher, in a largely white classroom in a rural community in Middle America: we don't know, what to do or say, but try anyway.

Curiously, Labaree (2012) understands chanting as a commonplace of educational research meanings: "We chant mantras…All children can learn; school is the answer; constructivism is the answer; teachers are the answer." (p. 81). He notes the ways such chants galvanize researchers, girding them with purpose against policymakers bent on ignoring them or undermining their work. But Labaree also considers the ways such chants calcify into dogmas which inhibit inquiry: what if constructivism isn't the answer? What if teachers aren't the answer?

Certainly a critical approach is one way we might approach such chants as texts, reading them to deconstruct and debunk their latent assumptions. But literary critic Rita Felski (2015) makes the case for readings that place less emphasis on "de-" words, and more on "re-" approaches – on literary texts' potential to re-shape, re-make, and re-new. Taking this tack, how might we understand how these stories might reshape, remake, and renew English teaching? What does the chant *do*? I seek in writing in these forms to evoke the literariness of teachers' experience. A project of *re*-enchantment. The feeling in the reader that, like Lerner's (2019) Adam:

A channel had been established, and language was coursing through him. Because even though

it happened while he was speaking, it was also a form of listening, of making himself a medium.

It was the poet part of him. (p. 209)

A kind of spell over the ways we come to see the intersection of a teacher's life and practice as an

English teacher. Some songs of themselves (Whitman, 1855/1973), writing multitudes into the

persons they were, are, and will become in the profession: how their music marks their time. Following

Whitman literary work can make teaching vast. Poetic language can make educational experience

larger, just as language vis-à-vis standards and scripts reduces it.

That father of American Romanticism and patriarch of the high school English classroom

makes a fitting figure to end the chapter with, though perhaps a strange one for me. I largely bypassed

the Romantics in school. As an undergraduate I loved the radicality and pyrotechnics of postmodern

American fiction; in graduate school I loved exactly the same in critical and poststructural theories.

Yet Bates' (2002) commentary on Bennett's enchantment connects the dots, and so is worth an

extended quote:

What [Bennett] seeks to develop is a non-teleological understanding of enchantment…The

vocabulary may be a bit unfamiliar, but surely the project isn't. This is more or less the project

of Romanticism…It is, more or less, the project of Nietzsche: the revaluation of all values in

the face of the death of God. However, she is much less ambitious than these precursors. She

presents her insights as part of what she calls a *weak ontology*…[which] "emphasizes the

necessarily speculative and contestable character of [the]… onto-story, and thus does not try

to demonstrate its truth in any strong sense." …If her claims for enchantment do not rest on

argument, perhaps they should be understood as invitations to reflect on elements of one's

own experience in relation to the stories she recounts.

By way of closing, what I want to say is that the weakness of literary writing, its baldly speculative and unavoidably contestable nature, its profound ambivalence, its fictivity— these are just stories, after all—all of that is also, I think, its great strength. "Do I contradict myself?" wrote Whitman. "Very well, I contradict myself." These stories sing large, I hope, pointing to multitudes and mysteries contained in even small moments in teacher's lives.

The intertextual singing Sam heard in "Helplessness", when no one else did. How we're all left to wonder.

CHAPTER 4: UNBEARABLE WHITENESS: NOTES ON A LITERARY PROBLEM

1.

> *The ghosts shudder, but they do not leave. They sway with open mouths again. Kayla raises one arm in the air, palm up, like she's trying to soothe Casper, but the ghosts don't still, don't rise, don't ascend and disappear. They stay. So Kayla begins to sing, a song of mismatched, half-garbled words, nothing that I can understand. Only the melody, which is low but as loud as the swish and sway of the trees, that cuts their whispering but twines with it at the same time. And the ghosts open their mouths wider and their faces fold at the edges so they look like they're crying, but they can't. And Kayla sings louder. She waves her hand in the air as she sings, and I know it, know the movement, know it's how Leonie rubbed my back, rubbed Kayla's back, when we were frightened of the world. Kayla sings, and the multitude of ghosts lean forward, nodding.*

—Jesmyn Ward, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017, p. 284)

2.

Notably unbroached in this study until this point: the unbearable, inevitable whiteness of Literature, of literariness—my own, especially. Here I hope to interrogate that omission. I seek out the ghosts which haunt this project, straining to hear, and working to intersperse here, voices other than the normative ones which historically constitute the field of English, testing the concept of literariness against other traditions. To assert the ways in which Black voices in particular matter[41], if I'm to theorize literariness as any kind of humanizing endeavor in this moment: the spring and summer of

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[41] I might have picked other categories of difference (cf: the discussion of misogyny and literariness in Chapter Two), but, as I explain below, the initial writing I did for this chapter worked through an article by three Black women scholars, which itself considers the racialized experience of Black youth. I chose the article because of its own particular place in my experience working as its editor, without much considering my own positionality w/r/t it. Writing as a white man, in this moment especially, it feels negligent not to engage race and specifically anti-Blackness (and the role of whiteness) for its long and pervasive history in English literature and curricula.

2020. When, here in the US and elsewhere, amid a global pandemic, protests against police violence particularly and systemic racism generally fill streets across the country. Singing.

3.

In my second year of doctoral work, I traveled to Nashville to give my first scholarly presentation at a national conference of English teachers and literacy researchers. The paper I read attempted to articulate, in the bold and naïvely underread way grad student papers often do, my frustrations with the field, which I traced across my time as a preservice teacher, my experiences teaching in high school English classrooms, and my subsequent induction to the field of English Education via graduate seminars and research literature. I wondered why teaching English was often framed differently from the ways I'd come to understand the subject as an undergraduate major. *Why is it*, 72-pt-Garamond read on my final slide, *that research on English teaching isn't very literary*?

4.

>*how to explain that I*
>
>*don't belong to English*
>
>*though I belong nowhere else.*
>
>—Gustavo Perez Firmat, *Bilingual Blues* (1995, p. 3)

5.

The spring following my Nashville presentation, I began working as a graduate assistant editor at *Research in the Teaching of English*, a top-tier journal in the field. From the summer of 2016 through spring 2017, I read every incoming manuscript, summarized each in preparation for editors' meetings, and communicated with authors as to the status of their articles. On those that were accepted I

performed initial copyediting, then ferried them back and forth between professional copyeditors and authors for several rounds before publication. Which is to say: across this experience I saw how research was made, and came to some sense of what does and does not count as worthy of publication in the field of English teaching, what is valuable and what is not, what it takes to get published and promoted.

6.

I initially aimed to perform a close reading of the (un)literariness of a single published article from that time working at the journal, one I felt representative of the field of research on English teaching today: "When School Is Not Enough: Understanding the Lives and Literacies of Black Youth" by Valerie Kinloch, Tanja Burkhard, and Carlotta Penn, published in 2017. My rough-draft thinking as to why I felt the article suitable representative of the field went:

> The article's subject (academically marginalized Black youth), purpose (inquiring into the possibility of greater equity and justice in schools), approach (treating out-of-school literacies as assets to curriculum and instruction) and popularity among scholars (27 citations since initial publication) all speak to its centrality in the field of English teaching today. Given my experience overseeing manuscripts, I can further attest to its status as an exemplary article for the journal. As a robust qualitative inquiry, it fits squarely within a tradition at *RTE* going back more than five decades that promotes rigorously social scientific scholarship on English teaching. Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn's study is also representative of the editorial team's primary focus during my tenure: publishing equity-oriented empirical research focusing on youth of color. Given all this, "When School Is Not Enough" makes for a suitable object of inquiry into the ways of writing that are particularly valued in the field.

7.

Black literature is taught as sociology, as tolerance, not as a serious, rigorous art form.

—Toni Morrison, *Conversations* (1994, p. 258)

8.

It quickly became apparent, when I brought the manuscript in front of my dissertation committee and in conversation with colleagues, (particularly those devoted to projects similar to that of the authors), that my writing failed to interrogate an assumption at its heart: that I could flatten the racial and gendered identities of Kinloch, Burkhard and Penn – three Black women scholars -- and their participants, and fold them into the larger project of social scientific research on English teaching, offering the paper up to critique while not thoroughly interrogating the ways literariness was saturated with whiteness. Put differently, I find now that there is a more urgent story emerging from this inquiry that considers the identity and cultural privilege which undergirds literariness as I've experienced it. Despite my avowed beginning with postmodern thinking, I've told a too-monolithic story about literariness thus far, always a problem but doubly so when that story is a white one. As such, the initial project, holding the work of three Black women scholars of English Education up to a (white) literary lens, needed challenging: some new literary form.[42]

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[42] The sequential "notes" of this project intersperse selections from Black novelists, poets, essayists, and journalists, within the context of a more conventional analytic inquiry (a reading of a research article). This literary form might best be understood as a "lyric essay" (D'Agata, 2015) which "eschews the story-driven ambitions of fiction and nonfiction for the associative inquiry of poems. (p. 7) Here, I've juxtaposed such voices in order to place them in tension with my own white perspective, embodied in the initial draft of this chapter, which analyzed the "presence" and "absence" of literariness in Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn's article. Instead of presenting that analysis in a more conventional sociological form, I hope this experiment in writing evokes something else – what I might contribute as a white scholar thinking about the role of literariness in the lives of people different from myself. "Holding dissonant forms together in ways that are passionately attached", writes Loveless (2019), "tells new stories and offers new sites of traction in the academy. It mobilizes forms that anamorphically shatter single-point perspective, failing to cohere fully into art or scholarship, instead nurturing driven curiosity as its lure and guide." (p. 105) My refusal to cohere, throughout these voices, is my effort to inquire more literarily otherwise, while also giving Black voices greater space on the page.

9.

Bluest Eye [Toni Morrison's 1970 novel] is a novel whose grammar precedes exposition, and that grammar is crushing. Racism is relevant to the story to the extent that it is relevant everywhere, including the reluctant enclaves of migrated black characters whose discontinuous narratives fill the pages. In The Bluest Eye racism is the environment—the weather, the climate—and it makes the seasons turn, which is to say that it is happening all the time and therefore no more remarkable than March snowflakes in the Midwest. Every time I read the novel I am fascinated by how syntax expresses illness without pathology, how vernacular holds people together without fixing them. I am not sure if my attention would be drawn in the same way if I had approached Morrison's fiction as a balm for my own latent racism and I am not sure what purpose the novel is meant to serve on an anti-racist list for someone desperate for understanding. I am sure such a person will find a lodestar worth grasping — the novel stuns after all — but what's missed in the mission? A novel. And all that language.

—Lauren Michele Jackson, "What Is an Anti-Racist Reading List For?" (2020, para. 5)

10.

Reading Kinloch, Burkhard and Penn's work I was struck at first by a form of literariness familiar to me, seeping into the language via quotation. After opening the article with some typical they-say-ing ("Many scholars (Darling-Hammond, 1998; DuBois, 1902; Gonzalez, 2001; Kozol, 1991) have long argued…"), the sound and style of the words shift when the authors appeal to Horace Mann: "Education, then, beyond all other divides of human origin, is a great equalizer of conditions of men— the balance wheel of the social machinery." (p. 34). Mann's language rings literary as a result of memorable metaphor ("a great equalizer"; "the balance wheel") and Romantically vast scope ("beyond all other divides of human origin"). It's old-fashioned ambitious writing. (Which is to say: white.)

11.

The following page, the authors' quotation of W.E.B. Du Bois[43] complicates this reading: "Education must keep broad ideals before it, and never forget that it is dealing with Souls and not with Dollars." (p. 35). The antiquated move to capitalize nouns of rhetorical importance, rather than capitalizing to solely denote grammatical difference, directs the eye, pulling the modern reader "up short" (Campbell, 2018, para. 18) as literary language does, and inviting further consideration of the sounds and possible meanings of the words, as metaphors which resonate off each other.

12.

> *How many of my brothers and sisters*
> *Will they kill*
> *Before I teach myself*
>
> —June Jordan, "I Must Become a Menace to My Enemies" (2017)

13.

Later in "When School Is Not Enough", the authors extensively draw on the writing of bell hooks (1990):

> …hooks' critique of the relations between being oppressed and being silenced, or of being
>
> told, "I
>
> want to know your story," only to have your story told "back to you in a new way. Tell it back
>
> to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own", and no longer yours. She continues.

---

[43] The citiational movement to him from Mann suggests a shift towards a Black American literary tradition which will be of interest later in this essay. For now, it's worth noticing that I read Du Bois' writing, through the lens of literariness as I've framed it thus far previous chapters, as particularly, conventionally literary.

"Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk" (p. 41)

This remarkable passage bristles with poetry, to devastating effect. Hooks plays with possibilities embedded in words and their near cousins ('author', 'authority'). She skirts the line of contradiction through clever reversals of syntax ("Re-writing you, I write myself") arriving at new meanings otherwise impossible. Consider especially the repetition: a repetition is excessive; it offers nothing more to the *what* of the writing. "What a relief to have nothing to say," writes Deleuze (1990/1995), "because only then is there a chance of framing the thing that might be worth saying." (p. 129). A repetition in writing (and speech) is about *how* a thing is said: with force, to be remembered, learned. *I am still…I am still…* This is part of what makes hooks' language so memorable, and it does much to account for why this passage has been so often quoted in contemporary discussions of racial oppression.

hooks is, herself, a prominent Black public intellectual, the literary qualities of her writing making her reputation as someone who opens and expands possibilities for thinking life through words. As one commentator notes of her work:

For me, reading [hooks' 1981 study of feminist theory] "Ain't I A Woman" was as if someone had opened the door, the windows, and raised the roof in my mind. I am neither white nor black, but through her theories, I was able to understand that my body contained historical multitudes and any analysis without such a measured consideration was limited and deeply flawed. (Lee, 2019)

Note the layered allusions here. hooks' work takes its title from Sojourner Truth's famous 19th century speech, a classic of the Black literary tradition; "contained historical multitudes" meanwhile referencing Whitman's famous lines, here repurposed by a Korean American novelist, a woman, to situate her experience in relation to hooks' writing and its effects on her life. All of which points to

the transversality (Harney & Moten, 2013) of literariness, the way language can usefully cut across familiar identity categories to illuminate study.

14.

Literariness further emerged from a perhaps less likely source than the quotations of accomplished scholars: in the language of participants themselves. Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn, for example, quote Khaleeq, an 18-year-old from the US Northeast:

> You know, like, what you be talkin' bout. They think we don't do any good, like we not smart. Like, we dangerous cause we Black or we criminals 'cause we Black. Then put being male on top ah that. We get labeled 'cause ah who we are." (p. 46)

Khaleeq's language feels alive, feels literary in the sense that the sound calls attention to itself and the individual person speaking: the language is studded with repetitions and distinctively marked by colloquialism, the kind of expressions that don't easily translate into social science research without the authors' intervention. I'm particularly drawn to the use of "ah" in place of "of": the sound taking direct precedence over clarity of meaning. ("I too am untranslatable. I too am not a bit untamed. / I sound my barbaric yawp over the rooftops of the world." [Whitman, 1892/1973]). It's a moment when, conspicuously, the language is obviously Khaleeq's; when Kinloch, Burkhard and Penn have resisted the impulse to render his words in ways more directly recognizable as suitable for publication.

15.

> *This is my part, nobody else speak.*
> *This is my part, nobody else speak.*
>
> —Chance the Rapper, "Ultralight Beam" (Bennett, 2016)

16.

Elsewhere, Khaleeq asserts, speaking of his peers, that "we be out here doin' the work." (p. 45). The use of the invariant be marks Khaleeq's language as reflective of his particular positions; one way we can think about it is that its inclusion allows it (his voice, and him) to be Black on the page, as Black idiom cannot be understood apart from culture and experience (Smitherman, 2000, p. 57). For me there's also some resonant ambiguity to Khaleeq's phrase, "doin' the work.", which he repeats again elsewhere in the manuscript (e.g., Kinloch, Burkhard, & Penn, 2017, p. 49: "I'm out here doin' this work, I'm not a statistic…"). In the context of Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn's study, the phrase doesn't exclusively or even primarily refer to the work of school. Instead it is reminiscent of the way Watson and Marciano (2015) describe phrasing taken up by participants in their study:

> "You gon get this work. Right?" The author was remixing a saying—"you gon get this work"—that held prior meanings as he, Howard, and Clark had previously discussed Loaded Lux, a rapper who performs in pre-arranged 'battles' in which opponents trade lyrical insults. Battle rappers conduct research about their rivals prior to duels. Loaded Lux refers to this work, researching adversaries, as he declares in-duel to opponents, "You gon get this work." When the first author employed Loaded Lux's catchphrase, Howard responded, 'Mos def.' Howard refigured the researcher-ly echo, and responded to an inviting echo to imply that he was 'most definitely' willing to engage the work of education research as learning process, that he was "gon get this work." (p. 42)

Khaleeq's language, in my reading, echoed researcher and participant language in Watson and Marciano's study, which in turn, as they note, echoed the phrasing of rapper Loaded Lux. This echoing quality of language reflects Jacobson's understanding that literary writing animates both the "sounds [its reverberations, echo being a sonic metaphor] and possibilities [allusions to prior uses which offer variations on potential meanings] within the message itself." (Campbell, 2018, para. 5). Kinloch,

Burkhard, and Penn engage one such echo when they offer one possible interpretation of Khaleeq's use of the phrase: that "Black students' determination to work harder to navigate racial barriers is a form of resistance." (p. 39) The engagement of echoed meanings emerging from language offers an instance of literary play at work in "When School Is Not Enough".

17.

Importantly, up until this point, my reading of literariness in "When School Is Not Enough" has focused on others' words – scholars' and participants' – to the exclusion of the authors' language themselves.

18.

WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH ME?

—June Jordan, "I Must Become a Menace to My Enemies" (2017)

19.

The manuscript's title presents an instance of the authors themselves using language in such literary ways. Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn choose to employ a common form for titles of research articles, in which an initial evocative phrase serves as a hook to engage the reader, followed on the other side of a colon by a statement of the paper's subject. Often enough, the portion to the left of the colon reads literary, as it does here: "When School Is Not Enough" is both ambiguous (its scope and lack of specificity might apply to any number of studies) and provocative, suggesting critique. Even its form – the fragment – is ungrammatical (a mark of literariness, Riffaterre [1983] argues). In this way it reminds me of a favorite epigraph, from Andrew Zawacki's (2002*) By Reason of Breakings* ("yet not so broken and cut off from" – St. Augustine), or even the fragment-title of Christina Sharpe's *In The*

Wake (2016), a fruitful text to bring into conversation with this article given its frank literariness[44], while nevertheless sharing a focus with Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn on rendering Black American experience with an eye towards critical future intervention. And yet—the right side of the title's colon ("Understanding the Lives and Literacies of Black Youth") pulls it back, sorting itself, providing the writing some order among recognizable things. This is what this title form does, and why it's so popular: it clarifies the text as not exclusively, or even primarily literary, not story or poem, but rather: research.

20.

Kinloch, Burkhard and Penn take time to tease out varied resonances in play with the words in their title. They explicitly assert this practice as central to their study: "As we address our research question…we think deeply about the embedded meanings and emerging implications of the title 'When School Is Not Enough'" (p. 40). Authors go on to interpolate the title for their research question: "for the purposes of this article, we ask: When school is not enough, how might students learn to cultivate their literacies, nurture their spirits, and chart their own trajectories within out-of-school spaces?" (p. 35) At the end of the manuscript, Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn return to the title, both repeating and riffing off it, as they answer the question (emphasis added):

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[44] Sharpe's (to my mind) highly literary writing makes extensive use of language-play with its title, pivoting, revolving, and reframing it so as to evoke a multidimensional conceptual effect:

> The disaster and the writing of disaster are never present, are always present. In this work, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, I want to think "the wake" as a problem of and for thought. I want to think "care" as a problem for thought. I want to think care in the wake as a problem for thinking and of and for Black non/being in the world. Put another way, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* is a work that insists and performs that thinking needs care ("all thought is Black thought") and that thinking and care need to stay in the wake.
>
> December 2013. I was in the grocery store when my brother Stephen called. I listened to the message and I called him back immediately… (p. 5)

I include above the first part of the following paragraph to provide a sense of the contrasting impulses present in Sharpe's book: how the writing shifts from playfully contradict.

When school is not enough, some Black adolescents may painfully internalize deficit narratives about who they are and what they cannot do. (p. 50)

When schools partner with students, families, community organizations, and social service agencies, the importance of young people's schooling experiences and the mutuality and bidirectionality between schools and communities are made more visible. (p. 50)

Our call to action and related examples help us understand the important role educators have in recognizing those glaring moments *when school is not enough. Because recognition is not enough*, we must also determine tangible ways to transform schools and communities into humanizing, loving places and spaces that nurture and support, encourage and honor the lives and literacies of Black youth. (p. 51)

Thought unfolds here prismatically, as the title reappears in novel forms, pointing to new meanings of the implications of the study. Considering the possibilities embedded in the language of the title for writing and theorizing, Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn invite us to think through the harmfulness of deficit-minded stereotyping of Black youth in classrooms, the important role non-school entities play in enacting less harmful curriculum, and the urgent imperative for this study: why the work is not only a rendering of experience but also a call to action if we're to achieve greater equity and justice in school and society. Not lost on us, then, should be the usefulness of such a literary approach to language in reaching the authors' humanizing goals: literariness allows Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn to express what's particularly urgent about the study.

21.

size me up & skip whatever semantics arrive

to the tongue first. Say:

—Hanif Abdurraqib, "How Can Black People Write About Flowers at a Time Like This"

(2018)

22.

In *How Fiction Works* (2008), James Wood articulates how a particular literariness results from authors'

skillful use of 'free indirect style'. His example:

> He looked at his wife. Yes, she was tiresomely unhappy again, almost sick. What the hell should
>
> he say? (p. 7)

Wood notes that the writing here is devoid of dialogue tags and other authorial flagging ("He thought",

or "He said to himself".) Instead, the husband's speech blends with the narration. There are many

nicknames for this effect: e.g., 'close third person', 'going into character', or Wood's own coinage,

'secret sharing' -- "We see things through the character's eyes and language but also through the

author's eyes and language." (Woods, 2008, p. 9) The critic goes on to explain that free indirect style

is most effective when it's hardly noticeable. A second example: "Ted watched the orchestra through

stupid tears." His analysis of this sentence is worth quoting at length:

> The word "stupid" marks the sentence as written in free indirect style. Remove it, and we have
>
> standard reported thought: "Ted watched the orchestra through tears." The addition of the
>
> word "stupid" raises the question: Whose word is this? It's unlikely that I would want to call
>
> my character stupid merely for listening to some music in a concert hall. No, in a marvelous
>
> alchemical transfer, the word now belongs partly to Ted. He is listening to the music and
>
> crying, and is embarrassed—we can imagine him furiously rubbing his eyes—that he has
>
> allowed these "stupid" tears to fall. (p. 8)

That marvelous alchemy is what happens when writing becomes literary, when language's function

becomes ambiguous and we become surprised at how it's operating.

23.

Near the beginning of "When School Is Not Enough", the authors lay out their research question, which builds upon the manuscript's title as noted above. It's what comes next that fascinates me:

> When students are sitting in classes hungry, when they cannot see the words on the board or on the page, and when they experience school as a place where they are regularly bombarded with standardized tests, we have to wonder: Education as a great equalizer *for whom*? When they are forced to learn under conditions that rely on English Only and zero tolerance policies, we have to inquire: Education as a great equalizer *for what*? And, when they are discouraged from relying on their family and community histories, intellectual traditions, and cultural practices to make sense of academic requirements we must ask: Education as a great equalizer *where* and *how*? (p. 35)

Reading this passage, I notice a difference in style, syntax and tone: sharp emotion courses through these sentences, driving them onward towards the authors' pointed rhetorical questioning. An interrogation of the inquiry, with real urgency. We feel, reading, some sense of the authors' passionate concern for students unfairly treated by a racist system of schooling. The language powerfully evokes injustice. In contrast to the language of reported data elsewhere in the writing: Whose words are these? Where did this come from?

24.

> *On the first day of the school year, the students of Lincoln High School received their new secondhand texts from the white high school across the way. Knowing where the textbooks were headed, the white students left inscriptions for the next owners.*

Mr. Hill started working at the high school when Elwood entered his junior year. He greeted Elwood and the rest of the history class and wrote his name on the blackboard. Then Mr. Hill handed out black markers and told his students that the first order of business was to strike out all the bad words in the textbooks. "That always burned me up," he said, "seeing that stuff. You all are trying to get an education—no need to get caught up with what those fools say." Like the rest of the class, Elwood went slow at first. They looked at the textbooks and then at the teacher. Then they dug in with their markers. Elwood got giddy. His heart sped: this escapade. Why hadn't anyone told them to do this before?

—Colson Whitehead, *The Nickel Boys* (2019, pp. 29-30)

25.

The "great equalizer" is a phrase borrowed from Horace Mann, taken up here again and in earnest by Kinloch, Burkhard and Penn in order to point to its profound ambiguity, considerations shooting out from the concept like impossible spokes, conceptual "lines of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987) that trace new possibilities in Mann's words: a great equalizer *for whom, for what, where, how.* The syntactical frame upon which the whole passage depends – repeatedly beginning from "When" – is of course another reappropriation of the manuscript's title. Here again the authors use the phrase as poetic scaffold, following the form beyond the title framing into new and different linguistic territory, seeing what happens. They stand upon the words like a scaffold, building outwards, allowing passion to drive thought. It's a significant reorientation towards the work. Rather than assuming the dispassionate stance of the detached social scientist, whose latent positivism (St. Pierre, 2014) continues to seek some distant objectivity with which to make certain Truth claims, Kinloch, Burkhard and Penn's writing reads sincerely subjective here. This is a moment where who they are – their particular claims, stances, stakes, values – crackles like life through the language. The writing feels literary.

26.

(The writing feels *to me* literary.)

27.

    Hey! It's not about <u>my</u> mind.

    —June Jordan, "A Short Note to My Very Critical and Well-Beloved Friends and Comrades" (2005)

28.

What I find so interesting about that passage is the mysterious way the language of Mann and the words chosen for the title, the literariness of that language, seeps into the language of the authors Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn themselves, changing the writing. As with Wood's description of free indirect style, the lines become blurred; it becomes unclear whose language is speaking to us. This effect is embraced by Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn in service to literary effect: their goal is not only or even primarily to convey information to the reader but also to enlist their sympathies, to evoke some emotional response in them that might help them feel the urgency of this work. In that sense, they're as much concerned with how they're saying it – achieving such effects through literary writing – as they are with what they're saying. This effect then, points to the crucial role literariness plays in "When School Is Not Enough".

29.

But, at the same time, what I've found here thus far is literariness through a white lens, without much considering how the authors might themselves be working from a different literary tradition. Going

back and reading over Burkhard, Penn and particularly Kinloch's body of work (e.g., 2005, 2006, 2011) my mistake becomes obvious. Working from and writing within a Black literary tradition, Kinloch (2005) understands literariness differently than I've consider it thus far: as less a function of the formal possibilities of language (that how) than a potent mode of activism – an approach which foregrounds as literary the writing's content (the what) for how it might humanize the literary lives of, particularly, Black youth. Literariness, in her words, is a matter of "how well one arranges words on a page to produce meaningful, political, even personally urgent music…situated in the relationship between oracy and writing, literary and democracy." (p. 96) In the context of English teaching, for example, "poetry serves a political purpose, for public school students struggling to master the conventions of Standard American English and academic writing." (p. 96) These ideas are perhaps best embodied in Kinloch's 2006 study of the poet, activist, scholar and teacher June Jordan. Weaving letters and interviews with biographical writing and a liberal use of Jordan's poems, Kinloch offers an expansive account of a literary life that situates the person and her politics within "the literary traditions of Walt Whitman and the letter-writing style of Langston Hughes" (p. 2) among many others. Kinloch thus compellingly accounts for the ways literary expression supports and extends the project of activism rather than – as has sometimes been suggested, by myself included – contradict or detract from it.

Put differently, I went looking for literariness in "When School Is Not Enough" and I found it mostly outside of the researchers' actual writing: in citations, quotations, participants' voices. My last analysis grants it to the authors' themselves, only after they'd been transformed vis a vis the alchemy of free indirect style. What I'm not considering: how the split I'm making Others and relegates the language of the researchers themselves, elevating (white) literariness at the expense of Black work.

30.

Bearing this in mind, my reading of "When School Is Not Enough" in this chapter has been less a confirmation of the un/literariness of research on English teaching and more an opportunity for me to see the implications of the notion of literariness I'd been operating with, how my over-emphasis on aesthetic form reflects a lack of political necessity afforded by my whiteness. Bearing in mind the ways literariness becomes refracted through racial identity, I feel the need to rethink what counts as literariness generally but particularly with respect to social science research. Rather than critiquing some "lack" of aesthetic attention to how language is being used, Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn's work offers instead an understand literariness as concerned with what language might offer politically to make Black lives more livable.

31.

Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn's own participant, Rendell, reminds: "It shouldn't be, 'pick up a book, write a paper,' but make sense of what you read and feel. Do you see yourself in it? How it make you feel?" (p. 49).

32.

Embracing conventional literariness in writing, scholars of English teaching might be concerned with *how* they might animate their writing on the subject so as to engage their passions in readers. We might think of this as a response to the long-standing theory-practice debate. If we're to reach practitioners, policymakers, and the broader-public, then we'd do well to level with the fact that they don't seem to be only or even primarily interested in what the data says. This may be unfortunate, but in a world in which powerbrokers largely reject the crisis-implications of the best climate science, or wherein a sitting president could flagrantly contradict expert epidemiologists because a budding pandemic is inconvenient for his re-election chances, it is clear that the best knowledge alone won't turn the heads

of decision-makers. A shift in thinking about what language in research writing is *for* may begin to address this reality. Models of writing drawn from literature (I use the term broadly to encompass all aesthetic pursuits), which compel as a story and appeal emotionally, provide an opportunity to make this shift, if scholars are open to it. If we're looking for it, these models may even emerge in surprising ways from the inquiry itself, in our citations and phrasing and in the voices of our participants.

33.

Yet the experience of this inquiry has unquestionably sounded a demand to hold literariness accountable to what it does—to the political, to identity and culture and context—in ways an over-emphasis on form fails to do. Attending to this, for me, meant trying to resist the impulse to conceptualize the literary so much as to write it, allowing it to remain an open question, seeking "who and what in the midst of inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space." (Calvino, 1974, p. 176) The form of this chapter attempts to make that space for a variety of Black voices to speak into and animate the gaps in my analysis, pointing to the lives there, prying open the whiteness of literariness as, instead, something yet unfinished.

34.

I can see further that the forms of literariness I've identified often depend on another false split: between linguistic form and sociopolitical content. That is, through this lens, following Jacobson and all the rest theorizing literariness, that what matters is not so much *what* is said as *how*. That the *how* is what makes it literary.

We do not have to think this way. A literary approach might test it otherwise, seeking some balance or new logic between the two. An art with something to say.

35.

The work of W.E.B. Du Bois presents an example of how wrong this dichotomy is, how it violates the poststructural impulse to avoid overly simplistic binaries which otherwise animates my thoughts. (Or, the limitations of poststructural thinking on my own considerations of research). In language and beyond it, Du Bois was an especially artful researcher. His early infographics (e.g., Figure 9), for example, demonstrate a visual playfulness with data and rhetoric that pushes on the formal limitations of research writing. Such striking figures (this one reminds me of Borges' story "The Circular Ruins") place into tension the false binary I've been operating under: that the work of sociologists is fundamentally at odds with the literary approach I've championed in prior chapters.

Figure 9. Visualization from W.E.B. Du Bois' "City and Rural Population. 1890." (Manksy, 2018)

That I wouldn't see this in my early readings of "When School Is Not Enough" points to my own attachments to a white version of literariness, one which depended on defining its value against other disciplines (i.e. sociology) but also other (i.e. Black) literary traditions. This has long been a problem I've encountered applying postmodern thought: disruption is thrilling until one's own identity,

position and privilege become implicated.

36.

I must become the action of my fate.

—June Jordan, "I Must Become a Menace to My Enemies" (2017)

37.

This, the story of the writing: I set out to analyze the writing of researchers on English teaching. I read an article written by three Black women scholars and found it, at first, lacking some literariness. I see, now, the problem: that this was not so surprising, after looking at the uncomfortable whiteness which saturated my initial conception of literariness. Coincidentally (or not), this mirrors the same problem of the deficit-based views on the literacy practices of Black youth to which the article responds.

38.

As such: I'm not sure literariness can bear the load of its own whiteness.

39.

As always: the experience left behind not a few questions to be taken up further: How might the literary constitute something more, beyond what I my (white) self espouse it to be? What else might be set loose? How might leaving the literary question open better allow for the emergence of some humanizing hope?

40.

A mentor once told me that our writing comes to resemble our reading. I'd argue teaching works the same way: the ways we write and read about English teaching inform the ways English teachers, education researchers, teacher educators, and preservice teachers teach and our taught. As such we ought to be careful with language and open to the possibilities embedded within it, for it has a way of getting back to us, of becoming our world. It's like the Borges (1964/2004) story:

> A man sets out to draw the world. As the years go by, he peoples a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals. A short time before he dies, he discovers that the patient labyrinth of lines traces the lineaments of his own face. (p. 93)

There is no getting around it, given its history in this world: the whiteness of the literary face.

41.

> *What else could I do? What else but try to tell you what was really happening when your eyes were looking through? And it is this which frightens me: Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?*

> —Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952, p. 581)

CHAPTER 5: THE HATRED OF ENGLISH, OR DREAMRECOVERING[45]

> I used to think I would grow up to be a person whose reasoning was deep, instead I became a kind of brush. I brush words against words. So do we follow ourselves out of youth, brushing, brushing, brushing wild grapes onto truth.

> Anne Carson, "Reticent Sonnet"

> You learn about literature so that you can participate in the universe in a more direct way; maybe even in a way, if you're lucky for a while, that accompanies and expands the possibilities for living.

> Blake Butler

There is the sense coming to the end of this dissertation that I've failed. (I suspect this is not uncommon.) I set out to see if I could do for English teaching – through research – what literature has done, continues to do, for many people. I introduced the inquiry with a favorite passage from McCarthy in order to show how the experiences of reading and teaching and thinking and writing about *All The Pretty Horses*, among many other texts, have become important to the story I tell myself about myself: as reader, writer, teacher, and person. Reminiscing for the protoproject that served as precursor for this study, I wrote:

> When I need to talk about how literature became important to me, I tell the story of encountering McCarthy's virtuosic coming-of-age tale of life on the Texas-Mexico border. My father gave me the book—importantly, not my teacher—and I alternately reveled and struggled through it on my own time, finding in it more compelling alternatives to the

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[45] The last term borrowed from *Light in August* (Faulkner, 1932/1985, p. 759).

bloodless parochial-school curricula I'd been subjected to my whole (brief) life. I saw the prison-hardened protagonist, John Grady, with his laconic confidence, somehow containing all the literary philosophizing of McCarthy and his stand-in, the matriarch Alfonsa, gallantly a-horseback, violently in love—which is to say I saw my idealized self. (Jarvie, 2019, p. 97)

Put differently, the book revealed to me the "glowing orchard" of literature, set me loose like a "young thief" in that orchard, "loosely [book]jacketed against the cold with ten thousand worlds for the choosing." (McCarthy, 1993, p. 30). Carrying this sensibility through an undergraduate education and years as a secondary English teacher and into grad school, I further explored what literature offered: a sense of the excitement and possibility of life afforded by the mysterious capacities of language. Even the work I did which didn't directly deal with literature and the English classroom (e.g. writing about religion and education) sublimated this impulse, taking up theories that I understand now are animated by a kind of literariness – psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, postmodern theology – which sought to complicate the stories of human beings in and around education, treating persons as complex texts in their own right. Britzman (1995), a major touchstone for my writing, theorizes that the power of the scholarly writer may only lie in a literary "awareness of the play of contradictions and the performances of power that both suture and unravel any ethnographic text. As a question of belief, reading and writing ethnography might provoke a different way of thinking…that worries about that which is not yet." (p. 237) Like Nietzche I hoped to treat life as literature (Nehamas, 1985); I sought (and still do) to recover and enact the dreams I've encountered there.

What I've encountered, over and over again, are my failures to achieve this. That prior inquiry quoted above, for example, pointed to the vanity and sentimentality and overly-romantic narcissism of the project, in which my individual dream became projected upon my students. Of course it didn't work. "Between the wish and the thing", writes McCarthy, "the world lies waiting." (p. 193). In the three chapters which comprise the body of this dissertation, I fall short of my wishes. "The Black

Box" attempted to perform literariness as a verb, closely reading Jennifer Egan's short story through and across my own teaching experience and attending to its formal qualities as literature. In the end what surfaced were the very limitations of that approach to enacting literariness: treating the text formally as literature inhibited me from engaging ethically and relationally with the work as it matters to lives – as I'd have to do were I to successfully engage literariness in an English classroom with real high school students. "How Our Music Marks Our Time" failed from the outset: treating literariness as enchantment, I began (and subsequently) ended conceding that the enchanting qualities of literature, that which generates the types of positive affective attachments I was interested in, are always already weak, subjective, and provisional ones. In other words, they're contingent upon the particular experiences and persons encountering literariness, and so can and do often fail – just as even the best literature doesn't resonate with everyone, only some small fraction of the schooled populace. In a rare occurrence, Whitman (1892/1973) was wrong: everything that belongs to me does not belong to others. The story of the fourth chapter, meanwhile, is one of my failure to see the problems with my own application of literariness, how always already contaminated my approach was by my whiteness. Beckett (1983/1995): "All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed." (p. 87)

The experience of failure should not be unfamiliar to anyone who has ever taught: lessons, observations, assessments, students. Indeed, classroom failings are a primary impetus for doing research on teaching. My first study (Jarvie & Burke, 2015, if it can be called a study) came about because of a lesson dramatically derailed: an otherwise ordinary literature discussion of thematic injustice in Tolstoy riven by emotional irruption, students' sudden tears pointing to the very real ways violence ravaged their lives. I was utterly unprepared as a teacher to deal with that, and so failed, I felt, to act in ways that measured up to the power of the literary text we were reading. That's just one example of the many ways research is borne of a response to such pedagogical shortcomings, but failure is baked too and increasingly into the daily ways we think about teachers. Accountability

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measures, for example, operate under the assumption that teacher failure is to be expected, the people teaching students being human and either ignorant or lazy or selfish, and so must be legislated against with increased observations and merit pay and the like. The literature on teacher burnout (e.g., Dunn, 2013) confirms the troubling extent to which this failure is felt and lived by teachers, as those that aren't pushed out choose to leave the profession after failing to find a teaching life livable. English teachers specifically have their own disappointments: the demeaning of the human elements of their work with students ("Nobody gives a shit what you think or feel", quipped Common Core architect/asshole David Coleman of the standards de-emphasis on creative and personal writing genres); the reduction of the manifold potential treatments of texts to conform to increasingly high-stakes tests; or the ways "writing across the curriculum" initiatives lead to faculty in other content areas casting blame on the inadequacies of students' writing instruction in English courses.

But the experience of failure, Lerner argues in *The Hatred of Poetry* (2016), is inextricable from the art of literature itself. He begins by telling the story of Caedmon, via Bede (731/2003) and Grossman (1997), an illiterate shepherd visited by an angel in a dream; the angel teaches him to sing beautifully. Caedmon awakes as a poet, the first in the English language. But the songs he goes on to sing while awake never live up to the beauty of the song in the dream. "The story expresses how poetry arises from the desire to get beyond the finite and the historical—the human world of violence and difference—and to reach the transcendent or divine", Lerner (2016) contends:

> You're moved to write a poem, you feel called upon to sing, because of the transcendent impulse. But as soon as you move from that impulse to the actual poem, the song of the infinite is compromised by the finitude of its terms. In a dream your verses can defeat time, your words can shake off the history of their usage, you can represent what can't be represented (e.g., the creation of representation itself), but when you wake, when you rejoin

your friends around the fire, you're back in the human world with its inflexible laws and logic.

Thus the poet is a tragic figure. The poem is always a record of failure. (pp. 7-8)

It's a sentiment that reminds me of Gatsby, whose dream is punctured the moment he kisses Daisy and everything he's hoped for over a young lifetime becomes incarnate, turns out to be flawed and mortal after all. Or, a memorable reading from one of my undergraduate literature courses, when my professor interpreted the mysterious cover of Richard Brautigan's (1967) *Trout Fishing in America* (Figure 10). The book opens with a description of the photo, taken in San Francisco's Washington

Figure 10. Image from cover of Richard Brautigan's *Trout Fishing in America.*

Square park, thoroughly describing the Ben Franklin statue in the background – its history, Franklin's own story, the text on its plaque, materials and construction, etc. etc.—as well as the surrounding architecture, weather and lighting, the date, flora visible in the frame, etc. etc. etc. – everything but, the professor noted, the people themselves. Brautigan can't or won't bring himself to render in language the relationship he loves. (Later in the text, the author longs, "I have always wanted to write a book that ended with the word 'mayonnaise.'" [p. 112]; the text does end with that word, misspelled). Like Caedmon these experiences fail because they can't live up to their virtual potential, just as no

actual poem – not even a great one, not even Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays" or any of Dickinson's slanted genius or the odes of Keats[46] – can measure up to the vast promise of Poetry, a concept that encompasses all the social possibility language might afford human beings.

Strangely, cleverly, Lerner offers up this argument (he's a poet, too, of course) in defense of poetry. Embedded in this sense of failure, and the hatred its disappointments engender, he ventures, lies the possibility of its redemption. To explain he cites the beginning of Marianne Moore's "Poetry" (1917/2017):

> I, too, dislike it.
>
> Reading it, however, with a perfect
>
> Contempt for it, one discovers in
>
> It, after all, a place for the genuine. (p. 131)

The first line establishes a connection with the reader, Moore assuring us we're both united in our dislike of literature and its shortcomings despite the fact that she's writing a poem anyway. But the key to Lerner's argument lies in the fourth line, which suggests that reading with contempt allows for the discovery not of the genuine poetic (this is important) but a *place for* it. Engaging with poetry isn't so much or so often for Lerner about encountering the transcendent as it is about making space that it might emerge, or refining an abstract dream yet to come. Lerner (2016) concludes:

> All I ask the haters—and I, too, am one—is that they strive to perfect their contempt, even
>
> consider bringing it to bear on poems, where it will be deepened, not dispelled, and where, by
>
> creating a place for possibility and present absences (like unheard melodies) it might come to
>
> resemble love. (pp. 85-86)

By way of concluding my own argument, I point to the particular failures of this study and the larger failures of research, English teaching, and education writ large as ways of conceptualizing the future

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[46] "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter", wrote Keats in "Ode on a Grecian Urn".

of the profession, what Britzman (1998) identifies as "the paradox…that learning is provoked in the failure to learn." (p. 31)

Implications for the Field of English Teaching Research

What scholars of English education need, I think, having emerged on the other side of this inquiry, is a nostalgia for the future (Miller, 2010; Jarvie, Watson, & Beymer, 2020) of English teaching. Decades of ongoing Canon wars (e.g., Applebee, 1997; Macaluso & Macaluso, 2018) have compellingly applied critical theory to the cherished tomes of the secondary English curriculum in the U.S., revealing the harm that (mostly white) English educators' continued attachments to a narrow band of literature (your Salingers, Lees, Steinbecks, and Hawthornes) have on an increasingly diversifying student population. Yet the issue is not only about text selection: Macaluso (2016) usefully expands outward from the canon to consider "canonicity" in the classroom as a discursive frame shaping English teacher practice. Through that lens it's not only that the texts English teachers choose are problematically distorted by and reproduced as a result of nostalgia; there is also a troubling canon of connected instructional practices, ways of framing literature, and of envisioning the daily work of English teachers. Moreover, nostalgia is a particularly troubling notion today, as "in the current political context there is a rhetorical weaponizing of nostalgia, deployed to racist, xenophobic, and sexist ends in a bid to return the U.S. to past 'greatness'" (Jarvie, Watson, & Beymer, 2020, p. 2). All of which points convincingly to the ways sentimentality about the past, be it the books we've always read or the ways we've traditionally taught, needs reworking for the future. These critiques often dwell less, however, on the positive affective attachments this history and its artifacts generates in English teachers and their students. The past, I'm saying, comes to construct the field of English teaching; it populates classroom libraries, constitutes curriculum and so forms our experiences, allowing us to build and maintain identities. It provides worlds for (some of) us to live in, and love. The problem, of

course, is that that past world is an exclusive place; as new and different ways of being emerge many can't find what they need there, or even find that past actively hostile to their emergent existence. What I suggest, building from Lerner, is that we learn to develop a weak attachment to the future through our scholarship, a kind of provisional Romantic sentimentality for the potential of what's to come, a longing for the possibilities we cannot know now but might yet live if we're open to them.

Put differently, we need a literariness without literature. Literariness as "the turning away from literature as being tethered to a concrete work or text. It is an appropriation of literature as a philosophical value to be found in anything." (Campbell, 2018, para. 7). An approach to English teaching not bound by form, or genre, which can put poetry and pop music, emergent digital forms and timeworn prose side-by-side as equipment for teaching and learning and living (Robbins, 2017). Even language (Figure 11): How might we think an English without English? The embrace of contradiction I've (re)turned to over and over again as the mark of literariness shows up here, again,
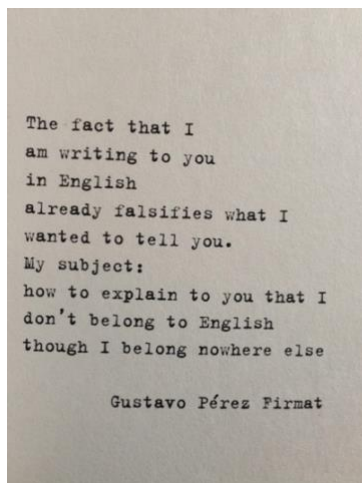

The fact that I
am writing to you
in English
already falsifies what I
wanted to tell you.
My subject:
how to explain to you that I
don't belong to English
though I belong nowhere else

Gustavo Pérez Firmat

Figure 11. Excerpt from Gustavo Perez Firmat's *Bilingual Blues.*

for its continued usefulness: it becomes the way I see the field moving forward in the midst of its necessary paradoxes. Like the one poetic line I see pop up over and over again (e.g., Barad, 2007; Kuby & Crawford, 2017) in emergent ontological theorizing of research: "nothing will unfold for us unless we move towards what looks like nothing." (Fulton, 1990, p. 2). A contradiction should be

understood not as a dead-end or an impasse but rather as something we might move towards. Very well.

Implications for English Teacher Practice

My prescriptions or prophecies for the work of English teaching going forward are not all that novel. Like Bingham (2011) wrote a decade ago, advocating "Two Educational Ideas for 2011 and Beyond" this study advances a program for English teaching that is poetic. (Of course). Bingham justified a poetic approach as a response to what he calls the event of the mute teacher, in which standardization, accountability reforms, and particularly the encroachment of massively online ed tech (i.e. MOOC's: asynchronous platforms that lucratively scale up classroom ratios into the tens of thousands), render the individual contribution of the teacher mute. Rather, poetic teaching offers a kind of anti-best practice, in which the teacher offers "translations of experience" or "renditions of life to students. Renditions that are [their] own, not anybody else's…poetic utterances for students to savor." (p. 518) Literariness, taken up in teaching, would likely do the same: animating singular, unsubstitutable aesthetic accounts of life, "models of plurality that might breathe life into our own" (Campbell, 2018, para. 19). Put differently, beyond language, Bingham and I advocate a relational pedagogy (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004) decoupled from the concrete text, literariness becoming a matter of encountering the promise and vitality of life wherever we find it, perhaps in the worlds of characters in novels or perhaps in community with people. In a relational pedagogy, the teacher "has the role of one who creates the circumstances for belonging and meaningfulness…Without the teacher, a school is just like any other of the myriad places people can learn. With the teacher, the school can become a community" (Bingham, 2011, p. 517) wherein lives might thrive.

Bingham writes of teaching broadly, but these two recommendations – to (1) open up understandings of reading and writing to meet students where they are, or will be; (2) to rethink

English teaching and learning so that it matters to youth today – are not novel to the English and literacy education either. A two-decades old shift towards new and multiliteracies has done much to explore the first, scholars and educators turning to contemporary digital forms and multimodal ways of thinking about text to re-envision curriculum and practice for the 21st century. Moreover, a passionate movement to envision and enact social justice through curriculum and pedagogy, with a particular focus on marginalized youth's literacy practices and assets to teaching and learning, has become central to conversations on what it means to meaningfully teach and research English today. This study dovetails with those two conversations, offering not a third point of emphasis or a new direction but a model for how we might supplement the work with a less certain, less scientific, more aesthetically-minded approach, which is important if the work is to attend to the complexities of human experience, just as literature can.

What may be needed, going forward, is a further ontological shift, one wherein we teach the core values of "the literary arts (i.e., establishing connection, producing sympathy, triggering change, and affecting the world) …not by showing and revealing the world to [students], but by being in the world with [them]" (Huehls, 2016, p. 24). Perhaps less English teaching, then, at least as we're used to thinking about it, and more reading, writing, being, and becoming with students in classrooms. That's a sentiment I find, eerily, modeled in McCarthy's novel, the protagonists embarking on their journey out "into the swarming stars so that they rode not under but among them…" (p. 24). I shouldn't be surprised.

One problem with offering implications, of course, is that, insofar as implications are specific and actionable, they are not very literary. While literariness may offer English teachers, teacher educators, and educational researchers many useful things – nuanced accounts of life, or imaginative envisionings of practice, or poetry – what it doesn't do well is reduce and translate experience into discrete recommendations, just as one finds it difficult to condense a vast and multifarious work of

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literature into two or three essential takeaways. Instead I think irreducibility is exactly what makes a work literary. I agree with Zadie Smith (2019): The responsibility of what should be taken from a literary work, what should be learned, does not reside with the author. "Only the reader decides. So decide." (para. 34) Literariness as a value for writing and teaching offers space for that decision, for relevant implications (if any) that emerge from the experience of the reader or student themselves, in the particular contexts in which they inquire, learn, work, and live.

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