Combatting Assumption in a Fluid Myth Classroom

by

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ABSTRACT

The need to draw a more explicit connection between literature and the daily lives of students has become an increasingly pressing issue. Preeminent literary scholars have long argued that the design of many undergraduate classrooms only engages the student with literature to a degree that, long term, does not produce habits of criticism that engage students with wider contexts of conflict. The yield instead primarily takes place in a classroom. Leading scholars tend to draw connections of value between the work they are teaching and the lives of students by focusing on how they negotiate specific power discourses. However, placing an emphasis on having habits of criticism function regarding specific biases in contexts restricts the kinds of conflict students are prepared to negotiate. To encourage a habit of critical thinking in undergraduate students that can be applied to any context of conflict and bias, a vocabulary on language failure should be taught and analyzed through its implications in origin myths that explain and justify division. Language failure, or the failure of symbols to represent subjects in their full capacity, is a concept and theory introduced by Kenneth Burke to examine conflict at a conceivable root. Burke suggests that language failure is the core of misrepresentation and conflict and is inevitably the result of any 'identification', or selection of meaning that is assigned to symbols. Identifications are selections of meaning and conceptions of value that organize bodies towards a social purpose, under a limited perspective. The danger of language failure is present when it goes unacknowledged. In identifications, the repercussions of language failure continually complicate, divide and propagate in discourse; assumptions about the validity of identifications encourage more complex 'blind-spots' and misrepresentations that exclude populations and have violent potentials.

The more complex the layering of association between identifications becomes, the more obscured their foundational failure, their nature of non-innateness, is, faced as truth, affective as justice. The 'affective' foundation behind these powerful associations and assumptions is myth. Origin myth, or a narrative that explains the beginning of some worldly phenomena, founds, and adapts to the needs of culture and society. Teaching students to regard risks of language use as being foundational in their cultural thought, their criticism, and their communication, enriches their capability to negotiate and participate ambivalently in conflicts faced during their daily lives.

DEDICATION

Thank you, to those who have taught me what it means to learn.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the amount of undergraduate and graduate students studying English declines,

the need to draw a more explicit connection between literature and the daily lives of

students has become an increasingly pressing issue. In *The Decline of the Humanities and

the Decline of Society*, Ibanga B. Ikpe writes that humanities scholarship has been

perceived "...to have failed to evolve with society and has therefore lost its relevance."

Indeed, she notes: "Its academic offerings are generally seen as belonging to the bygone

days when there was no need for specialized skills…" (Ikpe 50-51). Preeminent literary

scholars such as Ipke have long argued that the design of many undergraduate classrooms

only engages the student with literature to a degree that, long term, does not produce

habits of mind that enable them to productively engage conflict in their lives. The yield of

benefit, instead, primarily takes place in a classroom.

Wayne Booth and Janet Galligani Casey have negotiated this issue from two

perspectives. In *The Ethics of Teaching Literature*, Wayne Booth writes that studying

literature 'for literature's sake' does not provide a lasting impact on students. He argues

that engaging students with the ethics underlying a story is enough to enable them to

make the jump from thinking critically about ethics as they are presented in texts, to

thinking critically about the ethics being valued in the cultures surrounding them, giving

students a keener idea of how to track the development of cultural logics[1]. In *Canon

Issues and Class Contexts: Teaching American Literature From a Market Perspective*,

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[1] Cultural logic is the interpretation of one's world using natural logical principles, and with reference to
premises provided by, and usually specific to, particular cultural settings (cf. Hutchins, 1980). (Enfield 40)
The Theory of Cultural Logic

Janet Galligani Casey argues that students should be taught to track patterns of information flow from a market perspective so that they may negotiate more readily with the refinery process landing texts in classrooms, enabling students to analyze how power flow effects their class biases.

Both Booth and Casey place an emphasis on observing literature as it regards specific, systemic biases students may face or be affected by; they argue that students should be placed at a point of observation that enables them to reflect on specific components of larger, more powerful systems of influence. Booth, Casey, and other leading scholars tend to draw connections of value between the work they are teaching and the lives of students by focusing on how they negotiate the specific discourses and sources of conflict surrounding the student directly. By nurturing these perspectives, they enable students to negotiate specific structures of bias independent of the classroom, in a way that is adaptable to the student's life. However, placing an emphasis on having habits of criticism function in regards to specific biases in 'power' discourses, restricts the kinds of conflict students are prepared to negotiate generally.

In Booth and Casey's case, the specific discourses they engage their students with are the 'dramatization of ethics' in the classroom, and the capitalist refinery process that selects texts for the classroom and controls the flow of information, which I would argue is too specific and too developed a dialect to focus on when introducing undergraduate students to a foundation of criticism, that is, if the goal is to establish critical habits that will hopefully engage them with the more developed repercussions of theory in the real world (Booth 50; Casey 23). To encourage a habit of critical thinking in undergraduate students that they can apply to any context of conflict and bias, regardless of whether

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they are in the classroom, the habit of mind to be nurtured must be more foundational to developed theory. This base habit must contribute to, and enrich, more specific bodies of critical theory, such as environmental, race or feminist studies; such as the specificities analyzed by Booth and Casey in their class plans. But, importantly, this foundation should also remain effective in adding depth to mundane sources of conflict such as an argument between coworkers, or a reflection on how one presents oneself in public. Literature, I argue, should be recognized for how it foundationally stages language failure; the concept that language, or symbols, fail to represent the full complexity of what they interpret, resulting in division. In order to accommodate this prolific perspective, a vocabulary of language failure, and a study of myth offer the most comprehensive example for synthesizing the significance of language failure in an accessible way, as myth is ubiquitous in mainstream culture, just as much as language failure is unavoidable. Influential of all modes and concepts of storytelling, founding of moral hierarchies in organizing social bodies and existent across cultures, myth is foundational to society. The goal in studying myth with a vocabulary of language failure, is to provide a foundation that allows students to interpretively track patterns of bias and assumption more readily, to add complexity to points of conflict in any capacity, to enrich sensitivity to social dynamics at a core level, to negotiate hierarchies productively and positively. A vocabulary on language failure in combination with a study of myth form the baseline for the critical habits that I recommend be taught to undergraduate students, as the general insight they yield not only helps students practically negotiate mundane conflict outside of the classroom, it helps them possess a richer understanding

of theory in general, and more academically neutral, it gives them critical habits they can apply in any field.

Language failure, or the failure of symbols to represent subjects in their full capacity, is a concept and theory introduced by Kenneth Burke to examine conflict at a conceivable root. Burke suggests that language failure is the core of misrepresentation and conflict, and is inevitably the result of any 'identification', or selection of meaning that is assigned to symbols. Burke argues that in the process of selecting meaning, one conceives of value; bodies are organized and prioritized around a limited perspective. The danger of language failure is present when it goes unacknowledged in the form of an assumption. For example, one may hold assumptions of 'good and bad', which are concepts Burke describes as eulogistic coverings, or terms that justify the allocation of property and authority. When we enter into identifications of 'good' and 'bad' without assuming that there is inherent risk and selection in our choice, the assumption validates a hierarchy of morality that is not innate; the unfortunate aspect of this is that there will always be individuals who exist at the bottom, or outside of these conceptions; more often than not, these individuals are placed in a spot where they cannot fully negotiate their position. So, for example, one may look at the marked logic of religion; both how it morally explains the origin of divide, and how people should attempt bridging, or reigning superior in that line of division, by moving closer to the 'right' path. Because there is an established 'right' in proximity to certain ideals, actions, bodies etc., one can identify themselves as 'good' or 'bad' when interpreting one's distance from the ideals; unfortunately, this places people inevitably in the territory of bad; those of differing cultures, beliefs, bodies, become organized as others with emotional justifications of

righteousness. Identifications, or divisions, such as these, continually complicate, divide

and propagate in discourse; assumptions about the validity of one's identifications

encourage more complex 'blind-spots' and misrepresentations that exclude populations;

blind spots, or biased assumptions, have violent potentials. The more complex the

layering of association between identifications becomes, the more obscured their

foundational failure, their nature of non-innateness, is, as it incorrectly becomes faced as

a relative truth, affective as justice. When language failure goes unobserved as a basic

tendency in speech, separation between peoples becomes an emotional, associational

matter. This pattern in language use, as well as its violent implications, can be tracked for

its social role via analysis in terms of the 'moral', or the founding hierarchy behind these

powerful associations and assumptions that regulates 'goodness' in an infrastructure

influenced by myth.

      For instance, we may look at the unsettling perspectives in the 2017 travel ban,

where Muslims from 6 middle eastern countries were blocked from entering the United

States[2]. "...the heart of the sweeping executive action," New York Times author, Glenn

Thrush, writes: "...[is] Mr. Trump's 'American first' pledge to safeguard against what he

has portrayed as a hidden influx of terrorists and criminals--- a hard-line campaign

promise that resonated deeply with white working-class voters." (Thrush 246). There are

layers of identification informing each other in this consideration; the Christian mythos

and predominance influences the relationship with the Islamic other, who is outside of

it's moral proximations; the Christian mythos influences the dialogue of justice

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[2] *Trump's New Travel Ban Blocks Migrants From 6 Nations, Sparing Iraq*, Glenn Thrush

expounded by the government, of which, it has foundationally influenced. The mis-association between "terrorist", "criminal" and "Muslim" has been gorged by a disturbing consubstantiation, a government propaganda that allows it to purify its authority over 'the free', by organizing the actions of individual, violent radicals, as having some remnant of commonality with innocent men and women. A Muslim, the initiative argues subliminally, is not a Christian American, but a danger to the system that must be purified. And evidently, this is the 'feeling' of "white working-class voters" who have been appealed to that vision by layers of othering reflecting their own economic interests: their 'right' to property, nation, American identity, and religious authority.

While there are a variety of complex forms to myth, to track its implications essentially, a course can focus on how language failure complicates an origin myth, or a narrative that explains the beginning of some worldly phenomena, and how this myth travels and adapts to the needs of culture and society as it travels through influential texts. Teaching students to regard risks of language use (as being that of language failure, and as being perpetuated emotionally by moral hierarchies found in myth) as being foundational in their cultural thought, their criticism, and their communication, enriches their potential to negotiate and participate ambivalently in conflicts; they acquire foundational knowledge on misrepresentation that enriches their base abilities to communicate and reflect on the varying complexities of conflict in their daily lives and in their identities; they are less likely to assume inherent value in their assumptions, and, hopefully, they are positioned to act more ambivalently, as opposed to passionately, when considering their position against the line of an argument.

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An awareness of language failure is the bedrock of critical analysis, and hopefully, to students it can be a habit of reflection simple enough to be retained in attitude. Introducing an undergraduate course focused on tracking how a piece of 'common' literature is influenced by a fluid, origin myth [4] modifies the student's reaction to contemporary discourses and connects them to an awareness of the inhuman, damaging inclinations of language that they can observe and negotiate with at a peaceable level of 'objectivity'. To arrange this point further, I will first engage with Kenneth Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives*, and *Permanence and Change*; Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, and John Bryant's *The Fluid Text*. Primarily, I will be focusing on the following concepts: Burke's 'language failure', 'identification' and 'origin myth', Bryant's 'textual fluidity', which I will render into my concept of a 'fluid myth', and Foucault's 'power discourse', which will round out the implications of why designing a course focused on how origin myths dramatize and negotiate language failure across texts is important for students negotiating daily politics. To serve the needs of students navigating constant states of conflict, the benefit from studying language failure in a 'fluid myth' classroom is that, in understanding how symbols revolve and attach to bodies, by which I mean, in understanding how bodies are incompletely identified to make them functional in terms of a social agenda, a perception of goodness, students gain essential tools that enable them to track a fuller complexity of how power discourses fundamentally misrepresent and assume value in a limited perspective, that is not innate. The goal is, that students perceive the stakes from the myth prescribed, and that they are equipped by a language failure vocabulary to see assumptions and patterns of bias

generally illustrated and informed by myth, across contexts and stakes, as they inform

one another.

CHAPTER 2

IDENTIFICATION AND DISCOURSES OF POWER

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke introduces his concept of

'identification'. The idea relies on the basis of consubstantiality, which Burke describes

as the non-conscious process of interpretation and persuasion, 'to identify A with B…" to

initiate social function, or, 'acting-together' (ROM 21). This 'Identification' of 'oneness'

between the subjects or objects tied in a symbol, is drawn to create social function, and is

an act of selection and value making. Importantly, identification does not draw an

inherent relationship, merely, it invents one. This is what Burke calls 'the paradox of

substance'; the act of labeling acknowledges there is no inherent label or relationship to

be observed. These identifications come equipped with a level of exclusion for other

possibilities, although their selection makes social organization and productivity

possible. In *Clarifying Ambiguity and the Undecidable: A Comparison of Burkean and

Derridean Thought*, Kevin McClure and Kristine Cabral write that:

"The paradox of substance and the symbolic act do not lead us to the nihilistic

abyss…for it is precisely the irresolvable ambiguity of substances that motivates

rhetorical constructions of 'reality.' Although the ambiguity of meaning and substance

creates potentialities for division, it also provides for identifications among multiple

meanings and realities. In this sense, rhetoric is the advocacy of realities; it is partisan, as

it seeks to decide among the paradoxes of substance and definition" (Cabral McClure 76).

The need to identify, while only generated in the act of identification, comes at the cost of

the abstract, but results in a functional purpose; for while objects in abstract remain

undifferentiated, and lack observable, innate hierarchy in not being articulated perfectly

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into one, labeling them organizes their use and draws them into a function one can positively negotiate. Importantly, one must be able to observe that there is room to negotiate moral hierarchies and cultural logics (ROM 21). Due to the limitations of perspective inherent to identification, Burke argues that identification, as a core mechanism for generating and distinguishing objects through symbols, "…is compensatory to division" (22). What this intimates is that in any language selection, one is omitting and providing information with limited context, and that language use must be further complicated so that it can control the parameters of this organic result of division; it must 'compensate' for the division created in meaning making, in doing so, identification only obscures the inevitability of blind spots further by growing more complex. The limitation in turn, is a tendency to obscure language failure in one's social discourse. Burke writes, "The problems of existence do not have one fixed, unchanging character, like the label on a bottle. They are open to many interpretations—and these interpretations in turn influence our selection of means." (POM 10); what I can combine from these points is that identifications 'flow' amongst each other in the production of symbolic meaning. In the end, creating more, and more complicated mechanisms of division that result in a tendency of assumption for those favored by specific, systemic identifications.

In *Permanence and Change*, Kenneth Burke argues that, inherent in one's obligation to socially and intellectually function by means of imperfect symbols, there is a responsibility to consider the implications of inevitable language failure and how it's

blind spots manipulate discourse to the point that it produces violence[3] against 'others'.

Burke writes:

> "Orientation can go wrong. Consider, for instance, what conquest over the environment we have attained through our powers of abstraction, of generalization; and then consider the stupid national or racial wars which have been fought precisely because these abstractions were mistaken for realities."
>
> (PAC 6)

Burke's lines remind us that one does not encompass the abstract nature of what is symbolized simply because one restrains it into an image or associates an 'imagined inherent' form from symbols. Identifications are incomplete, and in fact remind that, if unacknowledged as incomplete or false, the complication of deception continues to travel as identifications inform new identifications in more and more advanced degrees of consubstantiation. These branched and advanced failures culminate in cultural logics that warrant the reflective responses of theory, such as that of race, feminism, or marxism; but these theories do not start at a foundation of language conflict, nor should they; they are advanced perspectives on the division of bodies. However, because students are often launched into these theoretical conversations without a vocabulary of language failure, the process of division is obscured by the very methods meant to dissuade it; theory, although it conceptually neutralizes division, risks informing students of new cultural

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[3] Violence, as in physical attack and emotional disregard towards a party as an act of rhetorical restriction. It is engineered through scapegoating, a tendency of exclusion that is perpetuated by assumptions of cultural logics. A systemic control or logic over who is allowed on rhetorical platforms to defend or challenge their position in a society creates targets for violence by making 'others' that appear to challenge the moral system of a discourse (morality, as regulated loosely in standards of normativity). These assumptions of value regarding bodies are typically engineered and challenged through the adaptation of myths towards a social agenda.

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logics, without allowing them to negotiate these new perspectives objectively. In the beginnings of theory conversation, a sense of morality is, consciously or not, assumed by students, or their past assumptions are entrenched in opposition to what they are being taught; and this sense becomes difficult to challenge productively in the course of a class period, as students are superficially opposed to a 'wrongdoing' or 'immoral' rendering of information or textual selection to the point where they may retain the very violent attitudes that they might oppose if written in a different vocabulary. The risk in young scholars observing issues with an unchallenged moral assumption, is, in an extreme case, the same violent action they despise being perpetuated at its opposite, or rather, cyclical extreme. In terms of a new assumption of truth, or a defiantly entrenched former moral assumption, the assumption grows into a justice phrasing their prerogatives. The primary point here is that, fundamentally, the misrepresentation in identifications yields assumption, and accrues emotional consubstantiation as it travels into a moral logic.

This moral logic tends to be informed by a structure of myth, which we may call a narrative identification, or a foundation that explains division in terms of foundational justice; myth tries to express that there is innate morality to aspects of the universe. The risk of not acknowledging this as a foundation to social reasoning leaves students to the vicious cycle of assumption; they again, are placed in a position where they cannot attempt swallowing subjects in a greater context; One cannot locate the full complexity of individual motives, or the baggage of biological and environmental influences on interpretation that feelings are pointed towards in a consistent, neutral way without the vocabulary for it. Because students function through identifications, they are divided and managed by them, and because teachers and philosophers, theoreticians, are also

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language users, they are divided and managed by language failure in their every selection as well. This information should be taught in order to develop critical habits that aid students towards analyzing the management of bodies politically and personally, with an air of distance and care for the inhuman tendency for division that continues to blind them. One, if left unaware of these tendencies, can only generally interpret how identifications fail from the perspective of emotionally leveled discourses that require the expulsion of tension through blame; discourses of power that they cannot functionally escape; they are informed by social, moral hierarchies and must write and interpret amidst them. These discourses are incomplete, no matter how broadly they are assumed (as the product of language failure) and employ a greater function at a greater cost: scapegoating[4], and restriction. These seemingly inevitable results spawning from the risks inherent in identicative acts of selection and proliferation; they are amplified by assumptions that hold the illusion of innate value. Artificial biases are shaped into normative standards, and students continue to struggle negotiating them if the theory they are introduced to does not acknowledge these aforementioned factors.

In Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault navigates this risk-inhabiting state of selection, proliferation, and assumption in his archival

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[4] "As for the scapegoat mechanism in its purest form, the use of a sacrificial receptacle for the ritual unburdening of one's sins...all that was needed for a formula and ritual whereby these sins could be transferred to the back of an animal, the animal was then ferociously beaten or slain--and the feeling of relief was apparent to all." (PAC 16);
"For the scapegoat is 'charismatic,' a vicar. As such, it is profoundly consubstantial with those who, looking upon it as a chosen vessel, would ritualistically cleanse themselves by loading the burden of their own iniquities upon it. Thus, the scapegoat represents the principle of division in that its persecutors would alienate from themselves to it their own uncleanlinesses. For one must remember that a scapegoat cannot be 'curative' except insofar as it represents the iniquities of those who would be cured by attacking it." (GOM 406)

investigation on how power discourses are generated, namely, the generation of current modes of power discourse, or, modes of language control and influence that are employed by an authority to use conceptions of duty, or normativity, towards economic goals. In *Permanence and Change,* Burke writes: "The drives have derivative aspects: The hunger drive can be converted into commercial ambition, the sexual drive can be expressed as a concern for the welfare of society, the procreative drive can be turned into art, etc." (POM 34); The takeaway focuses on essential human needs being reformatted into complications of conception, into standards with hierarchy; power discourses, as Foucault would phrase things. The schema of power discourse Foucault describes argues post-industrialist societies are regulated by a 'Scientia Sexualis', or "…the procedures for telling the truth of sex which are geared to a form of knowledge-power strictly opposed to the art of initiations and the masterful secret…" (58). Foucault argues that sexual discourse has been complicated to hold more detailed control over the 'bio' economy of population and workforce. It is able to do this due to the 'confession' custom in a Scientia Sexualis (a tendency to 'confess', branched into contemporary mindsets from medieval religious ritual) (Foucault 19). Through the implementation of an assumed 'normativity', his example is heterosexuality, confessions of 'perversion' provoked by powerful entities can more effectively extend and complicate power discourses to cover and identify more aspects of bodies in order to value them more efficiently in terms of an economical function; economic in the sense of financial economy, and the economy of power maintenance (Foucault 153). Those who systematically reinforce the power discourse, namely, the government, allow 'power' to flow in certain directions by obscuring that it's discourse regarding normativity is not innate (Foucault 155). This is

something one can view as the magnified result of symbolic tendencies of language failure. Language seeks to represent, but it fails to possess a fully accurate, fully dominating power over that representation- although, it would attempt to fool us into assuming its false hierarchies and standards for the sake of interpretive function by means of what Burke describes as the tendency towards a 'process of mystification', or, 'the covering of motives' (Burke 99). In obscuring it's mechanisms, power is able to regulate longer in the forms it materializes in (it is a conceptual entity beyond any one government), however, because it operates in pretense, it also concocts an inevitable rise in tensions that must be negotiated- as bodies are not fully covered or equally prosperous under any regulation of normativity. The risk is, when the tide turns towards a tension that can no longer be negotiated due to entrenched, passionate lines of division that are informed in terms of emotionality, by shifty moral logics and unyielding myth.

Foucault and Burke establish that there is a permanent flow of power behind division at different levels of language division; power flows in bias, and its discourse grows more and more complex and deceptive, aided by the artificial, emotional values of right and wrong, normativities, that convince us that an analysis of 'myths', as we will explain them further in the next section, needs to be analyzed as case studies in introductory undergraduate classrooms in order to negotiate the state of conflict, the power lines of division outside of the classroom. It would be impossible to get rid of social tensions, but it is very possible to allow students to negotiate them more objectively, productively; in a way that complicates whatever level of power discourse, or hierarchy they are subjected to by making it appear less innate foundationally; the foundation of emotional fervor for division should be tracked from it's baseline. The relevance of acknowledging the role of

identification in power discourses is that it enables us to understand the magnified tendencies and implications of language failure, as these implications reveal my concerns in two parts. Firstly, the emphasis on power discourses obscuring the non-innate nature of norms affects everyone, and these terms of innate value flow into classrooms, homes, social dynamics, as all are institutions facilitated by power discourse. The second point of significance we have gained, is a recognition that students are emotionally and economically regulated by artificial concepts of good and bad, but they are given a limited vocabulary for observing the falseness behind these moral economies. It is difficult to observe an objective tendency for division, and the selection process that blinds them in identifications, if they lack the critical vocabulary on language failure to enhance their critical thinking and negotiation skills. To establish these points even further, we need a more fleshed out concept of myth in order to regard the full implication of language failure's risks, and even, some of the risks we take in selecting our myths to study.

CHAPTER 3

MYTH, TEXTUAL FLUIDITY AND THE FLUID MYTH

Myth

To preface this section, I must begin by stating that staging the value of myth inherits beneficial risks; allow me to explain: Bruce Lincoln states in Theorizing Myth that: "…whenever someone calls something a 'myth,' powerful—and highly consequential—assertions are being made about its relative level of validity and authority vis-à-vis other sorts of discourse." (Lincoln ix). Any myth we select for pedagogy, is a selection that accrues bias and assumption. In addition to the basic function of selection, the act of selecting how we use myth is also complicated. In *The Story of Myth*, Sarah Iles Johnston notes: "any definition that we assign to 'myth' must be understood as heuristic" (Johnston 6). In other words, while one might adapt and create versions of definitions, or choose versions of what constitutes myth to observe how it is useful in different capacities, myth remains subjective and aloof; impossible to objectively analyze. In selecting examples of it, there are dangers in the argument underlying the choice: calling a story a myth implies that a story has hold over bodies of discourse, an argument that broaches and suggests foundational insight into the human mind, and risks informing a subtle assumption on standards of normativity, even while trying to negotiate these standards as they are presented in myth. This damage, admittedly, cannot be avoided even in my argument; after all, I agree that the standards of what constitute 'myth' are in motion, its definition is always going to be subject revision. But in referring to 'origin stories' as an example negotiated by language failure, I believe the risk of negotiating the role of a myth in a given culture is minimized, in fact, it is beneficial towards my goal.

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Acknowledging these risks, I need only argue that the bias found in the decision made regarding the selection of an origin myth may be negotiated through a language failure vocabulary; even in matters of textual selection, the concepts behind language failure allow one to productively doubt how information travels, how meaning changes and value is ascribed. The main point where we must be careful in selecting our origin myth for the classroom, is in negotiating whether it is, indeed, a foundational narrative, one that has impacted cultures over time; it should explain the beginning of a universal phenomena, and be translated through later narratives. So, with this established, allow me to elaborate more on how a study of origin myths is necessary for undergraduate students, and on how one can choose a myth for a 'fluid myth' study. To begin, I must recognize in greater detail that myth has been broken into varying definitions to accommodate different purposes and perspectives. Myth is multifaceted enough in terms of it being a general concept, to be worked into explanations and studies of human behavior, natural phenomenon, social regulation, 'pre-scientific interpretation', etymology, semiotics, anthropology, and theology (Honko 45). As I hinted at earlier, these 'solutions' to the shifting status of 'myth' are in a state of fluidity themselves, and they are not without their unique dilemmas. However, these perspectives each offer components that are especially helpful in explaining why tracking moral economies as they are revealed in origin myths, via a language failure vocabulary, is relevant and helpful for students. So, allow me to risk my selection of what constitutes a 'functional' and 'fluid myth' via risky deduction.

In *The Problem of Defining Myth*, Lauri Honko breaks studies of myth into several perspectives, all twelve she produces are useful, but the ones that especially stand out in the sense that I would fashion a 'fluid' function of myth from, run as the following:

> "1. Myth as source of cognitive categories. Myth is seen as an explanation for enigmatic phenomena. The intellect needs to conceptualize certain aspects of the universe, to establish the relationship between different phenomena…2. Myth as a form of symbolic expression. Myth is placed on a par with other creative activities, such as poetry or music. Myth has its own laws, its own reality, its own forms of expression: it may be looked upon as a projection of the human mind, as a symbolic structuring of the world…Myth as a projection of the subconscious. Myth is seen in relation to a substratum shared partly by all humans, partly only by members of the same race, nation, culture…5. Myth as charter of behavior. Myth gives support to accepted patterns of behavior by placing present-day situations in a meaningful perspective with regard to the precedents of the past…"
> (Honko 47)

These four perspectives on origin myth encompass key components of how myth indicates value in terms of it's sociological, semiotic, and critical capacities across texts: origin myth serves to conceptualize worldly phenomena, 'represents' in poetic and metaphorical terms (metaphor, I would suggest, is a more molecular representation of language failure, in that it attempts to bridge division in a abstraction), and 'projects' or 'affects' feelings of intuition and instinct by regulating a basic, moral hierarchy to organize a worldly phenomenon; myth also, arguably, structures ritual and sovereignty. For example, we can look to the pledge of allegiance and it's hidden dangers. One line, I

will focus on: "...and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible…" what is so provocative in this example is the way it designates groups in two forms via a reference to Christian myth. Firstly, that it is those under a Christian God that fulfill the status of the republic, that they are chosen and remain indivisible under God's judgement of the sanctity of their hold over the nation, and secondly, that the line was directly adjusted in 1934 to contain the term 'under God' as a response to communism, meaning an almost duplicit non-innateness has taken place; but nonetheless, the adjustment is assumed enough so that the accusation remains that those of alternate faith and ideology are not of 'our' assumed republic. A third component of interest, is that this is a propaganda rehearsed by schoolchildren; a ritual of patriotism that affirms their American, Christian identities by a pledge they are not capable of interpreting. Students, if I may presume, can only roughly feel of the pledge's importance, but they do not conceive of it's hidden propaganda; the feeling of an ordained community is all that leaks through. This example, like other Myths, explains 'division' and, to some extent, introduces a conceptual foundation of morality to discourses that reinforce specific forms of divide. Myth runs at the heart of a power discourse when one considers these components combined into renditions of normative standards (normativity, is mythic). To tether these aspects into our larger argument for the section, which is that myths inform moral economies and dramatize language failure, it seems reasonable to reflect more on what 'founding' explorers of myth's social value have had to argue on each of these points. The conclusion to this journey will be an interpretation on how origin myth informs discourse, staging the significance of their study in an introductory classroom.

In *The Hero of A Thousand Faces* (1948), Joseph Campbell argues that myths are spun in intimation of a negotiation with the unknown: "…The symbols of mythology are not manufactured; they cannot be ordered, invented, or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous productions of the psyche, and each bears within, undamaged, the germ power of its source", to Campbell, Myth in its 'various costumes' represents a 'timeless' insight into the human mind (Campbell 1-2). Campbell argues that 'cosmic', mystifying regulations of myth yield to 'greatness' and wonder beyond man, and that their functions have more modernly been disguised in a dialect of scientific consideration; one that frames the feelings of the unknown into agendas of science, capitalism, propaganda, (economy) as opposed to a scrambling to observe basic civilization. The connection between a former state of suspension and a modern stance of control are tethered in their chronological relationship; they're connected as phases on a timeline. Myth, therefore, exists as the threshold from which one can venture back into some investigation of consciousness that is atemporally appealing, affective in the terms that it regulates justice in a space of the unknown; Campbell's analysis regards what common nature has spawned myth, has expressed it in repeating patterns, in attempt to productively feel and organize the unknown (Campbell 335-337). Myth, as a foundational narrative, contains hidden insight into how order and feeling negotiate in the psyche. If we negotiate this with some of the work done by Carl Jung, the insight into myth's importance is rendered even clearer.

In *Man and His Symbols* (1964), Carl Jung writes of a holistic vision of myth's 'spontaneous' yield in the psyche; Jung writes:

"…the analogies between ancient myths and the stories that appear in the dreams

of modern patients are neither trivial nor accidental[5]. They exist because the

unconscious minds of modern man preserve the symbol-making capacity that

once found expression in the beliefs and rituals of the primitive" (Jung 98).

Jung's logic regarding a collective understanding of myth neatly flows into an

explanation of myth's semiotic, or symbolic value. Jung intimates imperfectly that there

is a poetic, interpretive aspect of myth that can yield insight into psychological patterns in

collectives. Jung recognizes the symbolic value of myths as being the result of a

collective propensity, and he phrases the psyche as being constituted in, turn, by universal

symbols, such as myth; he considers myth as having the ability to provide insight into the

mechanisms symbol use, which he uses in deciphering 'truth' from how myths flow

through dreams to indicate their psyche-altering effect. In *Man and His Symbols*, Myth as

a concept is forged into the core of a profound imaginative capacity. When this capacity

is considered in light of waking realities, myths exist as archaic stories that provide

insight on the waking psychological position of man (Jung 100). What I may mold from

this is that myths possess an adaptable, symbolic worth in terms of psychological

organization; they dreamily indicate a pre-status closer to unity. But this yield stops

before any special depth in the social diagram, or interest in the ritualistic byproducts of

myth, can fully be fleshed out.

Rejecting of Jung's "…rosewater archetypes…", In *Things Hidden Since the

Foundation of the World*, Rene Girard agrees that the myth is "…a question of something

social and collective…", however, Girard argues that the founding of myth serves to

negotiate and represent the original, founding murder, from which arguments and thought

have sprung forth into ritual, stemming from a 'scapegoat' mechanism that regulates order (Girard 116-118). Girard writes:

> "I cannot see why mythology should have the incredible poetico-philosophic project that structuralism attributes to it. Its real project is that of recalling the crises and the founding murder, the sequence in the realm of events that have constituted or reconstituted the cultural order" (Girard 120).

In losing focus on the poetic potential of myth, Girard's perspective makes it more difficult to trace violence outside of a nihilistic attitude towards ritual that regards violences as lurking beyond myth irreversibly; when walking with myth in terms of its poetico-philosophic potential, one can consider myth as regulating psychology through ritual as a reaction to language failure; create seeping joints where the reorganization of meaning can, and has historically taken place. While boiling myth down to how it has framed societies that are no longer able to be abate tension in primal ritual, Girard prefaces an inevitability that isn't inevitable to a semiotic vision of myth, that suggests ritual to be a response to language failure; the myth in its poetic form negotiates violence in the same way that it dispenses it; as informing an impermanent dividing cultural logic structured by non-innate moral hierarchies. Most importantly, a semiotic myth suggests that tensions are not removable, but that they can be complicated for good; they are discussable if assumption is assumed. Poetic readings of myth reveal junctions of dysfunction that provide insight into how symbols, as the vectors of one's rituals, as influencers of action, can actually be negotiated with as they move in translation; a degree of insight that allows us to rearticulate the biases presented in one's selections and omissions of symbols and information. It's the difference between a vision of fate and

vision of willpower; one that gives us hope that violence is, itself, negotiable if considered with the habits informed by a language failure vocabulary. While myths do inform one as a person continually placed in states of conflict, violence does not equal a definition of inevitable conflict. Burke explores the need for these poetic considerations in order to stage this necessary negotiation.

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke argues that Myths help us track how division insinuates there was once a status of unity. While myths fail to indicate the complexity of the 'undivided' state before language, they do enough to intimate that there is a silent, albeit dysfunctional, intactness outside of the entrapments of fallen symbols (ROM 220). Division is depicted as having an explainable order and hierarchy in myth; a mode of organization that infers a cosmic truth, a proper ordering, a morality in judgement. Myths offer core explanations of rituals that reaffirm symbols of 'ideals', or, one may stretch to say, normativities, and although origin myths have long been translated by social bodies, they continue to hold influence over interpretations of morality. Burkes states that "the myth would be a reduction of a 'pure idea' to terms of image and fable"; the pure idea being some unique depiction of unity broken; a brokenness never resolved, but interpreted in 'true' and 'emotional' terms. In Kenneth Burke on Myth, Lawrence Coupe writes:

> "Myths may be wrong, or they may be used to bad ends, but they cannot be dispensed with…they are our basic psychological tools for working together. A hammer is a carpenter's tool; a wrench is a mechanic's tool; and a 'myth' is the social tool for welding the sense of interrelationship by which the carpenter and

the mechanic, though differently occupied, can work together for common social ends." (Coupe 9).

Myths orient the social values of a group and invite us to believe in an 'affect', or feeling towards assumed values. Namely, they begin to paint an emotional motive behind why one requires ritual scapegoats, and plainly, violence, to distinguish different identities to justify an invented morality behind a given hierarchy. In a capacity, Burke is interested in how one structures and complicates discourse to fulfill the 'happiness' (as Sarah Ahmed puts it in her article, *Happy Objects*) that a myth promises to its favored parties and participants; a happiness that if unquestioned, yields degrees of normativity that (in advanced stages) regulates and expresses violence against assumed outliers, a happiness that spawns distress, unhappiness, as the alterior promise to a normativity that results in violence and rhetorical rejections or censorship.

Lawrence Coupe describes the intention behind Burke's attention to myth, he states: "The case for poetics is provisional and partially tactical: what Burke is after is greater and greater coherence. He seeks an increasingly inclusive philosophy that will do justice to the complexity of the human capacity for symbolism" (Coupe 40). In other words, the goal is analyzing myth towards greater insight into how they are incoherent, and how this incoherency can be understood and negotiated towards less emotional manipulation and violence. What I can render from these four, founding positions on myth that leads me to consider the importance of studying its incoherency, is broken into the following: 1) a consideration of what is core of the collective, 2) of the emotionality behind the adoption of moral hierarchies, 3) an indication that myths yield influence over the construction of social hierarchies that one has fallen and divided from, 4) a

consideration that myth symbolically indicates an ideal or cosmic space of unity that it cannot perform, but can be used to refute the inevitability of violence. Overall, Myth can be seen as it represents a division from unity and contributes towards an assumption of systemic violence as a fallen foundation to ritual and moral logic. It is an example, a bedrock, for understanding the state of division, and the moral structures that outline division in a social setting.

Textual Fluidity and the 'Fluid Myth'

Thinking of texts as 'Fluid' allows us to analyze shifts in revision and production, changes that indicate influences in flux; interventions in a work, modified 'intention' (or interpretive functionality), and audience interferences (Bryant 90). Understanding 'fluidity' in literature studies provides a means of tracking 'meaning-making' amongst works. In *The Fluid Text*, John Bryant describes the 'fluid text' as "…any literary work that exists in more than one version. It is 'fluid' because the versions flow from one another" (Bryant 1) An 'author' (or community member, family member, editor, director, manager), is influenced in the way they adjust a story to reinforce or adjust meaning; works are produced in consideration to the discourse of societal norms and preferences directly surrounding their production (Bryant 88) . The 'authors' make alterations to rhetorical fruit in their most minute revisions. By working and modifying (consciously and unconsciously) off the tradition of rhetoric that has preceded and accrued around them, the 'authors' or 'influencers' of revision contribute to a series of developments in meaning, and likely, they consider these revisions in light of how meaning will uniquely play out in various audiences. In tracking how works change across 'fluid texts', one can

begin to roughly teach how meaning and association are reorganized and hybridized at a general level. Having said this, analyzing how 'authors' adjust and intervene in the public and private office of meaning-making does not inherently account for a study of conflict and power flow; In a fluid myth classroom, however, this should be the focus. Analyzing narratives that produce tuned moralities alongside a vocabulary of language failure provides depth and complication to the already richly interesting study of fluid texts, but in order to gear towards a greater conception of violent, or emotional moral division and general conflict, would require another step. If I want to track a connection between studying how meaning-making performs and produces a general perspective on language failure, origin myth is the foundation from which an introductory course should focus. Bryant states that:

> "...if we are to understand how writing and the transmission of literary works operate in the processes of meaning making, we need first to recognize this fact of fluidity and also devise critical approaches and a critical vocabulary, that will allow us to talk about the meaning of textual fluidity in writing and in culture" (Bryant 2).

My interpretation of Bryant leads me to consider a unique version of this 'critical vocabulary' to observe the process of meaning-making as it flows minutely through versions, one that is constructed by, and yields to, a consideration of language failure as a bedrock issue of interpretation, terms in conversation with moralities assumed. This critical vocabulary of language failure and 'fluid myth' analysis, does not lack an emphasis on studying the interconnections of texts, but rather, traces versions of texts

until they reference, and are grounded in the moraling influence of a myth to recognize how language failure is being presented to modify one's perspective.

For example, we could look at one aspect of moral approximation in the myth of *Prometheus Bound*, by Aeschylus, to find a failure to communicate between the metaphor of a revolutionary titan and a dominating god: an intellectual and their censoring government. As Prometheus creates man and sympathetically provides him fire, or the capability of invention, he has come at a crossroads with Zeus, who wishes to withhold and control fire to cease man's advancement so man cannot challenge his ability, and his interest to kill them off. The tension becomes one of force and invention, the morality guiding the piece is complicated, but renderable when we consider it in the form of basic identifications and pathos. There are mirrored scapegoats; as while we may initially perceive Prometheus to be the scapegoat in terms of the moral justice that Zeus, as we are informed from other myths, is the great authority, we are aligned in the moral prerogatives of Prometheus, who paints Zeus as the scapegoat. As the primary god authority of the piece, Zeus's design should theoretically legislate true order towards a higher logic; he has decreed Prometheus has gone against it, and division has occurred because of Prometheus's actions. But because Prometheus offers benefits towards man's favor, there is a hesitancy to accept his banishment and torture. Instead, there is a hinted injustice in Zeus's leadership, his position as sovereign and father becomes negotiable. We are reminded that he approaches the border of power-control that insists he finally take responsibility for moral impurities, in his case, his extremely forceful attitude and actions as king. This is reflected in a prophecy that states Zeus will be overthrown by one of his children; his extreme force renounces his absolute sovereignty because he does not

attempt to muddle the appearance of his power and authority. Prometheus sees potential in man that is not in Zeus's perspective, and in turn, as men, our interests are aligned, in a capacity, with his; but, Prometheus is bound in exile to face torture, literally dragged there by the god sent by Zeus, Strength. Torture, exile, and overexertion of force warrant censorship and regulation that is resentfully obvious. Although one, as a subject, can recognize valid points to Zeus's fury as a sovereign, in that rebellion has disrupted his plan for perfection, we are divided from existing with his greater plan the minute we conceive of Zeus's imperfection. Because we have been drawn out of the dark of our minds, our respect for Zeus's strength only makes Prometheus appear martyred, and Zeus more demonic than godlike for his unabated thirst for authority over life and death; an authority, he cannot uphold as Prometheus is undying, and man has been saved by fire. One morality that informs the piece, remarkably, is a tension in perspectives; it sides with the danger of intellectual suppression or eradication by the hands of a brute, censoring authority; a scapegoat is superficially produced where knowledge can be gained, but this scapegoat has not been produced under the right propaganda, and becomes the martyr against an unjust sovereign; the power flow requires change because it has not effectively complicated to cover and maintain itself, it has not produced a strong enough authority over bodies; Prometheus is able to negotiate that to gain rhetorical authority, that in the piece, makes him appear the greater leader. The only entity mortally at risk, is a government run by obvious exertions of violence, a government that does not attempt to purify its moral incentives in propaganda. And while we might stop there to find great insight into the workings of social dynamics, we would go further to see how this reading informs narratives closer to home. We might argue that the myth of Prometheus

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provides insight into language failure in *Frankenstein*; a work that is commonly taught in classrooms. *Frankenstein* actively shows the 'creature' to represent force, but also a capability for sensitivity and intellect. In being actively censored by Victor's authority, there are extremely violent repercussions. For being rendered either silent, or expressed not simply through himself, but via translations of other men, the creature, alternatively represents the desperation of force, a passionate communication that seeks to breach language failure through symbolic action. The creature's suppression is of the intellect, in the form that his rhetorical platform has effectively been stripped of him, leading him to perform evil actions to fulfill the language barrier and gain a voice that cannot be silenced; instead of his words spawning sympathy, his act of rendering Victor in the same position of isolation by murdering his family is his only means of expression he finds left. Somewhere in the translation of both pieces, we find there is a common antagonism and value towards obvious censorship that allows us, as citizens under an authority, to neither condemn Prometheus, or The Creature; in both of these stories, the basic solution appears to be providing rhetorical platforms to the disbanded figures so as to abate violence. The solution is listening, negotiating. This of course, is just one of the many readings a class can render from this selection of texts.

The need for a 'fluid myth' study for new college students, as opposed to a 'fluid text' study, exists in the notion that, in a fluid text study, one would be positioned to explore rhetoric as it is employed or introduced to a text to produce a certain kind of functionality that focuses on meaning making for an author, but this would be limiting in that it did not provide insight into the 'fluidity' of an origin conflict for a more general perspective on moral complexities that inform all social dynamics, complexities in

misrepresentation. In analyzing versions and influences of a text or concept in terms of how they lead us back to a myth (whether the myth is alluded to in an influencing text or in the focused text itself, matters not), one would meet the root from which not only the author's occupation with conflict stems, but the root in which all may be susceptible to how language failure affects, restricts and mislabels bodies in terms of increasing complexity; this offers insight into how tracks of assumption are obscured over and over again. Alternatively, if I stopped at the point of recognizing fluidity solely in theory specifics (ex; as being specifically employed to address meaning-making in terms of feminism, psychoanalytical, or historical reflections) I would also remain at a specific threshold for fluidity, the potential yield would be segregated in that the focus would ultimately fall on serving the logics of disciplines and subdisciplines focused on specific scapegoats, or groups, which seems compromising when introducing students to theory at a foundational level. Having said that, I could feasibly travel into advanced theory from the foundation of language failure study if it seemed appropriate and discuss a moral complexity to the way information moves through specific bodies. While introducing students to studying how literary works flow together to expand the meaning of specific modes of criticism would be insightful in the classroom, it could be potentially entrenching a sense of divide between disciplines and bodies outside of it, who may operate with different vocabularies.

In my modification and address of the concept of a 'fluid text', I aim towards a concept of 'fluid myths' that combine with a vocabulary of language failure to draw anyone closer to finding insight into division holistically; as a concept relaying the primal point of division and power flow. In studying myths as 'landmarks' in moral hierarchies

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and recognizing them as fluidly moving through texts to reorganize moral perspectives, the class would navigate towards a greater understanding of the stakes of emotionality and moral hierarchy through the stance of their more objective vocabulary on language failure and division. Whether introduced into the core fluid text directly, or intimated by influencing works, a referenced origin myth should be sought as the landmark on which to analyze unique experiences with language failure at a broader level; the 'context' necessary to openly discuss with students the limitations of information flow, morality, and techniques for overcoming assumptions in one's daily discourse.

CHAPTER 4

STANDING IN LINE

Drawing the Line

The bodies and minds of students are held in tension by the lines of division regarding points such as financial status, political ideology, and race. These are consequences of the current concocted discourses of power, political discourses. In *Globalizing Literature Pedagogy: Applying Cosmopolitan Ethical Criticism to the Teaching of Literature*, Suzanne S. Choo suggests that poetics, or literature, may be the answer to overcoming these artificial lines.

> "…awareness of global risks such as terrorism, fundamentalism, and xenophobia in our everyday consciousness has led to a pressing need for educators to consider how to powerfully cultivate hospitality toward multiple and marginalized others in the world. Literature education plays a fundamental role in equipping students with a knowledge of the world and key dispositions with which to empathize. and relate to diverse others."(335)

Choo argues that one should develop this sense of 'responsibility' for students by expanding their understanding and access to ethical theory to guide them towards an 'ethics of alterity' (Choo 339, 350). And while I would agree that this would be beneficial, I would like to complicate the issue further. I would argue that students would benefit by being taught a rendered perspective of 'doubt' regarding their language usage, a doubtful perspective that would enable them to navigate the constant state of rhetorical divide and assumption that 'otherizes' perpetually; in these terms, there is no alterity, but

there is alternative perspective. This direction would give students the tools to see these rhetorical deceptions as they grow more deceptively complex and covered from by perspectives of emotionally drawn lines of division; the cultural logics of emotion influencing advanced theories of criticism become less geared towards visions of justice. The path forward is that of greater listening skills, and broader functionality for more people, with a consciousness of how rejections occur microscopically. It shows students why equality cannot be standardized in the form of any 'true justice'. To serve people, a vocabulary is needed to step outside of moral assumption. To provide this insight eases the risk that students will either perpetuate violent or restricting rhetoric unquestioningly or be the vectors of violence directly; it also lightens their susceptibility to being increasingly victimized because this perspective expands the depth of their rhetorical capabilities, as they are more likely to assume the weight of multiple risks more fully.

One must consider the substantial, dividing lines faced today, and be preparing students for the next unique rhetorical tactic, the next, unknown, macro or micro division they will face, and its ensuing blind-spots. Literature is a perfect, productive vector for this practice; in fact, it is one of the only places where one can explore these lines of division in experimental practice and case study. In *Representations*, Michael Lucey and Tom McEnaney write that literature presents a chronology, a consecutiveness from which one can track division, but that one must develop these scenes in a context of study.

> "Particular formal features of a given literary work (or other kinds of crafted
>
> utterances) can be taken to index aspects of the social world in which they
>
> originated. And the formal features in question are remarkably diverse. Noticing

them depends on the work that is done to establish the context in which that

indexical function can be perceived." (Lucey McEnaney 4)

To establish what Lucey and McEnaney describe as "the context in which that indexical

function can be perceived," in our terms, which focus on a rendering of skills that equip

the student with a general capability to negotiate conflict, one can ethically respond to

the practical needs of students in the face of limited time and resources in the classroom

by engaging them with the complexity of selection in itself (Lucey McEnaney 4). In

explaining the complicated nature of choosing to prioritize the identities, needs, and

functions described in one piece; one must expand the genealogy of the text by analyzing

it in partnership with its ancestral stories; the myths flowing into the text, the bodies

influencing the 'chosen' work, pieces of literature that the author has been exposed to,

that may revise the meaning and complexity of a work. In this 'context', and through a

vocabulary of language failure, students gain the ability to renegotiate what they

themselves emotionally prioritize and neglect in being given a selection of materials; a

book list on the syllabi that cannot fully encapsulate any genre or moral standard. It

provides not only insight into the assumptions made by readers and language wielders

about value, but it also dispels the assumed biases of the classroom in a way that does not

refute the authority of a professor's purpose, but instead, constructively notes the

hierarchies at play behind text selection.

Crossing the Line

In *The Ethics of Teaching Literature*, Wayne C. Booth states that the solution to

serving the needs of students remains in the 'cliched' answer of "[getting them] engaged

with the world of story (including 'literature' in the old sense) and [teaching] them to deal critically with that engagement." Booth argues that such a tactic informs students more acutely of not only the liquid status of 'ethics' compounded in the stories chosen, but that such an attitude enables students to engage with the conflict surrounding their living situations more fully, equipping them with newly gained insight from the texts they are studying in class that they can carry home. He states: "In short, students can learn the rich, complex experience of combining full listening with critical analysis of what is "heard"; They need to learn how to think about, and possibly reject, values of the story world they first 'took in' (Booth 49). Although engaging students with the general terms of ethics is important, to assume that they can make the jump from text to reality from engagement alone can be negotiated. The idea that contexts are equally accessible in ethical generalizations and that students might naturally assume the limitations of these generalizations, while inhabiting full emotions, is too risky of an assumption. Booth advances his reasoning with a design for teaching literature in a way that is more specifically 'useful for the student' aiming to interpret their political and economic sphere (Booth 44). He expresses that the following tactics be employed in the classroom: that one implements a state of rhetorical doubt by initiating a course that introduces itself with an 'extra flawed', or morally 'repugnant' text, followed by a 'rival story' that explores the failures of its predecessor, to be followed by the employment of a text focused on dispelling the assumptions of personal virtue (Booth 50-51). Booth's goal is to divert relations with teaching literature from the assumption that 'great' works and 'classics' contain an implicit value, to move towards using them to produce an explicit benefit in real-world problem solving for students; and this, I can retain in my own value; in fact,

there is much to be gained from Booth's classroom model of placing texts in a mode of selection where they challenge each other (Booth 8). However, if left without a vocabulary of language failure, there will remain a hint of implicit danger; the implicit hope that students can re-apply what they extrapolate from the 'virtues and sins' of literature. However recalibrated, how can students apply their newly gained insight on contextualized, metaphorical ethics to their lives, without any aid in dispelling the moral hierarchies incorporated into them, without a vocabulary that configures the worth of these negotiations as representative in a larger pattern of misrepresentation?

A significant aspect of my anxiety lays in a well-expressed stake written by Booth, regarding the position of the student. He writes:

"…[as teachers] we hope to produce a kind of person, and we don't want to be authoritarian about it, and yet we often realize, with some uneasiness about our arrogance, that the kind of person we want them to become is the same kind that we want to become-and want them to see us as already having achieved. Intentionally or not, every successful teacher is likely to impose an image of what an admirable person is, and that person then gets imitated (Booth 47)."

In expressing that teachers must, through their selection of materials, negotiate the personal impact they possess on their students, Booth emphasizes both the imposition of 'selecting texts', and the need in the classroom to perform sympathetic work that regards directly what students are experiencing outside of the classroom. He does not forget, but examines the biased position of a teacher in molding the discourse that surrounds students in a classroom; but this is a tendency not openly acknowledged in the coursework; it is assumed away and digested through the perspective of the professor-

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students are given no structure to negotiate or perceive any bias in the classroom power discourse themselves. When Booth claims the following benefit of teaching literature is enough, I suggest merely that there is value in his lines, but a calling to move even further:

> "the irrefutable reason all this is important is that our most powerful ethical influences-except perhaps for parental modeling-are stories: it is in responding to, taking in, becoming transported by story that character is formed, for good or ill. Stories that listeners really listen to are powerful self-creators: they can create or reinforce bad ethos or good. They can transform us in self-destructive direct or they can turn us into would-be heroes (Booth 49)".

Stories are central to power-discourses, but the analysis of a 'stories impact' at such a depth ignores that systemic discourses are in part, proliferated by basic language failure, which affects all modes of information being distributed. One cannot steer away from the development of a conceptual awareness of divide as a pattern extending from language especially when considering the ethical implications of texts, and the needs of students (who, like teachers, are people saturated in politics); students would benefit from a vocabulary that enables them to observe power in motion. One can build upon what is implicit in Booth's argument to say explicitly what consciously and subconsciously concerns the student, as well as everyone wielding symbols: studying and being taught stories remains 'irrefutably' important because they take us in, and they are continually negotiable. And while Booth is right to suggest that the trick is to question assumed perspectives when criticizing the works one studies, I could expand that depth to openly question ones assumptions on the language rules that absorb by design; expanding out

from the ruts of assumption in poetic selections is a fluid myth case study, an example to

reveal the fluidity of meaning and it's negotiable, non-innateness; a practice that can

negotiate larger conflicts if explicitly tethered to a vocabulary of language failure. To

summarize; I would argue analyzing stories in a fluid myth classroom is important

because they reinforce and negotiate structures of emotional and cultural logic across

time.

In *Canon Issues and Class Contexts: Teaching American Literature From a*

Market Perspective, Janet Galligani Casey expresses concern regarding helping students

develop the ability to track patterns of information prestige and spread from a market

perspective. By inviting students to reflect on their hidden assumptions on educational

canons (in terms of how the texts are produced and shared in consideration of class and

economy) in a transparent, hands-on manner, Casey's curriculum invites students to bend

their assumptions about the value of literature in a way that has them tracing the endemic

bias of social-class structure in their own lives; she also engages with them to

productively reflect on how that bias runs through the classroom (Casey 19, 22). She

writes that "fuller contextualization…can lead them to see that there is no absolute

measure of literary value, and that their attitudes and academic training inevitably

manifest a class position" (Casey 22). Ultimately, Casey has improved the yield of her

selected texts by informing students of a narrative that in her words, "is not just about

what is inside a text…", but is also about the bias of selection, the bias in social

institutions that surround students (Casey 19). In the final line of the article, Casey notes:

"The point of course, is that neither texts nor their audiences can escape wholly the

structuring dimensions of class perspectives." (Casey 26).

What is so compelling about Casey's course design is her attention to providing the tools necessary to bridge the distance between the ethical and historical context of a text, to have it behave fruitfully for students in real world applications, where they will be facing an altogether different selection of concern. Not only that, but it challenges students to assume that there is a bias in the selection process of texts in coursework. Ironically, this is what maximizes the selection. In revealing the process of selection, Casey dispels some of the heated division between 'classes' of texts (think scholarly versus 'low-brow') that students might be unwarily categorizing class-members and non-canon works via; the emotionality of this division is suddenly reformed into terms of structure into questioned assumptions; Casey describes a phenomenon like what Sara Ahmed pens as the dangerously 'sticky' aspect of associative, emotional value that some students have been trained towards. The phenomena is effective and dangerous enough to have students act rejectingly of alternate class perspectives, unknowingly, if not given the tools to dispel root assumptions. Casey provides the lattice for assumptions about class to be dispersed in her classroom criticism; however, as she is teaching at an advanced level of division, she does not track the tendency of language to obscure and blind us to perspectives and information and engages with cultural logics from within their moral threadlines. Tensions are acknowledged only in context.

To expand the significance of Casey's focus, I would turn to *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, and *Happy Objects* by Sarah Ahmed. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed discusses emotional, social contracts in value and normativity formation; she writes: "…emotionality as a claim about a subject or a collective is clearly dependent on relations of power, which endow 'others' with meaning and value"; In *Happy Objects*

Ahmed expands upon this point to discuss 'happiness' as a promise leveraged in normativity, a perspective attached to 'objects' that appear to promise us happiness as it is tethered to 'circulating social goods' ('social goods' may be termed as 'social subject') with 'sticky' associations (assumptions) of value (Ahmed 29). She notes:

> "When we feel pleasure from such objects, we are aligned; we are facing the right way. We become alienated—out of line with an affective community—when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are already attributed as being good. The gap between the affective value of an object and how we experience an object can involve a range of affects, which are directed by the modes of explanation we offer to fill this gap." (Ahmed 37).

If one considers Ahmed's words as regarding a form of 'mystification', at least, in the terms that she argues emotionality is employed to 'explain a gap', in Casey's example, the stickiness would be the students 'frustrated' bias towards the legitimacy and prestige of scholarly books, and their positive attitudes towards a 'canon'. Upon their study of a 'frustratingly low-brow' material under Casey; a book they presumed was worth little value due to its position in the hierarchy, it is a challenge to assumption that reforms their attitude and reinvigorates their feelings in terms of intellectual possibilities. To speak plainly, attitudes and assumptions are reorganized, and the books are seen to be points of insight unjustly rejected; leading, in turn, to more macro questions towards the 'hierarchy' of information flow itself. An identity of 'superior knowledge' is reformed emotionally through logic- right and wrong, as loosely objective, are reshuffled, although larger implications of 'moral' structures, such as political influence, household values, are left in the sway; students are still left to assume justification in their other moral

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compasses and experiences of conflict. Having said this, given the tools to track the flow of information at a systemic level, students accomplished a practice of reflection they may not have if not for Casey's tutelage. Casey's intervention led to the assumption on 'language value' and 'class value' being upended to form new associations regarding the function of capitalism, the classroom awareness regarding class prestige- something that is negotiated in terms of the regulation of bodies through assumptions engineered in power discourse (Ahmed 37; Casey 22). The implications of Casey's decision as a professor is that, in challenging class assumptions with lattice, her students became more prepared to climb on their own when considering the role of capitalism in their lives; they notice how a form of power flows in terms of their lives outside of class; in their assumptions towards class systems and classrooms. She accomplishes this by widening the scope towards root problems, but of course, stops short of the root discussion of language failure and larger roadways of moral assumption. So, how, and why, should one do more than Casey regarding the more general concept of division, language failure, so students can track damaging pools of discourse that affect them at an impersonal distance?

Understanding stories as being produced in language failure, and the implication of the blind spots they necessarily assume as being a part of textual selection in their invention and presentation, is not something that one can justifiably reduce, especially if one's hope is to educate on the balance of social function and their connection with conflict and violence through the metaphor of the stories one teaches. Lucey and McEnaney argue that:

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"To the extent that a work can be perceived as forming itself according to some metapragmatic function, it can be understood as having been informed by, having been formally responsive to, certain kinds of social structures, those structures that participate in creating the particular distribution of knowledge regarding the mega pragmatic functions in question." (Lucey McEnaney 7).

Teaching that language misrepresents in a course designed to reach students at the 100 and 200 level has the potential to enable students to analyze the violent rhetorical invitations that implore their participation daily, across exceptions; and they are also more capable, with this knowledge, to negotiate with distance and attention towards productive revision. These considerations of language failure advance the critical thinking of students from a foundational perspective, enabling them to engage in their other courses with an added degree of richness in reflection because they can track how the failure of language complicates into advanced, specific versions of divide through myth. And while I am convinced that studying why one is repulsed or not by certain texts can be helpful in a capacity, I am interested more-so in how one can study that repulsion with students at a level of distance that makes the repulsion less definite, and more rhythmically understandable, perhaps even, redefinable. So then, how can I design a course that regards the failure of language to an accessible, introductory degree? I would venture to say that constructing a class focused on tracking the flow of 'myth' in popular, or 'common' fiction, as a poetic rendering of the core of language divide, would provide a substantial skill set for anyone wielding language.

CHAPTER 5

COURSE DESIGN AND CONCLUSION

Course Design

  The 'Fluid Myth' course should begin with a focus on a singular text, one that students

are familiar with, either by name, or by having read the work in a past class. Chiefly, the text

should be well known, preferably, with a history of its being adapted across media platforms; for

example, it may be adapted as a play, or television show. I am looking for a material with lots of

'versions', and multiple interpretations, perhaps dominated by 'cliches' in the mainstream. For

my example, I will be using *Frankenstein*. The first two weeks, students will be given

foundational knowledge on the concept of identification, mystification, 'scapegoating' and

Foucault's power discourse, and how they interconnect; due to the advanced level of these works

of theory, the material will be broken into power-point, with supplementary worksheets, as well

as a secondary source of introductory criticism on the authors to aid them. Students will not be

required to read *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*, *A Rhetoric of Motives* or *Permanence

and Change* directly, as this is a more intermediate, to beginner level course. To support the

student's ability to interpret the difficult material, a multiple-choice quiz will be employed at the

end of the second week for some nominal degree of credit (the student will be allowed to retake

the quiz indefinitely), in addition to class discussion; this will be done to encourage students to

retain an awareness for the relationships between the concepts.

  Starting the third and fourth week, students will read the 'foundational myth' that the

professor has pulled off the text of focus; they will be given a brief background on myth in the

form of a PowerPoint, and supplementary forms. So, if the class was examining *Frankenstein*,

one may have a few examples of what myth one could choose, especially if one considers how *Frankenstein* engages with influencing texts, such as some of the works done by Percy Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, and William Godwin; all authors prone to referencing myth that record would suggest, Shelley has read. For my example, I would have them study *Prometheus Bound*, a myth directly referenced by Shelley herself. In class, a power-point going over some primary features of the myth (as it may be a difficult read) would be employed; the focus of one's discussion would be on where it locates a scapegoat and why, and what the point of division being described to us looks like, and how it considers an invention in one's daily life (for example, the introduction of fire, the divide from god, the 'imperfection of man' in flesh); I will ask them to consider what 'unity' appears as in the myth, and how they would consider the violent results of disunity; I would then invite them to consider the role of 'identification' in the scenario, and how the myth itself may 'mystify' aspects of the 'truth' regarding divide in a discussion board post.

Weeks five through six, students will be given a brief background on the author in class, as well as some insight into the publishing process involved with the spread of the text. They will then read excerpts, but preferably the full of the primary selected text. For example, I would select for them to read the full of the *Frankenstein*, but if restricted by time or by a longer work, I would have them focus on the passages that are the most heavily revised by the author and editor in a second version. I would then ask students to reflect, in the form of a one to two paged, single spaced summary, on points of division they see in the text, to engage with the climactic violence of the piece, using their knowledge of *Prometheus*, identification, scapegoating, and power discourse to influence their understanding of how of how this 'division' occurs. The following week, week seven, students will be assigned to read 'revision' excerpts of the text, followed by

excerpts from *the Fluid Text*. In class, students would discuss how these alterations influence

meaning and future points of discourse in the text. So, for example, in the case of *Frankenstein*, I

would refer to a list of discrepancies between the 1818 and 1831 versions. These revisions would

then be considered for how they revise meaning in the text, and how they negotiate points of

division. Students will again be asked to consider how their understanding of 'division' in the

text is enhanced by their knowledge of symbols and *Prometheus*. They will be asked to answer

what their assumptions about the Creature's body and value are; they will then be asked to reflect

on if these are innate to him or not, and why they would argue so. I will ask that they record their

responses later in a discussion board post. To prepare for the following class, they will then be

asked to envision an impact these changes may have on an audience, with no context for further

reception.

Week eight, students will be given information regarding the author's contemporary,

private and public responses, as well as public criticism on the first edition of the text; they will

then be given a background on how the author's life had changed in the time between the

editions, as well as how the editorial process may have been affected. Then, students will be

handed information on how the second edition was received by the public in the following class

period. The reviews will be considered for how they navigate some larger systemic discourse, so

students will also be assigned home reading focused on the historical positions of the conflict.

Students will be asked to complete another discussion post, negotiating, once again, the role of

'symbols' and 'myth' in their interpretation of this division, or consumption, of the author from

the public discourse. Weeks nine and ten, students will be assigned to read several excerpts of

some 'influencing' texts, preferably, a work of philosophy and a poem. For example, *Vindication*

of the Rights of Women, and poems written by Percy Shelley relatively close to the start of

Shelley's writing *Frankenstein*. They will then be encouraged to track points of divide in either the 'poetics' of a work, or in the influencing philosophy; students will be asked what hierarchies may be at stake in the pieces, and again, will be asked to do a discussion board post on how language failure influences these rejections, and how a myth referenced in these secondary pieces revises their social meaning.

Week eleven, students will be informed of one of their final projects; a diagram that shows the development of a concept through the filters of the origin myth into three of the primary texts studied in class, as well as two contextual pieces (for example, the 'public' response to publications). They may choose to study how 'virtue' is reconsidered in *Prometheus*, *Vindications*, and *Frankenstein*. The diagram should be tree shaped, to show the branching complexity of the concept as it flows through new discourses, as informed by audiences to symbolize the complexity of divide as it roots away from the unity proposed by myth, it will be due finals week. The second final project will be a 3 paged, single spaced paper of reflection describing the students' perspectives on how language failure, a failure to represent, changed the way meaning flowed in an experience of conflict they experienced, and how one of the myths studied in the class represents their position in this dividing memory. This week in class, students will be shown alternative forms of the primary text, for example, a movie. They will be asked to compare the primary text to a movie version and will be asked to write one to two pages, single spaced, on how the movie revised the meaning behind some moral concept of the students choice in the text; they will be asked why they think this modification has occurred. They may use this concept in the final projects as well.

Week twelve; for the first class period, students will be asked to read a myth referenced in one of the 'secondary' materials for the course; for example, they may read the story of Adam

and Eve from genesis, as it is referenced in *Vindications* frequently, and can arguably be seen to influence portions of *Frankenstein*. Students will be asked to consider what the point of division in the second story articulates about the lines of division painted in the novel. The second-class period, students will be asked to reflect on how choices of selection have been made inside the classroom; in what terms they would consider the inherent value of *Frankenstein* as a scholarly text; they will then be asked to reflect in a discussion post on how the meaning of the class had changed in quality based off its arrangement and selection of texts, and whether they conceived of any myth flowing into the classroom. Week thirteen, finals week; the first class will consist of a brief lecture on the role of myth and language failure in one's everyday life, followed by discussion on how meaning can be adapted through selection, even in course work. The second class, students will be given the opportunity to workshop their final projects in groups of four, referencing each other to see how their projects are being interpreted by their classmates.

Conclusion

Students need new vocabularies in order to reflect on better ways of maneuvering through the invitations to conflict that influence the world that they inhabit, and themselves. In *The Pursuit of Signs*, Jonathan D. Culler writes that: "the institution of literature involves interpretive practices, techniques for making sense of literary works... Instead of attempting to legislate solutions to interpretive disagreements, one might attempt to analyze the interpretive operations that produce these disagreements—discord which is part of the literary activity of our culture." (Culler 48) In studying the 'flow' of language failure, and in examining it as it branches out from symbols, and systemically, from myths, students are enabled to negotiate with the identifications that, initially, they may assume innately constructs the world around them, and

their own bodies, as well as the emotional lines of division that they can recognize all around them. A vocabulary of language failure enriches any degree of critical interpretation, but also instills a habit of reflection and observation that students can carry into their lives to measure even the smallest of conflicting moments with deepened mindfulness. In posing discourse to be a mode of the selection processes of language failure, students respond with questions; and these questions travel with more and more insight into a space of challenging representative authorities and the economy of bodies. In engaging with literature, students with a vocabulary for language failure conceive of their study as being a renegotiation with attitudes of justice, misrepresentation, exclusion, and violence; their own heated opinions may abate, and clear space for the positive air of peaceable rhetoric for themselves and others; the blame in even petty arguments becomes less assumable. The retention of such a student would be that of increased reflection, reflection on rhetorical tendencies for divide, the inevitability of complicating discourse, and plainly, the misrepresentations of symbols. Myth, as they would recognize it, would flow through the works they read to create observable opportunities for social improvement; myth would become the landmark that enables undergraduate scholars to track how power discourses are in a constant state of revision. Analyzing divide in such a general sense would help these new college students see the world, and their personal lives and experiences with conflict, in terms of a greater sympathy, positivity, and with a sense of hope and purpose towards peaceful renegotiations of violence.

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