

The Story of the Moral:
On the Power of Literature to Define and Refine the Self

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ABSTRACT

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This study employs a hybrid research method. My religious background has led me to find a great affinity for certain literary criticism, that which sees literature as a source for moral thinking and moral decision-making. I offer a history of my transactions with texts, texts that were initially formative for me as a moral thinker, then useful for me in a variety of ways as a teacher of texts, then which I later began to appreciate in a more critical and theoretical way as I developed a deeper understanding of how those texts had influenced me and how they had – or had not – influenced my students.

I borrow heavily from the theory and method of autoethnography in this study, in the sense that I will examine a variety of “internal data” from my memories of books, teachers, and classroom situations, along with “external data” including interviews, report cards, lecture notes and exam questions, and will subject my data to a number of critical lenses with the goal of what Anderson (2006) describes as a commitment to “an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena” (375). Using the lenses of the literary theory and criticism of Wayne Booth, Martha Nussbaum, Robert Coles and Aharon Lichtenstein, I will analyze my experiences as a reader and teacher, and I explain how literary works I read and taught can serve as vehicles for the development of a student’s moral sensibility – and how teachers can help facilitate that development. I use my own unique vantage point,

that of an Orthodox Jewish boy who initially found friends in secular texts, then found that those texts were among his great teachers of values, to offer a singular perspective on the power of these texts. These lenses, which are (to mix metaphors a bit) filtered through my unique perspective, provide an interpretation that will at first lead me to explore the field of moral education as a whole, if only because I shared many of its desired outcomes in my literature classroom. After a brief overview of this field, I use the work of Hanan Alexander, David Hansen, Carl Rogers, and others to present a more general yet nuanced account of how “spiritual awareness” and the humane fusing of reason and emotion can be fostered in students, with a flexibility and understanding that learning is a way to learn a process, not a process towards a specific set of intellectual goals.

I humbly call this hybrid method a literary-auto-ethno-pedogography, as I seek to produce a critical history of my education as a reader and teacher of literature. After an inquiry into my own reading and teaching to understand my own and my students’ development as moral decision makers; I then seek to expand the depth and quantity of moral conversations and bring them to the classrooms of others. As such, my study includes ideas for how to bring about moral conversations in English classrooms, both through student writing and oral exchange, based on ideas from Sheridan Blau, Jeff Wilhelm, David Hansen, Barry Holtz, and others. I conclude with the still unanswered questions that my study has raised for me and for other researchers who share my interest in the relations between secular and religious education and the problem of teaching literature to shape character and refine a reader’s moral sensibility. I also offer some concluding suggestions about how future students and teachers might build on and expand upon my work.

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When I began this work, I came to it like Herbert Cohen, cited below in chapter eight. I had an agenda to prove, and all I needed to find were the prooftexts with which to do so. I wanted to honor and expand upon the work of my teacher, Rabbi Dr. Lichtenstein, and I knew from my own classroom experience that the idea of English literary texts as primers for moral education was as clear as day. I often wondered, like the fifth grade *Phantom Tollbooth*-loving version of myself from Chapter four, why everyone else did not see it that way. The first sources I encountered make up much of the opening chapters of this work.

After beginning my research, encouraged at each stop along the way by a continually wise and ever-upbeat Sheridan Blau, I began to realize that there were actually excellent reasons that not everybody else saw things my way. I became less like Cohen and more like Moshe Rosenberg, who also appears in chapter eight: I still saw the beauty in the morality of the literature, but no longer could assume it would leap out at others the way it did for me. I would need to dig deeper. I began to do so in earnest, but still sought a way to be able to discuss much of the theoretical work I had unearthed. Janet Miller, over two wonderful semesters, introduced me to the world of ethnography and autoethnography and gave me the data set that had long eluded me: it had literally been with me all along. The first three lenses and much of the structure of my analysis came from hours spent at the feet of the sage and patient Ruth Vinz as I began this work. I am grateful to all of my teachers and classmates at Teachers College for all they have helped me on this path.

Rabbi Hanina, according to the Babylonian Talmud in Tractate Ta'anit, said that he had learned much from his teachers, more from his colleagues, from his students, "above all." I can attest to the truth of that observation. My students every year – some of whose children I now teach – have continually been a source of knowledge and inspiration for me since my career began. They have helped maintain my own changingness, and I owe them all an unpayable debt. The medieval commentator Rashi, Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, explains that students must debate in front of their teacher in order for the teacher to truly learn from them. The various respectful debates among my students, some of which Nell Noddings would no doubt characterize as "interpersonal reasoning," have indeed been wonderful lessons for me.

Since Blau would argue that I have not interpreted this Talmudic text without writing my own interpretation thereof, I must do so now. Rabbi Hanina was a lifelong bachelor. The Talmud elsewhere relates his family lineage and his profession but makes it clear that there never was a Mrs. Hanina. I can only imagine, then, were he married, what Rabbi Hanina would have said about the lessons he had learned from his own family – those lessons no doubt would have been beyond "above all." My parents have been among my loudest cheerleaders and greatest supporters since they let me throw all the books on the floor – and they have not stopped supporting and encouraging. I derive great strength from my four children, who are some of my finest teachers; and I have learned the most of all from my wife Michelle, who has given me the gift of hundreds of hours to pursue this passion, among countless other gifts. This all belongs to her.

Chapter One

A Review of Myself

I. The Odds, Defied

The very existence of the work you now read defies the odds. For reasons cultural, historical, sociological, and personal, the conflation of worlds that will be discussed in what follows should not have occurred. Yet it has, and – as a result – here I am. I am both an Orthodox rabbi and a doctoral student in the teaching of English literature. That I – indeed, that anyone – could simultaneously inhabit both these roles may be a distinctively modern phenomenon, but I see myself uniquely situated to occupy them both, to straddle two disparate ideological worlds. The perspective that my world-straddling has given me, I believe, offers a great deal of insight into what the literature classroom has been, currently is, and can ultimately be.

Traditional Judaism has always been wary – not averse, necessarily, but wary – of learning ideas from sources that are not the Torah. One of the earliest Rabbinic sources – and there are many – is the adage found in the Midrashic gloss on the book of Lamentations, *Eichah Rabbah* 2:13, which reads תאמין בגויים, חכמה יש חכמה בגויים, “if you are told there is wisdom among the [non-Jewish] nations, believe it,” an epigram which seems rather open-minded, until one reads its conclusion: תורה בגויים אל תאמין – “don’t believe there is Torah among the nations.” This complicated and classically terse text immediately begs a number of questions, perhaps the most basic of which is a definition of where “Torah” ends and where “wisdom” begins; and, once that has been established, what aspects of that “wisdom” are deemed proper sources of study?

Other sources are even less positive: for example, the *Sifre*, another Midrashic source and a gloss to Deuteronomy, cautions the student from thinking “I have learned the wisdom of Israel, so now I will go and learn the wisdom of other nations – hence the verse (Leviticus 18:4) says ‘to walk among [the laws]’ and not get free of them...”¹ The Talmud similarly records the query of one Ben Damah, who asked Rabbi Yishmael if he was allowed to study Greek wisdom, since he had already completed studying the whole of the Torah? The response:

he then read to him the verse ‘This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate therein day and night’ [Joshua 1:8]. Go then and find a time that is neither day nor night and learn then Greek wisdom.²

This text again begs for the clarification of term “Greek wisdom.” We will soon get there.

But first: Rabbi Eliezer in the Talmud³ is even stronger: “keep your children away from *higayyon*, and seat them in the laps of rabbinic scholars.” The next twelve hundred years are spent arguing over the definition of the term *higayyon* and the ramifications of that definition. Like all good Talmudic arguments, this one spans generations and remains unresolved. Does the term refer merely to logic, or does it extend to philosophy and beyond?⁴

For many who identify as Orthodox Jews, there is little ambiguity here. The twenty-four books of the Bible, commonly referred to as “the Torah” (although that term, confusingly, can also be used exclusively to refer to the five books of Moses), are together known as the תורה שבכתב, the “written law.” The Talmud, its commentaries and thousands of pages that follow make up the תורה שבעל פה, the “Oral law.” Together, these two compendia are, for these students

¹ Section 34. See Blidstein 9-11.

² Menachot 99b.

³ Berachot 28b.

⁴ See Blidstein (1997), 23-24.

and teachers, the sources of all wisdom and knowledge. As recently as this month (April 2018), New York State legislators argued over the government's right to oversee the curricula of various right-wing yeshivot, a number of which, according to one source cited by Kate Taylor (2015) in the *New York Times*, offer no more than ninety minutes of secular studies four days per week. These yeshivot do so out a belief that there is no need to look elsewhere for wisdom, and because they fear the potential negative influence of the secular sources.

These schools ground their educational philosophy this in such rabbinic sources as those cited above, and others, such as the Mishnah in Sanhedrin 10:1, where, in the list of those who “have no share in the world to come,” Rabbi Akiva includes “one who reads the outside books.” Blidstein (1997) points out that both the term “outside books” needs to be carefully understood here (23). The Palestinian Talmud explains that the books prohibited were only those specifically excluded from the Biblical canon, those which might otherwise claim Biblical status (which is a fairly narrow category: the Talmud occasionally quotes from such works as the book of Ben Sira and the book of Ben La'anah, both of which offer maxims akin to those from the canonized book of Proverbs).

Blidstein (1997) also points out that Rabbi Akiva's use of the term “reads” must be explained as well. The Palestinian Talmud obliges once again and explains that while one may not *study* works that are not canon (and not prohibited), one may read them for entertainment: “hence casual reading of Homer is permissible but intensive study is forbidden” (22). One could therefore allow for an hour and a half on Monday through Thursday of a smattering of mathematics, science, reading and writing, but no more.

I am not a product of such yeshivot, nor have I worked in any of them. Indeed, I knew of none of these issues until long after they had been resolved for me. All I knew was that I loved

books, loved reading them, and found that they brought lessons to life for me in ways that nothing else could. The vast majority of Orthodox Jews today hold by the standards of the yeshivas described in the *Times*: secular studies are seen as a necessary evil, one which must be undergone either to prepare graduates for navigating a secular world or because the secular government requires it.

My background, however, while that of devout Orthodox Judaism, is what has been termed “Modern” or “Centrist” Orthodox. Rabbi Saul Berman (2001) writes that one of the major differences between right-wing Orthodoxy and Modern Orthodoxy is that the latter assumes that “Orthodoxy can preserve its integrity and passion, and even be enriched, by its intersection with modernity, and that the interaction will allow Orthodoxy to bring to the broader world a clearer vision of the grandeur of Torah.” Berman reminds the reader, though, that “this approach does not deny that there are areas of powerful inconsistency and conflict between Torah and modern culture that need to be filtered out in order to preserve the integrity of [Jewish law].”

Berman goes on to describe nine key differentiators between Modern Orthodoxy and right-wing Orthodoxy. The most pertinent for me in this context is number one, which reads in part that

While the Torah is entirely true, human reason applied to the study of all of reality can also produce truth. We are required to engage with and study both Torah and other knowledge in order to properly achieve love and fear of God. We are permitted to study any aspect of human culture that enriches our intellectual, spiritual, or aesthetic identities. However, where the application of these studies might lead to behavior that conflicts with Torah, we must submit to the authority of Torah. Engagement in this struggle is positive and results in a responsible learning, thinking, and spiritually vibrant community.

Berman is one of my most cherished mentors, and his short piece quickly became a seminal document in the definition of the small percentage of Orthodox Judaism. Having chosen the career of educator, I was buoyed in 2001 when I read this piece. He noted that

Modern Orthodoxy is a difficult path that requires constant attentiveness to the maintenance of Jewish wholeness in the face of the distraction of material excess... It is a path that requires filtering out the degraded values of the low culture while welcoming and integrating the advances in knowledge and understanding being achieved in the high culture. It welcomes the opportunities created by modern society to be productive citizens engaged in the Divine work of transforming the world to benefit humanity.

This was how I was raised – only at the start I had no idea that I was living a life that, as I noted at the outset, defied the odds. Berman’s words resonated for me when I began my career as an English educator in earnest. I began my classroom life as a teacher of Judaic texts, and the contrast between the two classroom experiences led me to a realization about the power of an English class over that of other classes and of the moral educative power of the curriculum. I will return to this epiphany in detail in chapter four. For now, let me go back to my own beginnings.

It began for me with Virginia Lee Burton’s *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* (1939). This children’s book (about the heroism of Mike and his trusty steam shovel, Mary Anne) was the breakthrough text for me: it was the book with which I learned to read. I have no memory of this seminal event. My mother, however, vividly recalls it. She remembers reading to me as an

infant and my obvious joy as I recognized images. Here is a photo of an adorable pre-reader, circa 1970:

Figure 1



This photograph is telling. A happy ten- or eleventh-month-old smiles for the camera, surrounded by books. He does not fear that the photographer (who is almost certainly Dad) will be angry. Books are already seen as sources of entertainment, at least on the tactile level, and they are within arm's reach and descend to the floor.

My mother attests to my “squeals of delight” as she would read to me or as I recognized letters from the stroller before age two. My father, for his part, recalls that my room was furnished with wall-to-wall book shelving (as clearly the living room in the photo was – and still is – as well). The books ran the gamut from classical works of Jewish law to science fiction novels. My father also recalls that in my childhood home “the budget for buying new books was not limited.” My mother also recalls my early letter and word recognition and that crucial text of *Mike Mulligan*.

For my part, I recall always loving books in both their physicality and their content. This picture was not staged. I was not pulling out pans and pots: for me, it was books. Indeed, I cannot remember actually learning how to read. I remember learning how to whistle, how to multiply, even learning to distinguish my right from my left – and I also remember the time *before* I could whistle, multiply, and tell right from left. But before reading? I have no recollection. My memory begins with text.

I was and remain a voracious reader, which I come by honestly: both of my parents are still avid readers. According to my mother, both she and my father read to me “constantly.” To this day, the living room and master bedroom of their apartment are furnished what are literally floor-to-ceiling and wall-to-wall books in specially designed bookcases. I read cereal boxes; I read my parents’ magazines (for Dad it was *Natural History*; for Mom, *Parents* and *Good Housekeeping*); I read the now-defunct “Metropolitan Diary” in *The New York Times*. But I most enjoyed – and do still – reading stories. I read classic fiction, historical fiction, science fiction, mysteries, and horror. I would jump into stories with both feet, eager to get lost in them, and would emerge – to mix metaphors – dripping wet on the other side, exhilarated, often with a small pile of quickly-browning apple cores littering the ashtrays of my parents’ living room (that’s not a metaphor – I have always liked to eat while I read). Like me, Mom and Dad were (and are) both voracious readers. Dad has an appetite for history and for science fiction; he has been learning Talmud with the same study partner each week for nearly fifty years. Mom leans more to the modern novel and non-fiction. Her Hebrew language background is less strong than Dad’s, but she never misses opening a day with her *siddur*, her prayer book.

George Steiner (1970) writes that “A great poem, a classic novel, press in upon us; they assail and occupy the strong places of our consciousness. They exercise upon our imagination

and desires, upon our ambitions and most covert dreams, a strange, bruising mastery” (10). I too have experienced this mastery, and while it has not bruised me, it has certainly left its birthmark upon me: I have been influenced, buoyed, and altered by the impressions books have made upon how I think, how I feel, and how I make decisions of a moral nature.

Birkerts (cited in Tatar 2009) writes that for young readers, reading “throws wide the doors to inwardness, and nothing could be more important” (225). My early reading opened those doors for me: I have found reading literature not only to be a deeply enjoyable emotional and intellectual experience, but also one that has had a deep impact in forming who I am and what I hold dear. I did not realize that this formation was a happy coincidence of history and culture: what were the chances, after all, that a Jewish kid from the Upper West Side of Manhattan would approach literature with a grounding in certain non-negotiable religious values and practices? Statistically, I was more likely either to come from an assimilated, nominally Jewish family, the type Calvin Trillin has so adeptly depicted, one with little observance of the Sabbath or Kosher laws, or from a strictly Orthodox family, one without a television set, little access to newspapers, and no interest in having their son exposed to external ideas.

But that’s not what happened: rather, reading literature put me in touch with who I am inside. Indeed, in my years as a beginning reader, what I read actually helped form the core of concepts and values that I brought to later reading experiences. Reading allowed me to expand beyond the limits of my own experience, as Rosenblatt (1995) advises when she writes that “If the student’s structure of attitudes and ideas is built on too narrow a base of experience, he should be helped to gain broader and deeper insight through literature itself” (101). Reading allowed me to have what Rosenblatt (1995) describes as the chance “to participate in another’s vision – to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain

insights that will make his own life more comprehensible” (7). This study will present what this meant and continues to mean for me, for my students, and for other readers as well.

Many of the insights literature has afforded me as my “doors to inwardness” have opened relate directly to issues of right and wrong, just and unjust, fair and unfair – in short, issues of a moral nature. In chapter two I will begin to define the very term “morality;” the term’s limitations and possibilities; and the concomitant issues that and discussion of “moral education” by necessity raises. For now, suffice it to say that my own reading often made me identify with the characters whose stories I read, a process which in turn often made me evaluate the decisions that they made – and made me think whether I would have done the same.

Blau (2003) notes that many readers and teachers today, despite all the turns and developments of the past century plus of educational theory, still follow the tradition of Leavis and Arnold: *i.e.*, that of seeing “literary education as a source of psychological and moral wisdom and a humanizing bulwark against the crass materialism, ethical obtuseness, and intellectual crudity of contemporary commercial and political discourse” (201, fn 1). In my own experience as a reader, student and teacher, I have found that the literature classroom has the potential to provide such wisdom and to serve as such a bulwark, both with texts that I found on my own as well as those that were assigned to me, as I will detail below.

II. The Company of Friends

Booth (1988), whose theory I will revisit in detail below in chapter four, writes of the books providing a type of friendship “that is not only pleasant or profitable, in some immediate way, but also good for me, good for its own sake.” We seek such friendship, he continues, “*for the sake of the friendly company itself – the living in friendship*” (173, italics in original). The

very books themselves serve as artifacts when I think of the “friends” I have made in books. This began even before I can remember, as the snapshot above indicates. And I am a collector: of authors, of ideas, and of the physical books themselves. I am proud that I still have every actual book I have ever been assigned in elementary school, high school, college, and graduate school. A bookcase in my bedroom today (we are constantly seeking new ways and new places to store books in our home; I have often said that I am sorry that there’s no way to somehow shelve them on the ceiling) holds a shelf of the works of authors Herman Wouk, Michael Chabon, and Mark Helprin. Another shelf holds some of my beloved Tintin comics and the collected works of John Steinbeck. A third shelf holds books of Yiddish literature and poetry and the collected works of Yiddish linguist Michael Wex. A fourth shelf contains books on life in New York city; another holds Mary Norris’s *Between You and Me: Confessions of a Comma Queen*, John Lithgow’s collection of poetry *The Poet’s Corner*, Peter Mendelsund’s *What We See When We Read*, Sven Birkerts’s *The Gutenberg Elegies*, Saint-Exupery’s *The Little Prince*, a paperback set of the five books of Moses in Hebrew, a number of collections of commentaries on the weekly Torah portion, David McCollough’s *The American Spirit*, and three short works by C. S. Lewis. While the overall population of this bookcase skews more heavily Jewish (I noticed in retrospect, for example, that all the novelists listed here are Jewish), my taste still runs beyond, seeking out the “wisdom of the nations.” And each of these books is more than two covers holding pages together: they are a friend, who when time allows, will be invited back for a visit. Sometimes, it seems, they invite themselves.

Chang (2008) writes that human subjectivity is made up of two elements: “lived experience” and “perspectives on the ‘physical, political, and historical context of that experience’” (103). By revisiting the memories associated with each book, I connect the

experience and the context with the physical artifacts that engendered them. Interestingly, I can sometimes more readily recall when and where I first encountered a book than I can its contents or their meaning for me. There is a visceral connection as well as an intellectual or emotional one. However, I can also often recall the context in which I first encountered these works: in the case of school books, I recall a context related to the academic experience or the teacher who “made the introduction;” with those books I found on my own, I often remember the bookstore – if they came from a physical store – where I first made their acquaintance. Comparing the physical artifact of the book with the data I derive from my memory is a significant part of my method in this study. The data, whether books, other documents, or memories, are Chang’s “lived experience;” the analysis of that data will provide the perspectives on the contexts of those experiences. The goal throughout this study is to understand my own experience as a reader, how it has impacted how I understand and define myself, and how it has altered my own moral development. I will then attempt to apply that understanding to a model of how others’ reading of literature can similarly impact and influence their own definitions of self.

My tour of this bookcase (just like my analysis of the snapshot above) provides an additional piece of what Chang (2008) terms “external data,” which complements and confirms the “internal data” provided by my memory (55). The books are at once containers of content and of associations, and they are also artifacts that verify my memories, my emotions, and – as I will discuss in what follows – the decisions they helped me learn how to make.

Indeed, Bruns (2011) writes of an aspect of the psychological factors at play as we read. She posits that we ideally read literature to “move beyond” ourselves, to enlarge our being, to heal the loneliness of the self and (here she cites C. S. Lewis) to “correct its provincialism.” (15). Bruns argues that narrative itself becomes what psychology terms a “transitional object” (30),

thereby allowing the reader to get lost in the experience of that object. This in turn loosens the boundaries between the self and the other, allowing for what Bruns describes as a re-working of the self (39). For me, the physical books themselves serve as “transitional objects,” carrying mental and emotional associations for me for many years. This brief tour of but one out-of-the-way bookshelf is a somewhat generalized example of such associations, of the creation of some of my “transitional objects.”

I can readily pull an example off this shelf: one such “transitional object” is Saint-Exupery’s *The Little Prince* (1943). My strong emotional connection to this novel, one which my mother initially introduced to me at age eight or nine, allowed me to begin to imagine other literal and figurative worlds. In Bruns’s terms, I “got lost” in Saint-Exupery’s narrative, and that wonderful feeling of getting lost has not faded, nor have my memories of the Prince, his beloved Rose and Fox. The theoretical and critical lenses that I will shortly discuss, borrowing from the theoretical and methodological work of autoethnography to help balance the unreliability of memory-data, help me understand how I have come to learn decision making from such memories and emotional associations.

Maxine Greene (1995) describes her own reading as “pursu[ing] my own adventures into meaning.” She writes that reading narratives allowed her “to conceive patterns of being” and to “imagine being something more than I have come to be” (86-87). What my books have given me is that possibility to “conceive patterns of being” in my own life. My books then are the breadcrumbs from my own journey, each imprinted with meaning and emotional connection. Those books that have left little or no impression are far outnumbered by those with deeply ingrained associations. These associations are as strong for the narratives of the books I have read as they are for the physical books themselves as well, which takes Bruns’s idea a step

further. A number of bibliopoles that I know speak similarly of the books that they own. We agree that the books have seemed “sad” when space limitations required them to remain boxed away; and we think of the unpacking of books after a move as a “reunion” with friends. The 1970 baby pulling books off the shelf loves those books (and loves pulling them off the shelves) as much today as he did back then.

III. What I Hope to Provide

The essential question of this study is why read, why study, and why teach literature? Great literature arguably had great aesthetic value, but has it any value beyond the aesthetic? I argue that it does – a tremendous value. Indeed, it may well be a modality of offering a way of processing the world – indeed, a way of living – that seems sorely lacking in this young twenty-first century. By sharing how literature has mattered to me, I hope to show how that mattering is important and illustrative for others, be they students or teachers of literature.

This study employs a hybrid research method. My religious background has led me to find a great affinity for certain literary criticism, namely that which sees literature as a source for moral thinking and moral decision-making. Did I come to literature because of my roots or did my accidental predilection for reading only reinforce extant but latent ways of thinking? I cannot at this moment unscramble that omelet. I offer a history of my transactions with texts, texts that were initially formative for me as a moral thinker, then useful for me in a variety of ways as a teacher of texts, then which I later began to appreciate in a more critical and theoretical way as I developed a deeper understanding of how those texts had influenced me and how they had – or had not – influenced my students.

I borrow heavily from the theory and method of autoethnography in this study, in the sense that I will examine a variety of “internal data” from my memories of books, teachers, and classroom situations, along with “external data” including interviews, report cards, lecture notes and exam questions, and will subject my data to a number of critical lenses with the goal of what Anderson (2006) describes as a commitment to “an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena” (375). Using the lenses of the literary theory and criticism of Wayne Booth, Martha Nussbaum, Robert Coles and Aharon Lichtenstein, I will analyze my experiences as a reader and teacher, and I explain how literary works I read and taught can serve as vehicles for the development of a student’s moral sensibility – and how teachers can help facilitate that development. I use my own unique vantage point, that of an Orthodox Jewish boy who initially found friends in secular texts, then found that those texts were among his great teachers of values, to offer a singular perspective on the power of these texts. These lenses, which are (to mix metaphors a bit) filtered through my unique perspective, provide an interpretation that will at first lead me to explore the field of moral education as a whole, if only because I shared many of its desired outcomes in my literature classroom. After a brief overview of this field, I use the work of Hanan Alexander, David Hansen, Carl Rogers, Jeffrey Kress and others to present a more general yet nuanced account of how “spiritual awareness” and the humane fusing of reason and emotion can be fostered in students, with a flexibility and understanding that learning is a way to learn a process, not a process towards a specific set of intellectual goals.

I would humbly call this hybrid method a literary-auto-ethno-pedogography, as I seek to produce a critical history of my education as a reader and teacher of literature. My inquiry into my own reading and teaching has led me to understand my own and my students’ development

as moral decision makers; my next step is to expand the depth and quantity of moral conversations and bring them to the classrooms of others. As such, my study includes ideas for how to bring about moral conversations in English classrooms, both through student writing and oral exchange, based on ideas from Sheridan Blau, Jeff Wilhelm, David Hansen, and others. I conclude with the still unanswered questions that my study has raised for me and for other researchers who share my interest in the relations between secular and religious education and the problem of teaching literature to shape character and refine a reader's moral sensibility. I also offer some concluding suggestions about how future students and teachers might build on and expand upon my work.

Chapter Two

A Review of Literature

I. Transacting through Four Lenses

So how to proceed in my recounting of self and analysis thereof? The unique nature of my situation demands a unique methodology, as discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter will address a number of issues that arose as I conducted my research. I first develop a theory of a moral classroom. Then, even though my theoretical model is not one of “moral education,” I will provide a review of the field of moral education and the critiques of this field, since all discussions of moral classrooms can only be held against the backdrop of this field. In the chapter that follows, I will address issues that the use of memory as data have raised, and I will discuss what elements of the field of autoethnography I seek to utilize in my study.

This study is more than sentimental musings on half-remembered encounters with literary works; while such a work might be an enjoyable read (and would be something enjoyable to write), I have developed a more rigorous method. Using Rosenblatt’s transactional theory as a baseline, I align her thinking with the critical lenses offered by several other theorists, thinkers whose approaches to literature dovetail not only with Rosenblatt’s understanding of the relationship between reader and text, but also of my own sensibilities of the impact literature has had on me and what I have seen it have on my own students.

My theoretical research has led me to formulate four initial fundamental methods of transaction, for myself as a reader and as a teacher of readers. These distinct approaches overlap in their understanding of the moral educative power of literature – after all, that’s not only my agenda, but one that I hope to show has a rich history in English education and can have one

today and in the future as well – but each offers a different model of how the transaction occurs for the reader. Each approach is a distinct lens, I argue, through which to view the literature discussed. I will briefly introduce each lens in this chapter, and I will expand on each in the four chapters that follow.

The first lens comes from Wayne Booth, whose work leads me to think about the role that fiction plays in establishing “what-if” propositions in the mind of the reader (in this case, my own emerging reader’s mind) and how the reader’s impressions are then refined through comparison with those of other readers. By taking on, as Booth (1988) describes, the mind of a book’s characters (139), seeing a book’s “implied author” (185), or both, what moral choices did I make as a reader – and what moral choices do I hope my students will make? I will offer examples of my own connections to texts both assigned in academic contexts and freely chosen and of the connections I wanted my students to make (sometimes, I realize in hindsight, inappropriately) with texts that I taught. Booth (1995) writes that he hopes for modern-day students “who engage fully in thinking about their emotional responses, moving toward deeper self-knowledge” and for teachers “who will educate students to resist passive absorption and develop active transaction” (xiii). Booth addresses emotional transactions; in my own reading and my own teaching, through the model of the “what-if” proposition, I have experienced what I would call “moral transactions” as well and will detail and analyze them in chapter four.

The second lens is rooted in the work of philosopher Martha Nussbaum, who writes (1995) of the power of literature to create a “judicious spectator,” *i.e.*, a reader whose vicarious experience of reading of those in need brings him or her to go “beyond empathy” to a place where her or she is able to evaluate a character’s situation and decisions with healthy detachment. A “judicious” reader ought to assess “the meaning of those sufferings and their

implications for the lives involved” (90). But a reader should not get carried away; he or she should ideally reach what Nussbaum (2010) calls “literary neutrality,” which “like the reading of a novel, gets close to the people and their actual experience. That is how it is able to be fair and to perform its own detached evaluation correctly” (90). I often, but not always, achieved such a balance: at times I could care less about the characters and their situations, and at times I could not separate myself from identifying with them. As a teacher, I was frustrated when I did not see evidence of my students’ empathic connection with the texts we read, but, as I will explain in what follows, I may not have been realistic in my goals.

I will examine a number of vicarious experiences that I underwent as a reader, identifying instances of gains in empathy (which is admittedly difficult to quantify) as well as attempts to bring about similar gains in my own students. I wanted them to care, which, as it turns out, was part of the zeitgeist at the time. One of the “Six Pillars of Character” cited by Smagorinsky and Taxel (2010) as a foundation of the late 1990s / early 2000s federal call by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) for character curriculum is “Caring,” which asks people to “Be kind; Be compassionate and show you care; Express gratitude; Forgive others; Help people in need” (143). This was a character trait that I wanted (and still want) my students to have, and one that I hope I myself possess.

Nussbaum (2010) describes a system of education wherein students learn a “relation to the world, mediated by correct facts and respectful curiosity” (81). She lauds Dewey’s Laboratory School for helping children to be “more lively, more focused than when they are passive recipients,” adding that what Dewey “disliked was abstract learning uncoupled from human life” (86). In my own reading of and transactions with texts I have always seen myself in the character’s shoes. When teaching students, I tried to have them transact similarly by

bringing in real-world applications of values discussed in the texts we read and by applying those values. I wish to mediate Rosenblatt's (1995) concern that the student will "consider literature something academic, remote from his own present concerns and needs" (59). Rosenblatt's antidote is to attempt to enable the student to make both an intellectual and emotional connection to the text (72). The texts to which I have most deeply connected and from which I have grown morally are those about which I both think and feel something. I have hoped to foster similar depth of feeling and thought same in my students, and I will offer examples and analysis in chapter five.

The third lens finds its source in the thinking of child psychiatrist and educational theorist Robert Coles. Coles (1989) describes one of his former Harvard students, who went on "book binges" instead of drinking (134) when he felt sad about the "hollow" nature of his work as a corporate attorney (133). For this student, Harold, "the library was a sanctuary, a place of moral refuge" (135). Coles sees books as moral instructors, or what he variously calls "signposts" (68), "challenges to conscience" (81), and "kinsmen, kinswomen, comrades, advisers" (158). In contrast with – or perhaps in support of – such a lens, Rosenblatt (1995) writes that books can offer the reader "an objective presentation of our own problems" (40). In chapter six, I will offer examples of my experience of books as instructors. I will detail the problems and solutions, the questions and answers, the back and forth, that my transactions with the texts presented to me. I will then analyze when and how I also sought to use the texts I taught as instructors, finding moments of what I see as success and moments of great failure as well, for both students and teacher.

The fourth lens can be most properly introduced after the first three have been fully explicated, so I beg the reader's indulgence until we arrive at chapter seven. Suffice it to say

while Booth, Nussbaum and Coles each offer distinct perspectives on the morally educative transactions I experienced and sought for my students, the fourth lens – that of Rabbi Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein – offers the perspective I found lacking based on my own unique vantage point as a Modern Orthodox reader and English teacher.

I seek to create, as I will discuss below in chapter seven, what Ely, Vinz *et al* describe as a “third space,” one which “engenders various contextualizations of the data in order to yield different avenues of insight with the purpose of challenging, mixing, testing, and ultimately transgressing what the researcher or reader ‘knows’ (40). I see this “third space” as one wherein the worlds of literary transaction and moral thinking intersect. A space which, as Ely, Vinz, *et al*, describe, makes meaning for me and will allow me “to communicate that meaning with people in order to involve them in thinking about and living [my] research experiences” (61). What follows below are steps necessary for creating such a conceptual space. Before those steps, however, and prior to delving into the perspective offered by each lens, though, I will introduce the theoretical model I have developed.

II. Promoting Morality and Intelligent Spirituality through Literature and Education

The best understanding for a teaching of “morality” is rooted in the thought of Hanan Alexander (2001), who focuses in no small part on the idea that such a curriculum buttresses democratic values. He argues that what he terms a “spiritual” curriculum is necessary because in a democratic society, leaders are “spiritual educators,” and every citizen in such a society has the potential to become a leader “when they accept the responsibilities of self-control and self-governance and when they teach by example. *Every democratic citizen is a potential spiritual*

educator” (200, italics in original). Alexander is a proponent of what he terms “intelligent spirituality,” and defines the democratic society as one that values “intelligence – critical judgment, freedom, and fallibility.” Such a society will require what he terms “spiritual” – not *religious* – education. If we wish to develop leaders and followers who uphold the values of democracy, open-mindedness, critical thinking and meaningful discourse, then we must refine the way we are training those leaders and followers.

Alexander defines spirituality as “living according to a vision of the good,” a definition which resonates for me, as it does not fall into Haidt’s (2012) trap of “parochialism” in too narrowly defining morality, an issue discussed below in section IV. Alexander notes that there is a “reciprocal relationship between spirituality... and education.” Education thus “also needs to be grounded in a spiritual vision so that it, too, can be meaningful” (xi). Such an education is vital for individuals and society as a whole. This educational approach incorporates both a concern for individuals as well as “sociocentric” concerns. Such qualities ideally produce a society where all are both “self-critical” and able to “sit in self-judgment,” in the words of Garrod and Bramble (1977), who believe that “every individual must learn to become an *autonomous* decision-maker” (105).

Alexander (2004) writes that “spiritual interest” has grown due to “the sense that schools and other contemporary educational institutions have lost their moral compass” (viii). He bemoans the artificial schism between knowledge on the one side and religion and ethics on the other, and feels that the relegation of spiritual values to home or places of worship, and their exclusion from “the public spheres of work or politics” (which includes most schools in the United States) is an unnecessary and ultimately detrimental outgrowth of the Enlightenment politics that have influenced our current system of education (viii). I will return to Alexander –

whose definition of spirituality is somewhat different than that of Moffett (1994) – later in my discussion of Lichtenstein, in chapter seven.

In prior eras, such values were inculcated in the church (or, in my case, in the synagogue). Such moral conversation has moved to the school as fewer families maintain the level of religious practice that once held. Here we see a continuation of a concern that goes back as far as the nineteenth century, when Matthew Arnold (as we will see in chapter seven), believed that “morals” and religious values were growing “tiresome” to his Victorian contemporaries and that literature could take up that baton. He writes (1865) that “poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life, – to the question: How to live” (353). Arnold’s view of the morally educative function of literature held great sway over the nascent curriculum of English in the Victorian Age: Applebee (1974) writes that Arnold thought that an education based on literary texts “...could be the source of a new principle of authority to replace the eroding bonds of class and of religion” (23). Applebee also cites Arnold’s contemporary, Horace Scudder, who writes that “the place of literature ‘is in spiritualizing life, letting light into the mind, inspiring and feeding the higher forces of human nature’” (24). G. Stanley Hall, another late nineteenth-century educator mentioned by Applebee, also “stressed the place of literature in moral development” (57). I see these various labels so overlapping as to be practically synonymous, even though many of these terms carry different theoretical baggage.

Indeed, a similar conception of the aim of education more broadly (as distinct from a specifically literary education) reappears in the late twentieth century not merely in the work of Alexander, but in the thought of Moffett (1994), who writes of the power of his “universal schoolhouse” model which “requires developing all levels of one’s being toward self-realization

and self-transcendence.” For Moffett (and for me), “Spiritual education centers on personal growth” (58). Moffett further adds that in addition to his model redeeming what he sees as the lost American “prosperity and democracy,” that “personal development may also be the main purpose of life” (330). Carl Rogers (1995) lists a number of qualities of the “person of tomorrow,” which include “a yearning for the spiritual.” Such people, explains Rogers, “wish to find a meaning and purpose in life that is greater than the individual. The wish to live a life of inner peace... Sometimes, in altered states of consciousness, they experience the unity and harmony of the universe” (352). These are lofty levels of engagement indeed. Many of them, I contend, along with my Victorian predecessors, can come from the reading of literature.

All of which then brings us to Booth who in the Arnoldian tradition, emphasized the ethical and implicitly moral dimension of literary experiences as well as the social and dialogical character of our education through literature, locating our ethical and moral thinking about literary texts in our transactions with other readers. Booth, who I will examine in detail below, explains (1988) that as readers we neither deduce nor induce our appraisal of a text from any other sources, but rather “It is always the result of a direct sense that something now before us has yielded an experience that we find comparatively desirable, loveable, or, on the other hand, comparatively repugnant, contemptible or hateful” (71). We have an almost visceral reaction to what we read. As we will soon see, for Booth there is a second step as well: the impression that we form of literature and the lesson that we learn or we reject occurs through the vehicle of conversations among readers. Nussbaum (1995) is perhaps the most influential of contemporary theorists in the Arnoldian tradition, defending “the literary imagination precisely because it seems... an essential ingredient of an ethical stance that asks us to concern ourselves with the good of other people whose lives are distant from our own” (xvi). Literature has by theorists

both older and more recent been seen as a primer for thoughtful moral, spiritual decision-making. I will return to these concepts in fuller depth in chapters seven and eight.

III. Mapping the Conceptual Terrain of Moral Education

Before beginning this study in earnest, I must discuss the concepts inherent in a discussion of “moral education.” Even though my model is in no way a proposal for a curriculum of “moral education” or “morality,” any analysis of “moral” anything in the classroom must be conducted against the backdrop of the last fifty years of such curricula: the shadow that these curricula cast, with ramifications both positive and negative, is far too influential both programmatically and nominally.

I begin with the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, whose thought dominates the field since the 1960s. Kohlberg (1968) writes that a “child is born with very little patterning of personality or of mind.” Therefore, he continues, “it is possible to teach a child almost any behavior pattern, provided one teaches in terms of the laws of association learning and provided one starts at an early age before competing response patterns have been learned” (1020). Kohlberg (1977) posits that students can be led through six developmental stages of moral development, which are summarized as

- [1] The punishment-and-obedience orientation;
- [2] The instrumental-relativist orientation;
- [3] The interpersonal concordance or ‘good boy – nice girl’ orientation;
- [4] The “law and order” orientation;
- [5] The social-contract, legalistic orientation; and
- [6] The universal-ethical-principle orientation (54-55).

Kohlberg (1980a) is careful to reject traditional “notions of stages” as connected to a “conception of natural biological growth and unfolding.” Rather, the stages he advocates are based in a “cognitive-developmental ‘theory of moralization,’” which, while it does attempt “to explain universals and natural trends in development,” also “specifies the kind of environmental conditions necessary to formulate moral development” (37 – 38). He further explains (1977) that the six stages are each an “organized syste[m] of thought;” their order represents “an invariant sequence,” wherein “movement in always forward, never backward” (barring any trauma); and each stage includes the prior ones in what he calls “hierarchical integrations” (54).

Kohlberg (1966) turns the goal of educators who wish to inculcate morals away from “administrative convenience or state-defined values,” and urges a focus on “the stimulation of the development of the individual child’s moral judgement and character as a goal of moral education” (19). Indeed, Lickona (1991) remarks that “Kohlberg’s first contribution was to call attention to the child as a moral thinker” (239). In Kohlberg’s (1980) classroom, students respond to moral “dilemmas” which are presented by the teacher. The ensuing discussion allows the students to formulate and refine their moral values as individuals and as a group. His approach “unites philosophic and psychological considerations,” fosters moral change with methods that have “long-range efficacy,” and is “in accord with a constitutional system guaranteeing freedom of belief” (17).

Another important facet of his approach is the focus on what he terms the “hidden curriculum,” or “the fact that teachers and schools are engaged in moral education without explicitly and philosophically discussing or formulating its goals and methods” (23). In other words, for Kohlberg, schools are already often conducting moral education: he simply formalizes that work and offers a framework for a more productive teaching of the goals already in place.

While Kohlberg's approach is remarkable and revolutionary, it has some serious limitations as well.

The questions raised against Kohlberg vary in intensity and vehemence. Smagorinsky and Taxel (2010) cite Gilligan's famous dispute of Kohlberg's all-male sample. In 1983, Gilligan replicates his methods with women, finding that "because of their communication orientation they typically did not reach Kohlberg's highest levels of morality, which privileged an individual's abstractions of laws at the expense of a more relational contextualization of issues." Kohlberg's sample thus "did not correspond to the population as a whole" (29). Wilson (1980) further argues against Kohlberg's data, noting that since the very concept of morality is difficult to define and cannot be objective, as it will by definition vary from society to society (217). Wilson argues that the language used by children responding to researchers when they explain their moral reasoning is by nature indeterminate. For example, when a child answers the question of "why is a particular act wrong to do?" with a sentence beginning "Because..." the child's answer may have several meanings:

The child may understand (i) what *other people think or say* is wrong... (ii) what *other people actually avoid* doing is wrong; ... (iv) what he actually avoids doing is wrong; (v) what he thinks *he himself ought* not to do is wrong... (221, italics in original).

Since it is neigh impossible to fully comprehend and quantify subject results, Wilson says, Kohlberg's data is flawed.

Other criticism of Kohlberg is more philosophical than it is scientific. Wallwork (1980) writes that "it is safe to conclude from public discourse and the testimony of social scientists that most Americans believe morality to be dependent on religion, in some sense" (272). In a post-Victorian world without faith at its center (as it was in prior eras), this is a challenge, especially for a teacher of general studies like me who would like to bring moral

conversations into the English classroom. Another philosophical critique is offered by Haidt (2012), who rejects Kohlberg as too biased towards what he terms WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic⁵) (112), writing that “If you see a world full of individuals, then you’ll want the morality of Kohlberg... a morality that protects those individuals and their individual rights. You’ll emphasize concerns about harm and fairness” (114).

Kohlberg’s attempts to create a curriculum in moral education are thus not without their share of controversy. While educators seem to consistently and strongly feel the need to teach some type of curriculum in moral education, they seem to be equally consistent and strong in their opinions as to what model of such a curriculum, whether Kohlberg’s or another, is correct.

Haidt (2012) argues for a vastly different model of moral development than that of Kohlberg. Haidt criticizes Kohlberg and other moral philosophers of his generation, saying what they “were really doing was fabricating justifications after ‘consulting the emotive centers’ of their own brains” (38). In the words of neuroscientist Gary Marcus, Haidt argues for a certain innateness to human morality. We are born with “a first draft, which experience then revises.” What Haidt calls the “righteous mind” is thus “‘organized in advance of experience’” and “revised during childhood to produce the diversity of moralities that we find across cultures – and across the political spectrum” (153).

Haidt resonated for me as I reflect on my own moral development and how ideas that made complete sense to me at earlier points in my life now seem provincial, limited, and even prejudiced. Stories have been the key to developing many of these ideas and opinions. This development has taken place internally: therefore, I cannot claim to have seen it take place in any

⁵ Based on the work of Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan (2010)

of my students. I am ever hopeful – based on my own experience – that it has happened for them the way that it happened for me.

Haidt cites Darwin, who writes that our sense of morality, our conscience, is a “highly complex sentiment.” It begins in “social instincts,” relies on how others approve of our acts and speech, and “rules by reason, self-interest, and in later times by deep religious feelings, and confirmed by instruction and habit” (226). What I explore in this autobiographical project, using the four critical lenses detailed below, is how some of that evolution took place in my own mind, and how I hope to help it takes place in the minds of those I teach.

Indeed, the very act of writing this study has enabled an articulation of my own self-narrative, which describes me as a person who has been helped and whose ability to make moral judgments has developed immensely by reading literature. When I fold in my background of Orthodox Judaism and its concomitant baggage, then consider the phenomenon of Modern Orthodoxy’s openness to wisdom which comes from outside the world of Torah, I realize how unique such a position is for someone like me. I realize not only a desire to define my interests and predilections, that I have a strong desire to help others grow and develop similarly, whether they share my background or not. Hansen (2001) writes that “teaching entails a moral, not just academic, relation between teacher and student” (10). This describes the type of connection I seek to foster with my students. Kruger Levingston (2009), in a study of overt and implicit moral education in both public and private school settings, notes that how the teacher treats both the subject matter and the student reflect the quality of this moral relationship (101).

Kruger Levingston explains that the messages from the teacher are twofold: first, a teacher can demonstrate moral values when relating to students as people, such as when a teacher expresses concern over a student’s health when she is absent, which models caring for other

students (4); secondly, the very curricular and pedagogic choices that the teacher makes can help students hone their own morality: when commenting on classroom methodology, Kruger Levingston notes that moral questions offered by the teacher can “lead students to consider weighty issues that could have an impact on their own understanding of friendship, love, hate, conflict, and peace” (117). Kress (2012) cautions Jewish educators not to falsely distinguish between influencing their students’ “heads” and ignoring their “hearts.” The assumption that one can differentiate between the “cognitive” and the “socioaffective aspects” of education may well be false. “Cognitive appraisal,” writes Kress, citing Eric Jensen’s work, “can shape an emotional experience” (25). Citing Kress and Elias (2008), Kress adds that “Jewish education aims to touch cognition, affect and behavior,” or, in other words, “to build Jewish identity” (29). This agenda definitely influenced my own as an English teacher, a role I will discuss in chapters four and five.

Probst (1988) identifies five kinds of knowledge that can be gained from literature: “knowledge of the self, knowledge of others, knowledge of texts, knowledge of contexts, and knowledge of processes (of making meaning)” (27). These for me are vital categories, and ones that speak to the reader’s moral development. A reader must know him or herself and know others in order to make meaning of his or her life and his or her interactions with others. Probst’s categories of “knowledge of self” and “knowledge of others,” however, are subtle when compared to categories such as “self-discipline” or “best effort” that are coined by right-wing educational theorists Lickona and Davidson (2005) under the overarching label of what they term “Performance Character” (18, also cited in Kruger Levingston 117). These “character strengths,” write Lickona and Davidson, “enable us to pursue our personal best – whether the outcome is realized or not” (18). Lickona and others of his political and philosophical bent seek

to inculcate specific moral values through what Smagorinsky and Taxel (2010) call “didactic” character education, one in which the “power of adults and cultural icons is central,” where “adults have unassailable authority in providing direction to young people’s moral development” (43). While, as I will explain, I may not agree with many of Lickona and Davidson’s politics and educational goals, their categories do resonate for me, and are as desirable for me to help my students create as are those of Probst. I want students to have knowledge of self, but I also want them to strive to be straightforward and honest in their interactions with others and to be hardworking and committed in their work ethic. Suggestions for how to help students attain these goals are the substance of chapter eight.

I saw and continue to see the need to bring Probst’s categories as well as (a tempered version of) Lickona’s into the curriculum. Buckley and Erricker (2004) identify a modern-day psychological and emotional issue, writing that “young people are existing [sic] without metanarrative. There is no coherent ‘story’ that tells them how they should live... They have choice, and who tells them how to choose? (182). The missing “metanarrative,” for Buckley and Erricker, is that of what moral decisions to make – and how best to make them. In a world with a wide variety of options, young students are told and feel pressure to make wise decisions, but they are not consistently taught how to do so. Such confusion strongly argues for constructing a curriculum that helps students learn values and how and when to apply them into effect.

As I alluded to, much of the recent pressure for curricular instruction of fixed, specific moral values comes from the political right. In his summary of the “case for values education,” Lickona (1991) writes that “Transmitting values is and always has been the work of civilization,” adding that “[t]he great questions facing both the individual person and the human race are moral

questions.” Lickona sees the issue as a vital missing piece in the reform of the educational system, writing that

[t]he school’s role as moral educator becomes even more vital at a time when millions of children get little moral teaching from their parents and where value-centered influences such as church or temple are also absent from their lives.

Although I disagree with Lickona’s conclusions, some of his complaint rings true.

Indeed, Lickona sees moral education as an overarching need – and void – in schools for a number of reasons. Commitment to moral education is essential “to attract and keep good teachers,” who should be encouraged that “values education is a doable job” (20 -22). I am not as panicked as Lickona: Smagorinsky and Taxel (2010) sanguinely point out that although Lickona and others see the current state of affairs as a “crisis,” pointing to “the breakdown of the family, an epidemic of violence, the deterioration of civility, rampant greed... dishonesty at all levels of society, a rising tide of sleaze in the media,” among other problems (20), such worry is not unique to the twenty-first century. Smagorinsky and Taxel (2010) argue that not only is the “for-character approach to education... older than written history,” but that, according to James Davidson Hunter, “every U.S. generation for at least the past two centuries has believed its youth to be in a state of crisis” and in need of “moral development” (23).

Smagorinsky and Taxel (2010) describe the spectrum of discourses of recent State curricula from across the Unites States seeking to address character education. The authors write that the Southern States they studied tend to “position adults and the young in authoritarian relationships,” wherein “moral adults guide individual students toward virtuous behavior of the sort long lost in our increasingly coarse and vulgar society” (122). The approach is “primarily didactic” (122), based on a yearning for the “good old days” (74) when morals were more universally shared, and morals are, for many conservatives, “the province of the Almighty, rather

than a mortal construction” (34). The Midwestern States studied, on the other hand, “rely on a set of discourses that emphasizes a communitarian set of relationships,” with adults both modeling behavior for the young as well as engaging in “reciprocal exchanges,” with “the community” at the “locus of attention.” The Midwestern States felt that students need to understand the plurality of perspectives of community members (122), and many of the Midwesterners believe that “truth, rather than being absolute, is constructed by individuals based on their experience with what life offers them” (34). (My own partialities, as I will discuss in the following section, fall out somewhere in between.)

Since the very source of morality is itself an agenda in the Culture Wars, defining the term “morality” becomes slippery as well. Haidt (2012) notes that there is a challenge inherent in choosing which values are “moral,” noting that “[a]ny effort to define morality by designating a few issues as the truly moral ones and dismissing the rest as ‘social convention’ is bound to be parochial” (315).

Thus, despite a number of diverse thinkers acknowledging its importance, the definition of “morality” remains elusive. Still, I stubbornly seek to inculcate values in my students that are not only related to the rights of the individual, but which can be categorized under what Haidt (2012) calls “sociocentric morality,” which places the “needs of groups and institutions first, often ahead of the needs of individuals” (114). The traditional Jewish values of community and of mutual responsibility with which I myself have been inculcated inform my own set of values, and as a student and then as a teacher in Orthodox Jewish private schools, I sought (and seek) to develop such priorities in my students. In section V below I will explore the Jewish educational aspects of moral education in greater depth.

IV. Criticism of Moral Education

How then to proceed, whether as proponent of a curriculum in moral education, or even as one suggesting to add a moral bent to an English literature classroom? The definition of “morality” – let alone figuring out how to *teach* it – still remains murky. Chazan (1985) summarizes some of these challenges, writing that the “definitive stance on the social origins of morality as an objective fact is the source of much of the discontent of current approaches to moral education.” Lickona and others of his stance would claim that morality is divinely rooted. Here’s the problem: I think so too. I am therefore, in Chazan’s words, “uncomfortable with the notion of morality as a body of social norms and conventions that are arbitrarily imposed on the young” (10). Chazan resonates for me as I straddle, in both my personal and professional lives, the worlds and the outlooks of the yeshiva and the academy. Morality, to me, is not simply a “body of social norms,” but part of a greater, innate human quality, one that is innate because God placed it there. I thus align with Haidt more than with Kohlberg, and with certain limited aspects of Lickona and Davidson. I will return to this discussion in chapter seven.

Regardless, however, of where one thinks morality originates, three major classroom challenges remain if one wishes to teach “morality.” For one, educators cannot simply present the subject as a set of facts or set of skills to be taught like they would teach geography or how to measure the hypotenuse of a triangle. A further critique of a curriculum in “morality” per se is offered by educational philosopher John Wilson, who is concerned “with the presentation of a notion of morality as a *procedure* for confronting moral issues, rather than a set of mores of a particular society...” Rejecting an overt curriculum, Wilson instead strongly feels that students need to develop “a series of abilities,” which he calls “the moral components” that will allow them to process and judge moral issues independently (30, italics in original).

Thirdly – and here I likely divert from Lickona – I believe that teachers need to avoid indoctrinating students. Discussions need to be as much student-driven as teacher-driven. Students need to process (and “buy in” to) such a curriculum for it to expand their worldview successfully. This is what Rogers (1969) means when he urges subject matter that is relevant to the student (a topic to which I will return in chapter eight). Rogers writes that “A person learns significantly only those things which he perceives as being involved in the maintenance of or the enhancement of his own self” (158). In addition to such classroom challenges, there are a number of outright arguments against the teaching of morality in schools that I will address as well.

Chazan (1985) lists a number of critics of developing a values curriculum, critics from across historical, geographical and cultural spans (91). Bereiter, for example, argues that schools should not impose societal values on a student (which make him or her into “a socialized agent of that society”), but rather can only care for children and train them in specific “skills.” These “skills” include not only reading, writing and math but also “learning how to speak honestly what is on your mind, learning how to take the point of view of others, and learning how to distinguish between a viola and a violin.” Such education “does not come to shape the whole person according to some speculative world-view, but rather to provide him with true, non-speculative knowledge...” (94-95).

The “individualist” critique, according to Chazan (1985), claims that “moral education impedes genuine moral development in the young, rather than advancing it” (96). Students need to develop their own moral sense, runs this argument, rather than having it externally impressed upon them. A teacher, therefore, must enable students to develop their own moral sensibility, whether by modeling critical, open-minded thinking or by encouraging such thought through

class assignments and assessments; a teacher of literature must do both of the aforementioned, in addition to choosing texts that foster such discussion. This position is supported by Rogers (1969) when he advises that the student ought to participate “responsibly in the learning process” and argues on behalf of “self-initiated learning,” which he defines as involving “the whole person of the learner – feelings as well as intellect.” This kind of integrated learning, Rogers concludes, “is the most lasting and pervasive” (162). These are powerful critiques; an individualistic or targeted moral curriculum would not succeed. On the other hand, students need to develop a moral sense and an ability to make moral decisions. I will argue, based on my own experience as a reader and teacher, that the English classroom can fill this need.

Indeed, even Kohlberg, who Haidt has criticized as too WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic), explains why a high school must provide some type of curriculum in morality, explaining that we cannot assume that a student will simply develop a moral sensitivity through post-educational “spontaneous experience.” (Clearly, Kohlberg would like his own model to be adopted.) Kohlberg (1980) writes that a high school graduate without a specific moral education is unlikely to be in a position to have the capacities and motivation to enter positions of participation and public responsibility later: “He or she will... avoid such situations, not seek them” (466), because without direct moral instruction of some kind, he or she will not have the tools to make the decisions necessary to succeed in such situations.

Though I agree with Haidt, who rejects Kohlberg’s approach as too narrowly situated, I cannot but agree with the need that Kohlberg has identified. Bereiter’s “true, non-speculative knowledge,” *e.g.*, knowledge like knowing how to speak honestly and how to take other’s points of view, is valuable. But it is nowhere near as valuable as the slightly more nebulous “intelligent spirituality” of which Alexander writes, which enable the success of a democratic society writ

large. I always wanted to encourage my students to develop their own, independent moral sensibility, but strongly feel they can only do so if they are able to make their own choices rather than have specific values inculcated in them. I align with Noddings (2002), who advocates providing a solid moral education by “bringing relations into caring equilibrium, balancing expressed and inferred needs, and helping children understand both our actions and their own” (154). Direct instruction of “how to be moral” does not work. Rather, the best way to create such an equilibrium, I maintain, is through the transactions offered by literature and the imagination. Greene writes of the power of the imagination, in Virginia Woolf’s words, to “bring the severed parts together.” Imagination, Greene writes, can create “new orders,” and “may be responsible for the very texture of our experience” (140). For me, the reader’s imagination can serve as the gateway to the development of moral sensibility. I have felt this as a reader and have conducted my classes with this potential in mind. I bear this power of the imagination in mind as I begin below to look at my own experiences as reader and teacher.

V. Jewish Education and Moral Education

Interestingly, Levisohn (2001) writes of the need for Jewish educators to approach texts with Gadamer’s “historically effected consciousness,” which means to approach a text with an “openness,” one that “acknowledges a text as possessing a claim to validity... in such a way that it has something to say to me” (23). What does such an approach mean for an educator with a moral agenda? I wanted students to have moral takeaways whenever possible; balancing that with the idea of the text saying something to them, however, could be precarious. Levisohn does add that for Gadamer, “interpreting from within a particular tradition is not a philosophical embarrassment, and does not represent a failure; in fact, it is the only option open to us” (23). If

the Jewish approach (or my own Jewish approach at the very least) entails finding a moral outcome, I am well situated.

Jewish schools often explicitly focus on developing not only their students' minds but their "hearts" and "souls" as well. Kress (2012) notes that such schools experience a tension "between maintaining group norms and providing for individual interpretation and meaning," but balancing such a tension – between the socialization-focused "explicit" approaches to religion and the individualization-focused or "implicit" approaches – is all "part of the Jewish tradition that should be preserved in educational efforts" (124). A classroom exploring a text for its moral lessons would therefore need to allow space for each student's voice and reaction to a text while simultaneously seek to generate a communally agreed-upon moral "lesson." I thought that such a classroom could exist.

My English classroom in the Modern Orthodox schools in which I taught sought to both bring students to a specific set of values while allowing them to find their own way(s) to arrive at those values. Holtz (2003) notes that traditional Torah learning is "intended to move people toward *action*" (90, italics in original). He explains that for teachers of Jewish text, such "action" begins with an application of biblical ideas to one's own experience. This in turn becomes what some Jewish educators call "character education" (90). While Holtz uses this point as a springboard to explore a variety of approaches to Bible educations, the same can easily be said for the English classroom.

Holtz (2013) presents the model of what he calls a "didactic" or "moralist" approach, one which makes overt connections between the text and the life of the reader. A teacher using this approach wants to teach moral messages that apply to all students (42). At times, the has been my own approach in the literature classroom.

Holtz (2003) also introduces the model of the approach of “personalization,” which seeks to find meanings in the text with an orientation that is either psychological, political, or spiritual. “The goal,” he writes, “is to see the relationship between text and the life of today” (94). Again, while such an orientation describes the approach of a Bible class, this description fits my own approach in my literature classroom as well. As Levisohn (2013) points out, a teacher’s orientation is not a method or technique of teaching, and “not merely an attitude held by the teacher.” Rather, an orientation is “a teacher’s fundamental stance toward a particular subject that encompasses the teacher’s conception of the purposes of teaching that subject and a set of paradigmatic teaching practices” (58). I have already begun to discuss my conception of the purposes of teaching, and I will mention the set of practices I have employed in what follows below. Chapter eight will offer a number of suggestions of further practices.

Chapter Three

A Discussion of Methodology

I. Autoethnography as Resources and Inspiration for This Study

What I seek to do in this project is to study my own perspective as a reader and as a teacher of literature in order to understand how my own moral decision-making developed and how it was influenced by that literature. Ultimately, this project, in the words of Winograd (2002, quoted in Hughes, Pennington and Makris, 2012) “is not the creation of any new claims to knowledge, but, rather, a representation of my experience so others may ‘imagine their own uses and applications [Clandinin and Connelly 2000, p. 42.]” (214). I will utilize autobiographical writing as well as other personal artifacts as data for analysis and interpretation.

The particular form of autoethnography from which I borrow is what Anderson (2006) calls “analytic autoethnography,” the distinguishing features of which all apply to me and my study. For Anderson, such an approach has three criteria: first, the researcher must be “a full member of the research group or setting.” This criterion applies to me in that I certainly belong to the group I identify as “students of literature” and also to that of “teachers of English,” both of which I will be subjecting to close analysis. Second, Anderson says the researcher must be “visible as such a member in the group’s published texts.” Here too, my work qualifies, since the entire enterprise of publishing my literary-auto-ethno-pedogography demands my presence in the data that I will interpret, all of which are either documents about me or memories I have of my own experiences. Publishing this work will make me “visible.” Anderson’s third criteria is that the researcher is “committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving

theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena” (375). This study will both provide better theoretical understanding of my reading and teaching, as well as offer observations and suggestions for how that theory may be advanced and put into classroom practice by others. The “social phenomena” I hope to study are instances of potential confluence of the study of morality with the study of English literature – a confluence that, as I have already noted, has been taken for granted for virtually the entire history of literature and literary criticism.

Some context on Anderson’s approach is warranted. Anderson traces the history of the development of autoethnography, noting that the Chicago School ethnographers of the early twentieth century had “enduring personal connections with the social settings and groups that they studied,” but adds that “they seldom, if ever, took up the banner of explicit and reflexive self-observation” (375). Those researchers “were neither particularly self-observational in their method, nor self-visible in their texts” (376). The 1960s and 1970s yielded some attempts at more explicit self-observation and analysis, which offered what Anderson calls “potential direction for the development of autoethnography in the realist or analytic tradition” (376), but this was largely derailed by Carolyn Ellis, Arthur Bochner, and others, who advocated the narrative approach of “evocative autoethnography,” which rejects “traditional realist and analytic ethnographic assumptions, voicing a principled belief that the value and integrity of evocative autoethnography is violated by framing it in terms of conventional sociological analysis” (377). Ellis’s and Bochner’s approach, in Denzin’s words (1997, quoted in Anderson 377), seeks to “bypass the representational problem” – i.e., the impossibility of using one’s words to accurately reflect experience. Their approach does so “by invoking an epistemology of emotion, moving the reader to feel the feelings of the other.” Anderson, on the other hand, argues for an approach

“that is consistent with traditional symbolic interactionist epistemological assumptions and goals rather than rejecting them” (378).

Anderson’s “key features” of analytic autoethnography include “complete member researcher (CMR) status,” “analytic reflexivity,” “narrative visibility of the researcher’s self,” and a “commitment to theoretical analysis” (378). Anderson explains that an “opportunistic” CMR is one who “may be born into a group, thrown into a group by chance circumstance... or have acquired intimate familiarity through occupational, recreational or lifestyle participation.” I meet this criterion: as discussed in chapter one, beginning even as a pre-reader, my love of books and of reading literature – and ultimately, of my professional involvement with it as a teacher – would grant me lifetime membership in this group.

Anderson explains that analytic reflexivity requires “self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one’s actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others” (382). While the sections of my study that pertain to my own development as a reader by definition exclude “direct dialogue with others,” my discussion of others’ reading experiences (first discussed in chapter four), and my analyses of my own teaching and of samples of student work certainly involve interactions with others and the meaning of those interactions.

Anderson requires a visible and active researcher in the text, which is a reaction to the “crisis in representation,” where critics note the invisibility of the traditional ethnographer, one who can be “a hidden and seemingly omniscient presence in ethnographic texts” (383). My hybrid method entails incorporating my “own feelings and experiences” into my text and looking at them as “vital data” to understand the world under observation (384). In addition to borrowing aspects of the method, I accept some of the warnings that accompany its use as well: I

am cognizant of the danger of falling into what Anderson calls “self-absorption,” and attempt to balance my own self-narrative with measured analysis throughout the study. My writing style and tone throughout seek to connect with the reader to “inform and change social knowledge (Davies [1999], quoted in Anderson 386). My commitment to theoretical analysis, another of Anderson’s “key features,” is what makes up the bulk of chapters four through seven.

Anderson’s approach is not without its critics. Denzin (2006) fears that Anderson’s call for a “return to the basics, to traditional symbolic interactionist assumptions,” will lead to a “negation of the recent poststructural, antifoundational arguments” of the late twentieth century, which are “the very arguments that support CAP [creative analytical practices]” (421). Ellis and Bochner (2006) go a step further, fearing that “journal reviewers could reject autoethnographies if they didn’t have a Discussion section of make claims for generalizability” (443), for which they see Anderson advocating. Ellis and Bochner write that Anderson’s model is one of “aloof autoethnography” (436) and remind him and the reader that what they do in their “evocative autoethnography” is both “evocative and analytical,” but that the difference is that they “use stories to do the work of analysis and theorizing” (436). The difference between the approaches may be in the understanding of autoethnography as a whole. “We think of autoethnography as a journey,” they write. “[Analytical autoethnographers] think of it as a destination” (431). Ultimately, however, Ellis and Bochner are willing to reconcile with Anderson, allowing that “analysis and story also can work together,” and that “there’s no reason to preclude adding traditional analysis to what we do, as long as it’s not treated as necessary to legitimize our stories” (444). They conclude by disagreeing “without being disagreeable” and by honoring “similarities without giving up [their] own stance” (447).

Rosenblatt (1995) writes that a reader “needs to understand himself; he needs to work out harmonious relationships with other people. He must achieve a philosophy, an inner center from which to view in perspective the shifting society around him...” (3). Using the critical lenses introduced in section I above, aided by the methodology lent me by analytic autoethnography, I will analyze the ways that literature has allowed me to go beyond the world of the Torah’s wisdom to influence my moral development and, subsequently, the goals I set for my literature students.

Indeed, as I begin to write and to unpack my stories, this study has been revelatory. Creswell (2007) cites Muncey, who defines autoethnography “as the idea of multiple layers of consciousness, the vulnerable self, the coherent self, critiquing the self in social contexts” (73). The memories detailed in the following chapters, along with the physical artifacts and documents, allow me to access those layers of self. Muncey further adds that each of these layers “contain the personal story of the author as well as the larger cultural meaning for the individual’s story” (73). The very act of writing these memories during the research for this study has helped old, semi-forgotten chapters of my story to resurface, and I have found a number of “larger cultural meanings” for my story. The interaction between the physical artifacts and my memories has provided what Richardson (cited in Ely, Vinz, *et al* [1997]) describes as data “crystalizing” (as opposed to the more positivist notion of “triangulating”), thereby reflecting “the complex, partial, and multi perspectives that refract meaning for and from the reader” (35).

Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou (2013) distinguish between “event-centered” narrative and “experience-centered” narrative, noting that the boundaries between the two are “porous and overlapping” and that both are “individual, internal representations of phenomena – events,

thoughts and feelings – to which narrative gives external *expression*” (5, italics in original). My narrative contains both events and experiences. In chapter eight, I will discuss Blau’s (2003) ideas about the power of writing in the literature workshop. I have experienced the power of writing while working on this study. Witherell (1991) writes of the uses of narrative in both teaching and counseling, and notes that self-narrative finds an internal logic when it integrates “value, purpose, and meaning.” She explains that “value represents the valence we attach to the present, purpose entails our sense of future possibility and aspirations, and meaning is our memory and interpretation of the past” (93). Writing this self-narrative has allowed me to focus on my value, purpose, and meaning as a reader in a deep and meaningful way.

Neither the process nor the outcome of reading for any reader can or should be glossed over or taken for granted. Rosenblatt (1995) describes how a reader draws on “past linguistic and life experience” then “links the signs on the page with certain words, certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain images...” The personal connections, “submerged associations,” and the reader’s own immediate needs and physical state and mood are what make a personal reading. This “never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his interfusion with the peculiar contribution of the text” (30). Each time I would read, at each stage of my development as a reader, I accessed the text with a distinct set of “submerged associations,” traits, memories, needs and preoccupations. When refracted through the prism of the text at hand, these all, as Rosenblatt writes, begin to crystallize into “ultimate attitudes, either of acceptance or of rejection” of the ideas and values of that text (19). Do any of those ideas, values or beliefs either validate an existing facet of my identity or personality? Do any offer a new insight heretofore unimagined? When I read Juster’s *The Phantom Tollbooth* (1961), for example, which I will discuss in chapter four, I began to imagine new possibilities for myself in how I helped or would

help others in need, much as Juster's protagonist, Milo, set out to help the Princesses Rhyme and Reason.

Analytical autoethnography offers helpful methods for exploring these questions: as Squire, Andrew and Tamboukou (2013) point out, "narratives signify unconscious emotions, as well as conscious cognitions and feelings" (10). In my study I explore my own "cognitions and feelings," and the creation of "new patterns of being" (*à la* Greene) that have happened (and which still happen) for me as a reader and as a teacher of readers. Before beginning to explore those patterns in earnest however, I must first address the issue of using memory as data.

II. Memory as Method

Since I am using my own memories as the source for much of the data produced by this study, I must make a few important points on memory, reality and honesty and take up the problems of representation and questions of validity that are inherent in the kind of project I am undertaking and the research method I am employing. First, one can never regain a full memory: as Smith and Watson (2010) note, "narrated memory is an interpretation of a past that can never be fully recovered" (22). They add that "life narrators may present inconsistent or shifting views of themselves" (15). While my recollections may seem perfectly coherent and accurate to me, they cannot be: it is impossible to replay that which took place with full accuracy. Maxine Greene (1995) puts a specific literary spin to this issue, writing that "recollection of literary experiences cannot but be affected by critical and other cognitive judgements (my own and others)." However, she gives some hope when she adds that "such judgements can be bracketed out, put in abeyance while we reach for the prereflective experiences that art can make accessible if we attend" (78). Memory has limits and limitations, and there are real challenges inherent in recording and reporting it. Moon (2016) points out that "poststructuralists rethink the

conventional understandings of memory in which an individual simply retrieves ‘facts’ from his or her ‘memory storage’” (37). Memory, he adds, is “always contextual and what the subject remembers is not an isolated fact but situated associations with a specific time and place” (37). What I think I remember, therefore, may not be what occurred, and even if it did, I may be remembering it selectively: Moon adds that “what is remembered and valued in memory is not neutral but political” (37). These are not insignificant challenges.

Haug (2008) further complicates matters in her distinction between “truth” and “memory.” Memory, for Haug, is by definition unreliable for political reasons: she writes that “memory itself should be conceived of as contested; it... is constantly written anew and always runs the risk of reflecting dominant perspectives” (538). She adds that the question of “what really happened” is unimportant. Haug is not interested in memory as an “image of authenticity,” but rather in the “formidable power of the construction of perception, its subjection under dominant ideologies, the accompanying construction of self, and in all of this the fragile ability to act...” (540).

Haug’s view of the memory as unreliable yet politically or ideologically informative anticipates the insights and valuation of memory as a resource for theorists who argue for the legitimacy of autoethnography as a method for research. Borrowing from the logic of such theorists, I acknowledge that my memory is inaccurate. But this does not mean that it lacks the virtue of being true to what might have happened and a representation that has the quality of imaginative truth – the kind of truth found in good fiction. According to Denzin (2014), there is in autoethnographic representations a special kind of “[v]alidity,” that “means that a work has verisimilitude. It evokes a feeling that the experience described is true, coherent, believable, and connects the reader to the writer’s world” (70). Indeed, as Smith and Watson note, “we

inevitably organize or form fragments of memory into complex constructions that become the changing stories of our lives" (22). So even if the memories I recall (or think that I recall) and then report are thus twice skewed – in the recalling and in the retelling – as long as the world that they create is coherent and believable, it provides material worthy of analysis.

This approach, incidentally, also addresses a related concern which is raised by Halse and Honey (2010), who argue that “[t]he investments, dilemmas, and implications of researchers’ ethical decisions and moral choices are usually secreted away, buried, concealed, and hidden from public scrutiny...” (124). I hope that by making my own history and practice into the subject of my research that I will be able to avoid some of the secrecy and concealment feared by Halse and Honey. This allows me to acknowledge and even to embrace the fallibility of the memories of early (and even relatively recent) reading that I attempt to access in the course of this project. As Muncey (2010) notes, “Subjectivity doesn’t infect your work, it enhances it” (8).

In defense of what might at first glance seem an outrageous claim for a researcher to make, Muncey (2010) observes that a key element of autoethnography is the inclusion of “the researcher’s vulnerable self, emotions, body and spirit” which together yield “evocative stories that create the effect of reality” and produce a discourse that constitutes a “fusion between social science and literature” (30). While I do not claim that my literary autobiography or what I am taking the liberty of calling my “literary-auto-ethno-pedogography” (to include my pedagogical history and reflections) can be classified as a kind of autoethnography, I do want to cite the legitimacy of autoethnography as an academic genre that might authorize the subjectivity and self-disclosure and reflexivity of the story I tell in this study of my own literary, spiritual, and pedagogical development. If I can thereby provide the reader with an account of my experience

that is both literary and academic, fusing elements of social science with those of literary narrative, I will regard my project as successful, especially since my foundational hypothesis is that literature has been instrumental in shaping and informing the social and spiritual self that defines my identity as a teacher both in the religious and secular senses that I inhabit those social and spiritual roles (or, put another way, the word “rabbi” literally means “teacher”).

My goal is therefore unapologetically literary insofar as it seeks to connect the reader of my self-study to my own internal world as a reader and teacher of literature, as Denzin (2014) describes, “in a way that moves others to ethical action” (70), much in the way that I have been altered my own thought and action through reading literature. That is to say, I want to write “a text that does not map or attempt to reproduce the real” (which addresses the issues raised by Moon and Haug), but rather one that does create “an experiential text that allows me (and you) to understand what I have studied” (83). Ultimately, I find that, like Muncey (2010), I have “a plethora of experience that is being repressed in [my] desire to conduct ‘proper’ research” (1). But by borrowing from the autoethnographic approach (which I will discuss in more detail below), I hope to address this issue and liberate that experience.

Haidt (2012) notes that the “human mind is a story processor, not a logic processor.” He adds that “Among the most important stories we know are stories about ourselves... These narratives are not necessarily *true* stories – they are simplified and selective reconstructions of the past, often connected to an idealized vision of the future.” Nonetheless, those stories, or what I am currently recalling as memories, “still influence people’s behavior, relationships, and mental health” (328). While I acknowledge that the memories I now recall are reconstituted and reworked in ways I do not even realize, whether to illustrate particular points or fit specific models that I seek to explore, I still believe in the human validity of the data and its analysis.

Memory, by its very nature, is flawed; I acknowledge that what I think I remember may not be accurate, but it is data nonetheless, and subject to analysis as it exists now, as I recall it, however imperfectly. I would add that the additional supporting data I have found, which include childhood report cards, interviews with my parents, and my classroom lecture notes, among other artifacts, serve as an attempt at triangulating the subjective (yet still very real) data offered by my memories.

With this understanding of method, I now begin my study in earnest.

Chapter Four

The First Lens: What If?

I. Coduction and What-If Propositions

The Talmud is rife with narrative of the “what-if” model: not only are many of the two thousand of its pages filled with *aggadata*, or stories, but the very heart of the Talmud, the case law that drives its discussions, are mini-tales of “what-if.” What if a camel carrying flax in the public domain accidentally pokes the flax into a store, causes the flax to catch fire and burn down the building? The camel’s owner is liable if the lamp was inside the store; the storekeeper is liable if the lamp was outside the store – but Rabbi Yehuda adds the caveat that if it was Chanukah and the lamp was a menorah, then the storekeeper would not be liable.⁶ The Talmud often spins a short narrative to make such a juridical point.

Booth (1988) writes that a reader takes in the literature that he or she reads through a process that he calls “coduction,” a term that he invents after rejecting the inadequate imagery of “weighing” and “judging.” “Coduction,” according to Booth, suggests:

the reliance (rational but by no means logical in any usual sense of the word) on the past experiences of many judges who do not have even a roughly codified set of precedents to guide them... Coduction will be what we do whenever we say to the world (or prepare ourselves to say): ‘Of the works of this general kind that I have experienced, *comparing my experience with other more or less qualified observers*, this one seems to me among the better (or weaker) ones, or the best (or worst). Here are my reasons’ (72 – 73, italics in original).

The process is facilitated and influenced first by the reader’s prior knowledge and opinions. This is akin to Rosenblatt’s (1995) explanation of aesthetic reading, in which the reader draws upon life experience, linking signs with certain words (30). For Booth, these initial

⁶ Baba Kama 62b.

impressions are subsequently enhanced by the feedback given the reader by teachers and others who read or have read the same texts. For both Booth and Rosenblatt, what the reader brings with him or her in the moment is what creates the aesthetic reading or the coduction.

As an engaged reader, I would identify with the characters and situations of which I read and put myself in their place, asking myself what I would do in such circumstances. This formed my initial impression. The coduction would take place when I compared my decisions with those of others. One example of such a reading experience occurred for me when I first discovered a particular text on my own, then re-encountered it in school: Norton Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth* (1961). Maxine Greene (1995) writes of the reader "going intentionally in search of something and seeking out the kind of understandings needed for the search, for moving toward what is not yet known" (175). This search happened for me both figuratively and literally when I first encountered Juster's text. I was eight years old. My younger sister and I were visiting friends in our apartment building. While searching a closet for toys, I stumbled across the hard-covered, dog-eared volume, which seemed to be meaningful to someone. Did it belong to one of the parents? The family's children did not seem to know or care much about it. I remember the sensation of being drawn in by both the book's title and Jules Feiffer's cover art. "In this search," continues Greene, "a refusal of the comfortable is always required, a refusal to remain sunk in everydayness" (175). I was curious to learn what this odd-looking volume was all about. While not quite uncomfortable, it decidedly did not look "everyday" to me. I took down the book, held it, began to read – and was unable to stop. It was one of the first page-turner experiences I had ever had. It would not allow me to "remain sunk in everydayness."

I recall reading while the other children continued to play around me. I am sure I did not read the entire book in one sitting – they must have let me borrow it – but it feels like I did, so

engrossed was I in Juster's fantasy and imaginative wordplay. I loved Juster's protagonist, Milo, with whose *weltschmerz* I thought I could identify (although I had not felt particularly *weltschmerzliche* prior). I loved the characters who were Milo's companions, the loyal dog Tock and the reluctantly heroic Humbug. I was drawn in by Milo's quest to save the beautiful and wise princesses Rhyme and Reason. I couldn't wait to find out how it all worked out. I was simultaneously and equally enthralled by the characters and by the plot; the wordplay and puns only added to my enjoyment. By entering Milo's world – in Booth's words, by actually *thinking* Milo's thoughts "as I read" (275) – I made connections to ideals I held (global, overarching life values, such as the belief in peace and justice) and reinforced my faith in those values. This was but the first stage of Booth's coductive process: of connecting with prior experience and belief systems. Rosenblatt (1995) identifies a similar process of connecting to relevant memories, experience and interests, a process which makes reading itself possible (77). What remained to take place for me (and which later did) was the comparison with the impressions of other readers.

I have already mentioned Probst's identification of five kinds of knowledge that can be gained from literature: "knowledge of the self, knowledge of others, knowledge of texts, knowledge of contexts, and knowledge of processes (of making meaning)" (27). As I made my way through *The Phantom Tollbooth*, my knowledge of how to read improved as my vocabulary and appreciation of mechanics and style grew; my knowledge of texts and contexts also expanded, as it did with each book that I read. But my knowledge of self and of others grew as well: I learned more about what I believed and what values I held dear. In rooting for Milo to save the Princesses and bring peace to the Kingdom of Wisdom (a cause for which the author clearly wanted me to root), I reinforced ideals of harmony and righteousness that I had learned at

home and in school. In the Rosenblattian sense, the reading was thus “made possible” by connecting my reading experience to my previously existing values. Indeed, Rosenblatt writes (1994) that readers “often pay attention first to the feelings and ideas accompanying the emerging work,” adding that the experience may stimulate the reader “to clarify his own values, his own prior sense of the world and its possibilities” (145). This happened for me reading Norton Juster.

Booth adds that the process of coduction requires the presence of other readers – in a classroom this could be both instructors and/or fellow students – to fully absorb the lessons of that which is read. “How,” each reader ought to ask his or her fellow readers, “does my coduction compare with yours?” (73). This, interestingly and frustratingly, did not fully materialize for me with Juster’s text. At the time of my initial reading, I simply knew no one else who had read the book or had even heard of it. Then, when the book was finally assigned to my fifth-grade class, some three years later, I remember feeling excited that my friends would now enjoy the same journey I had (and I also remember a distinct superiority to them at having read the book already and some three years earlier). Some of my classmates seemed to enjoy that journey as much as I had – which means that they expressed similar emotions to mine; I could not understand, however, why all of them hadn’t. Some found the book “just okay.” Some preferred Chuck Jones’s 1970 cartoon adaptation that we viewed in class to the actual novel. I could not fathom why every single student was not as magically transported by the text as I had been – at least as far as my eleven-year-old self could determine. To me, they seemed not to coduct as deeply or as fully as I had, and this bothered me. They read for plot, but they did not connect or identify with Milo; they did not think his thoughts or dream his dreams. Since

I had connected in this way – and continued to do so with each subsequent re-reading of the book – I was disappointed that, in my perception, this was not a shared experience.

Booth (2010) writes that fictions “offer an experience that changes the lives of their readers, those readers who engage themselves sufficiently to find a life in the works” (85). In retrospect, I think that what bothered me was that my classmates – even those who were my close friends – did not all choose to be as “sufficiently” engaged as I had. They either did not conduct as deeply or were unwilling (or unable) to share their conceptions with me. This unwillingness or inability to engage frustrated me – and has continued to do so since that time. As a teacher, I have sought myriad ways to forge student connection with the text being taught, but I have found that the students don’t always want to connect. In class, I will mention current films and television shows that parallel aspects of the text at hand in attempts to draw in my students. When teaching tenth grade English in 2001, I recall how I seemed to find for every text, from *Macbeth* to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a connection to the previous summer’s hit movie *Shrek*. It became a running class joke. Some students enjoyed the parallels and were thereby able to connect; others, less so. Their conceptions were less robust than my own and less meaningful than I wanted for them. I recall them openly expressing that they found the text “boring” or “dumb.”

The feeling of frustration I have experienced is worth deeper analysis, if only because it has recurred often throughout my reading life and my teaching-of-reading life. Ellis and Bochner (2000) write of “systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall” as a means “to understand a way of life” (737). I attempt to achieve such an understanding of this particular frustration. What ways have I found to either bring about connections for friends, family, or students (all of whom I have tried to encourage to connect to various texts at various times)?

There have been instances where I have given up: with friends or family, I sometimes simply don't discuss the text I am reading, thinking that the effort required to explain what I see in such a text is beyond me at the moment. Whether out of laziness or impatience, I am certainly unwilling to try to get those family and friends to connect.⁷ This demonstrates more of my own unwillingness to share than it illustrates others' attitudes. It may well be that others can and would connect with these texts, either immediately or even later in their lives. With my students, I have also found myself frustrated when trying to enable such connections. Greene (1995) dreams of "classroom situations in which significant dialogue might be encouraged once again, the live communication out of which there might emerge some consciousness of interdependence as well as a recognition of diverse points of view" (177). She is describing a classroom of coductions being shared, something I attempted to do in my own class, as I will detail below. Before looking at my classroom, however, the impact of another author from my childhood warrants analysis.

II. But What-If Things Get a Lot Worse? Reading Stephen King

My longtime attraction to the work of Stephen King has enabled me to vicariously experience a number of "what-if" situations that I would never want to actually endure. It was the books themselves as well as King's writer's persona that drew me in from an early age. At age eleven or twelve, the librarian at the local public library bent the rules and allowed me to check out books from the adult section of the library; I went for Stephen King. I cannot recall which novel of King's was my first. I remember reading such books as *The Shining* (1977) and

⁷ Jasper Fforde's series of Thursday Next novels, for example, which bend genre between mystery, science fiction, and satire, and are peopled with characters from classic literature, are difficult for me to explain to people who are not fans of all these genres. Another example: the appeal of such books as Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* has also been challenging to explain.

Cujo (1981) and feeling simultaneously unable to continue reading out of sheer terror and being unable to stop turning the pages. King's afterwords, small essays which appear in his later works, are always addressed to his "Constant Reader," a moniker which I have always felt was directed to me personally.

King's horror fiction attracted me for its gory detail, the psychological thrills it offered, and the consistent bravery of its characters in the face of malevolence. I liked experiencing the triumph of good over evil, which is how these books generally concluded. Steiner (1970) writes that fiction's appeal "allow[s] it entry, though not unguarded, into our utmost" (10). When I first read *The Stand* (1978, 1990), King's epic tale of the end of civilization from infection and the battle between good and evil that is fought by the survivors, I wondered, in my "utmost," what I would do if (1) I was the only survivor of my family; (2) whether I would choose to side with good or with evil; and (3) why I was so happy when the good guys won. Rosenblatt (1995) writes that "Literature fosters the kind of imagination needed in a democracy – the ability to participate in the needs and aspirations of other personalities and to envision the effect of our actions on their lives..." Through vicariously experiencing the horrors experienced by King's characters, I vividly envisioned the needs of others. What I would do to impact their lives if given the chance, though, was not a question that I often considered. Rosenblatt continues: "Literature, through which the adolescent reader encounters a diversity of temperaments and systems of value, may free him from fears, guilt, and insecurity engendered by too narrow a view of normality" (212). The worlds that King opened up to me as a reader definitely widened my view of normality, although it may have added to my fears and insecurity: I often had nightmares during and after reading these books.

Rosenblatt elsewhere (1994) notes the existence of “popular texts which make few demands on their readers and whose readers make few demands on the text or on themselves.” I am not sure that applies to my own experience of reading King, as I feel it impacted me greatly, despite its popularity and accessibility. I should add that Rosenblatt continues, saying that “Paradoxically, it is probably among these readers that the freest, most honest, and most personal literary transactions occur” (140). This was definitely the case for me, as illustrated by my experience of reading *The Stand* (1978, 1990).

The Stand was a novel I returned to again and again, rereading passages that particularly moved me, and ultimately re-reading the novel in its entirety when an “uncut” version was published in 1990. Its epic nature appealed to me, as the narrative spanned the entire United States of America, and its appealing (or completely unlikeable) characters were easily accessible. As I spent my summers at the time in a vacation home in rural Connecticut, I identified both with King’s largely rural New England settings and with his urban ones, as I will discuss below.

The Stand has elements of both fantasy and realistic fiction, as does much of King’s *oeuvre*, both of which appealed to me equally. Booth (1988) notes that readers “willingly suspend disbelief about some matters but not about all.” The characters and their relationships in the novel were real to me. That King’s villain Randall Flagg can perform actual magic in no way impeded my connection with the novel’s realistic elements. I still remember a chapter describing Larry Underwood, one of the novel’s protagonists, as he travels through a pitch-black Lincoln Tunnel to escape a post-apocalyptic New York City filled with the corpses of disease victims. My admiration of this character’s resolve (a trait which ultimately enables him to emerge redeemed as a hero) remained with me as much as did the terror of the situation. As Booth continues, “most authors would be distressed if we said, after our reading, that nothing we

found in it carried over to our ‘real’ selves” (151). The resonance of the terror and Larry’s bold resilience made an impression on me some thirty-five years ago, one which has not yet faded.

That I independently chose to read *The Stand* clearly strengthens my memory of it as well as its impact upon me. Rosenblatt (1995) notes that ideas and insights from literary experience “tend to be assimilated into the individual’s active equipment because they are embedded in a matrix of emotional and personal concern” (226- 227). Perhaps the very act of selecting this book rather than having it assigned in school made it more impactful for me. The messages that I took from *The Stand* still resonate with me. I have been inspired by the stamina and the courage of King’s protagonists, flawed though many of them are. “Narratives,” writes Muncey (2010) “are people’s identities...” King’s narratives became my own stories. I read and re-read them, re-telling them to myself. Muncey adds that “the stories people tell shape and construct the narrator’s personality and reality as the story is retold and reconstructed throughout that individual’s life” (43). Greene (1995) adds that

We all have memories of our worlds opening outward through encounters we have had with other human beings, with texts, with works of art... If we were fortunate, we were able to develop open capacities – meaning the kind of capacities that enabled us to move on from particular texts to other texts and other modes of representation (181).

As I now retell the story of reading King, I extract meaning from telling that story, a memory that has for many years lain dormant. My middle school years, when I first encountered King’s work, were not enjoyable (nor are they for many). I was stressed; school was difficult both academically and socially; an attempt to spend a summer at an overnight camp had resulted in terrible homesickness, to the point where I refused to go back and summered with my parents instead. The “capacities” to be heroic and to confront evil were magnetically attractive for me as a young teen, and their resonance is still with me.

III. What-If in the Classroom: You Be the Jury

The approach of the “what-if” proposition was one I employed as a teacher as well. When teaching Reginald Rose’s *Twelve Angry Men* (1954) to middle schoolers, I overtly and transparently attempted to get my students to ask “what-if” questions as we made our way through the text. The play covers the tense jury deliberations of a murder trial. One juror (all the characters are nameless throughout) casts doubt on what at first seems a clear-cut set of facts, and personal issues quickly cloud the discussion. I taught the text by assigning students to act the parts of the various jurors, reading out the script over several days of class. In my lecture notes, I planned to impress upon the class what I termed the “gravity of the situation.” I wrote that the play is a “celebration of justice” that highlights “one person standing up for what he thinks is right and true.” I asked the students, “why not be prejudiced?” as we focused on a number of jurors who demonstrated significant prejudices and even what I termed “reverse discrimination.” Students seemed to enjoy acting out the drama and seeing a civics lesson unfold around them. When I asked them the obvious “what-if” question – if you were one of the jurors, which would you be – the vast majority chose characters who were unbiased. However, when I asked the students if they would have the nerve to stand up to a room full of strangers and push for a fair discussion of the facts, *i.e.*, to stand up to peer pressure (a question with which they were familiar from countless informal programs on the topic), they seemed less confident overall.

The dramatic aspect of the text no doubt helped students more readily connect; if the play were a novel or a short story, rather than a text that they acted out in class, I wonder if they

would have as easily accessed it emotionally and intellectually. Rosenblatt (1995) writes that the student

should be encouraged to bring to the text whatever in his past experience is relevant: his sensuous awareness, his feeling for people and practical circumstances, his ideas and information, as well as his feeling for the sound and pace and texture of language (270).

My students could definitely draw upon their feelings for “people and practical circumstances” as they acted out this drama, much as the jurors they played had been urged to by the judge in the play itself. My students were, as Wilhelm (1995) describes, each going “beyond simple comprehension of story action to evoke the text and elaborate[ing] upon it as a ‘story participant’ (121).

The approach I adopted of trying to make ethical decision-making connections for my students paralleled that of Kohlberg (1980), whose educational model, as we mentioned earlier, has students respond to moral “dilemmas” presented by the teacher. The ensuing discussion allows the students to formulate and refine their moral values as individuals and as a group. Admittedly, at the time, I did not apply a Kohlbergian lens to my class; I simply tried to get them to identify with various members of the jury. I hoped that the “what-if” model would allow me to enable a class-wide sharing of Boothian “coductions.” I had moved this Boothian lens from my own coduction of texts as a reader and attempted to introduce it to my students as a teacher. I was disappointed to see that my own process of coduction – relating the script to issues of peer pressure and prejudice – seemed to ring less resonantly for a number of the students. Their coductions seemed to remain within the plot and the facts of the case discussed in the play, even after we screened the 1957 film and once again discussed the decisions made by the various jurors. It became clearer to me that projecting my own coduction onto others and expecting them to make them their own was both ineffectual and wrong. David Hansen (2001) writes of

the need for teachers to have “moral attentiveness,” which means “Being alert to students’ responses to opportunities to grow as persons – for example, to become more rather than less thoughtful about ideas and more rather than less sensitive to others’ views and concerns” (10). Despite having what I consider an empathetic nature, I cannot in full candor admit to having consistently done as Hansen advocates. I was too interested in fostering – and forcing – empathy.

In sum, the “what-ifs” offered by authors as diverse as Reginald Rose, Stephen King and Norton Juster have allowed me to make decisions about values and ideas without needing to live through the situations endured by the novels’ characters. I choose these particular stories because I draw upon aspects of autoethnography in my method. As Denzin (2014) notes, a “critical autoethnographer” should enter “those strange and unfamiliar situations that connect biographical experiences (epiphanies) with culture, history, and social structure” (53). In this case, the situations are not all lived; some are lived vicariously through reading literature. Booth (1988) writes that ultimately “every reader must be his or her own ethical critic” (237). By reading a wide variety of books, by conducting their values and ideas, and by asking myself “what-if” questions as I read each one, I have become my own best ethical critic. In addition to helping me ask such questions, though, reading and teaching readers has also allowed first for the development of an empathy with the characters I read – and then for an empathy for actual people. Chang (2008) writes that “what makes autoethnography ethnographic is its intent of gaining a cultural understanding” (125). In looking at my own experience as reader and teacher of text, I hope to gain an understanding of my own personal culture and to offer a model that other readers can apply to their own reading or teaching lives as well.

The great challenge for me as a teacher of text – as for many literature teachers – is how to enable my students to develop their own sense of ethical criticism. Rosenblatt (1995) writes that teachers “affect the student’s sense of human personality and human society.” She adds that teachers of literature “foster general ideas or theories about human nature and conduct, definite moral attitudes, and habitual responses to people and situations” (4). That’s no small amount of pressure. The “what-if” model worked for me as a reader, and my hope as a teacher was (and is) that it would enable the ethical critic or the “definite moral attitudes” of which Rosenblatt writes. She notes that “teaching becomes a matter of improving the individual’s capacity to evoke meaning from the text by leading him to reflect self-critically on this process [*i.e.*, of reading itself]” (25ff).

Wilhelm (2008) grapples with a similar challenge as he seeks to encourage students “to think of the meaning of reading as something outside themselves” (19). Like Wilhelm, I was “especially troubled by the students who appeared to be reading but who did not find it meaningful” (41). I did not try some of Wilhelm’s methods (unaware of them as I was at the time) such as asking students to dramatize the works that they read, which he claims to be “an effective technique for achieving entry into a texted world” (145), although when my class actually performed a play, as we did with *Twelve Angry Men*, we did use such a method. This and other methodologies, to which I will return in chapter eight, have since become key tools for me in fostering my students’ (and my own) coductions. None of these coductions are perfect: Greene (1995) writes that “no novelistic reality can ever be complete or wholly coherent... We are left, therefore with our open questions – about practice, about learning, about educational studies, about community. They may be the sorts of questions that lead us on more and more far-reaching quests” (187). Another lens for the quests I undertook follows next.

Chapter Five

The Second Lens: The Judicious Spectator

I. Becoming the Judicious Spectator

The second lens through which I view my literary transactions is that of the experience of reading that creates what Nussbaum (1995) calls the “judicious spectator” (90). The reader that feels a degree of empathy – not merely sympathy – for the characters and situations that he or she encounters in books makes for a better citizen, explains Nussbaum. She further (2010) explains that an “empathetic perspectival experience” can teach a young reader that aggression to another can be harmful. “Empathy is not morality,” Nussbaum adds, “but it can supply crucial ingredients of morality” (37). I vividly recall a number of moments, first as a reader and then as a teacher, in which I experienced – or sought to help others experience – vicarious moments, moments that would lead to empathy. We defined this term more fully earlier, but for now I would call it a balanced combination of thought and feeling that lead to good judgement in how one treats others, oneself, and one’s surroundings.⁸

As I grew older, I became more ambitious in the selection of novels that I selected on my own. At age twelve, I found a dog-eared copy of Herman Wouk’s novel *The City Boy* (1948) among my father’s many paperbacks. My father, through both character and reading habits, has had considerable influence upon me and my own habits as a life-long reader. As long as I can remember, he has been constantly reading: books on American or European history; Hebrew

⁸ See chapter two, section II for a fuller definition of this term, based on the work of Hansen (2001) and Alexander (2001).

books on Israeli law or ancient Judaic customs; journals on points of law or American, European or Israeli culture. He is a science fiction buff, and as an eleven or twelve-year-old I scooped up his collection of novels by such authors as Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov, titans of the genre from the 1940's through the 1980s. The picaresque narrative of *The City Boy* made me laugh and connect with its protagonist Herbie Bookbinder in his quest to impress his Beatrice, Lucille Glass.

“Literary understanding,” writes Nussbaum (1995), is unique in that it “promotes habits of mind that lead toward social equality” (92). I was able to empathize easily with Herbie Bookbinder and develop such “literary understanding.” Like Herbie, I was bookish, intellectual and unathletic. By this age I already had tasted unrequited love from my fifth-grade crush, Sarah S., and could vicariously feel Herbie’s pain of rejection by his beloved as I read. I was not the son of an iceman from the year 1919, but Wouk’s vivid prose enabled me to connect with his characters and live vicariously through them. Sumara (2002) writes that narrative allows the reader “to engage in the imaginative acts of reconsideration and creative invention” (85). Through reading of Herbie’s exploits and thinking his thoughts, fearing his fears, and desiring his desires, I *became* him while I was reading. I wanted to impress Lucille as much as Herbie did and felt heartbroken when my love was unrequited. Nussbaum explains that a novel “gets its readers involved with the characters, caring about their projects, their hopes and fears.” This leads the readers to realize “that the story is in certain ways their own story, showing possibilities for human life and choice that are in certain respects their own to seize, though their concrete circumstances may differ greatly” (31). My eleven-year-old Orthodox Jewish self connected with Herbie’s more assimilated self, and I felt our differences outweighed by our commonalities.

Nussbaum here recalls Greene's (1995) observation that "Knowing 'about,' even in the most formal academic manner, is entirely different from constituting a fictive world imaginatively and entering it perceptually, affectively and cognitively" (125). I cannot truthfully say that reading of Herbie's boldness and cleverness made me bolder and cleverer with Sarah S. or with the crushes that followed. But knowing that others (even if those others were fictional) had suffered what I had undergone and had managed to emerge triumphant gave me great hope, great encouragement, and great joy; I had gone beyond "knowing about," to a deeper experience.

II. Developing Further Empathy

Reading and loving *The City Boy* made me want to tackle – and enjoy – more works by this author (at a certain point I had realized that one book I enjoyed by a specific author would often lead to more enjoyable books by the same author – it was like finding a new and untapped diamond mine). I thus undertook to read Wouk's *The Winds of War* (1971) and *War and Remembrance* (1978). I took on both of these books in succession in seventh grade. Wouk's love of story seemed to match my own, a connection that was later articulated for me by Booth (1988), who notes that the connection exists not so much between reader and book as much as between readers and writers. Having used the term "friends" for books (a term I have long since felt appropriate as well), Booth expands it to describe writers as well. Writers are "friends" who demonstrate their friendship not only in the range and depth and intensity of the relationship they offer, not only in the promise they fulfill of being useful to me, but finally in the irresistible invitation they extend to live during these moments [of reading] a richer and fuller life than I could manage on my own.

Booth adds that the idealized author is a far superior moral being to the “disorganized, flawed creature” (223) who is the actual writer. It is this idealized version of the writer who can – and does – successfully influence the reader. I would eventually read everything and anything by Wouk that I could find. Wouk’s works were among the first volumes of “adult” literature that I read, and they engaged me in ways that the teen and children’s literature in which I was steeped could not. Years later, as I will discuss, I would actually connect with Wouk himself, which only strengthened my feelings of connection and close identification with the author as a person.

I felt a deep empathy for Natalie and Aaron Jastrow, two of Wouk’s fictional characters from *The Winds of War* (1971) and *War and Remembrance* (1978) who travel from the safety of the United States to war-torn Eastern Europe in the midst of the Holocaust. Aaron dies in Auschwitz; his daughter Natalie survives and is reunited with her husband and son. Wouk’s weaving of fictional characters into historical reality further engaged me on the emotional level. Nussbaum (2010) desires readers to attain “the faculties of thought and imagination that make us human and make our relationships rich human relationships, rather than relationships of mere use and manipulation” (6). Connecting with and feeling the pain of Wouk’s Henry and Jastrow families helped developed my empathy. It’s likely that such empathy was already there and merely honed by the reading experience, but it may well have remained latent without my reading to trigger it. Nussbaum further adds that such faculties are the very root of democracy, which “is built on respect and concern, and these in turn are built upon the ability to see other people as human beings, not simply as objects” (6). I saw these characters as real people, a process aided by their appearing in a realistic historical setting, and I felt compassion for their pain. No doubt my own Jewish heritage and identity added to my feelings of connection.

In a letter that I wrote to Herman Wouk in June 1994, I wrote of my “blatant” admiration for his work. I praised his “combination of humor, eloquence, fear of Heaven and style.” I asked Wouk, who is to this day one of my literary idols, to provide “any advice or stories or jokes or criticisms (*sic*) or warnings or anything you deem relevant and appropriate” to one planning to teach both Judaic Studies and English literature. I was concerned that I would be spreading myself too thin. Wouk (1994) did reply to me, encouraging me to “[g]o for it,” writing that my “worry about falling between two stools is groundless, providing you give the challenge in both fields your all.” This exchange is nothing if not an extreme example of Booth’s (1988) “friendship” that extends an invitation to live “a richer and fuller life than I could manage on my own.” I found Wouk’s advice extremely encouraging, and I often thought of it during my years in the classroom. I reconnected with Wouk again in the summer of 2017, when I felt that the fact that one of my literary role models was still alive and alert (at age 102, no less) was an opportunity that could not be passed up. I wrote to him, summarizing some of this study, and said, in part that

One of the formative authors of my life is, well, Herman Wouk... Your characters and your books have become my friends. As part of my research, as part of my own development as a reader and teacher, and purely to express my [appreciation], I wonder if you would be willing to meet with me at your convenience to discuss any and all of these ideas.

Wouk, terse but prompt, answered the same day. (The response time itself, not to mention the Courier font that he used, gave me extreme pleasure.) He wrote, in part:

Good letter. I'm not up to interviews, but within limits I can answer queries...

That my literary “friend” was once again willing to dialogue with me brought back many of my feelings of admiration for his books, his characters, and their tone and style. Indeed, that Herman Wouk had even written me the two words “Good letter” gave me tremendous pride. I immediately drafted a follow-up question, which was, in retrospect, one that would only garner an obvious response. I told him a bit about the school I lead and asked him if when writing he had “specific educational or moral intent for [his] readers in creating specific books.” I added that I was “thinking less about the overtly didactic works like *This is My God* (1959) or *The Will to Live On* (2000) and more about [his] historical fiction.” I asked him:

Did or do you want your reader to come away from *War and Remembrance* [(1978)] or even *Inside, Outside* [(1985)] or *The Lawgiver* [(2012)] with specific moral insights or ethical sense? ... I'm talking about a moral or ethical authorial intent.

I'd love to read whatever you are willing to share on the topic.

Wouk responded, “not much, this time,” then continued

My answer to your question is "Of course!" Mark Twain once said, to this effect, "All I ever do is preach."

Discerning the teachings is a teacher's job, like yours, while I go on with current work.

I had two reactions to this response, which, incidentally, I found delightful. First, I found Wouk’s words to be a validation of my own critical approach to literature: every reader ought to be reading in order to grow in his or her empathy, whether through Booth’s coductive process or by ways that Nussbaum identifies (which I will discuss in the next section). If every reader ought to be reading that way, was it not fitting that a writer (whether Twain, Wouk, or others) write in order to make a moral point (“to preach”)? My second reaction was to mull over the

challenge I felt as an educator: how could I bring a student to the emotional and intellectual point where contact with a favorite author would give them the feeling I had, of feeling like a star-struck teen seeing the Beatles at Shea Stadium, screaming (perhaps not literally) with disbelief and delight? I believe that my own experience as a reader is not unique; indeed, the mass numbers of books sold by Wouk and Stephen King, among others, prove that it is not – or at least their power to connect to readers, to become their “friends” in the Bothnian sense, is not limited to me.

Blau (2003) writes of the “intentional fallacy,” which is “one of the foundational principles of the New Criticism,” explaining that “a writer’s intention – contrary to commonplace ideas about meaning – is not reliable as a source of authority in determining the meaning of a text” (107). In essence, it does not matter what Wouk’s stated or unstated intention was in writing his works; what matters is what transaction I or any other reader makes when reading. This point notwithstanding, Wouk’s brief distinction between the author and the teacher resonates for me. While he goes on with “current work,” my role is to “discern the teachings.” But how to get my students to the same level of “judicious spectatorship” at which I found myself was (and is) not always so simple.

III. The Novel as Vehicle for Empathy Education

As a teacher, I found that although poetry could often convey what my ninth grade English teacher called an emotional snapshot of insight, I still thought that novels were the ideal vehicle to inculcate empathy. The lengthier narrative of a novel, which allowed for a deepening of character and situation, gave me as a reader (and, I thought, gave my students) more

opportunities to connect emotionally and intellectually with the stories. We had more chances to encounter what Rosenblatt (1995) calls “a diversity of temperaments and systems of value” and to “envision the effect of our actions” on the lives of others (212).

Indeed, Nussbaum (1995) notes that the novel may well be one of the most succinct ways of conveying and inculcating empathy.⁹ Writing about Dickens’s *Hard Times*, she notes that a novel’s storytelling “gets its readers involved with the characters, caring about their projects, their hopes and fears, participating in their attempts to unravel the mysteries and perplexities of their lives.” This is Rosenblatt’s aesthetic transaction, as Nussbaum acknowledges all but in name as she continues: “The participation of the reader is made explicit at many points in the narration. And it is brought home to readers that the story is in certain ways their own story, showing possibilities for human life and choice that are in certain respects their own to seize, though their concrete circumstances may differ greatly” (31). I sought constantly to show my students that the story was “in certain ways their own story” through the discussion questions I asked in class and the writing prompts that I assigned them. (Some examples follow below.) I was sometimes successful, and saw that students made connections between the text we studied and their own lives beyond the classroom. Sometimes, however, no connection seemed to be made. It is easy (and a bit snobbish) to assume that no connection ever took place; I can only report on what data I had at the time of assessment. It may well be that connections occurred that I did not see or that seeds were planted for connections made weeks, months or years later.

When writing to Herman Wouk, one of the texts I cited was Sir Philip Sidney (2004), who notes that that although “the philosopher teacheth... he teacheth those who are already

⁹ Holtz (2003) adds that “Nussbaum provides a particularly appropriate lens to look at the goals of teaching Bible” as well, as the Bible’s goals of “ethical criticism” are very clear (118). See my discussion of Holtz in Chapter 2, section V.

taught. But the poet is the food for the tenderest stomachs: the poet is indeed the right popular philosopher” (18). Is my intellectual stomach tender today thanks to my voracious reader’s appetite? Perhaps. Sidney is talking to – and about – me. Booth (1988) notes that “all works *do* teach or at least try to” (152). I don’t know if I saw literature as a vehicle for conveying ethics when I was an emergent reader; that idea really only developed for me when I began teaching. But the seeds were sown in the love that I felt for the power of story as a child and the intoxicating pull it had over me. Did my Orthodox Jewish background have anything to do with this? In the sense that both my parents highly valued education and reading *per se*, yes; I can hardly claim, however, that such values are exclusive to Orthodox Judaism. The repeated challenge was trying to bring the love and awareness that I possessed to younger readers who were not yet at my point in life. As an educator, I firmly believe that such an awareness is teachable at age-appropriate levels – indeed, a student’s experience of reading would be much more powerful with that awareness. I myself possessed it to a degree as an adult, but only because I had brought it to my own attention. I did not want to rely on the possibility of students discovering this for themselves. I wanted more of a sure thing.

When I finally and ecstatically began teaching both Judaic Studies and English literature, I thought that each of these curricula would inspire my students, albeit in diverse ways. I was teaching in the Manhattan school I had myself attended from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Some of my former teachers were now my colleagues; it was difficult to address some of them by their first names. I had daily flashes of *déjà vu*, and I enjoyed the “coming home” aspect of my teaching career immensely: now I could give back to the place that had given me so much.

The experience of time folding upon itself only redoubles exponentially in my current recall and retelling of those moments. Tappan and Brown (1991) write that “when an individual

tells a moral story about an experience in his own life, he must necessarily *reflect* on that experience.” Thus, “such reflection also entails *learning* from the event narrated, in the sense that the individual has the opportunity to consider what happened, what he thought, felt, and did, and how things turned out” (182, italics in original). This study has allowed me to accomplish such reflection. Haidt (2012) writes of the “narratives that people create to make sense of their lives.” He explains that “these narratives are not necessarily *true* stories – they are simplified and selective reconstructions of the past, often connected to an idealized vision of the future” (328). Muncey (2010) adds that “Our current world view may be seen to be a distillation of life so far, coloured by an anticipation of what life may hold in the future” (13). My current interpretation of my early teaching days and early reading days is most certainly colored by my agenda of engendering empathy through the reading and teaching of literature. Although the “coloring” in this case is retrospective, not prospective, Muncey and Haidt’s principles remain the same. And the issue of self-revisionism is, for me, largely irrelevant: as Haidt (2012) further writes, “even though life narratives are to some degree post hoc fabrications, they still influence people’s behavior, relationships, and mental health” (328). This hearkens back to my discussion of the unreliability of memory in chapter three.

After starting to teach, I soon felt that the classroom give-and-take in my Judaic courses, which had overtly moralist agendas, had appreciably *fewer* meaningful discussions of issues of moral decision-making than did my English classes. In my Judaic Studies classes, I taught Bible, Jewish law, and classical Jewish philosophy. Students seemed to simply take notes, ask clarifying questions, take tests, and move on. There was little evidence of internalization of the overt values that we studied. Indeed, the impact of what we studied seemed negligible: the regard in which they held the traditional texts that we studied – or in which, at least, they acted

as if they held these texts – seemed to place these texts in virtual museum-like, alarmed glass cases. The texts were sacrosanct, and therefore the transactions, the coductions, the empathy-creation, were at a minimum. English classes, however, had much less of a stigma of untouchability: students reacted strongly, whether verbally or in writing, to the choices made by Jane Eyre, Lady Macbeth, or Atticus Finch; indeed, they did so far more than they did to those choices made by Moses, King David or the rabbis of the Talmud. My teaching methodology and enthusiasm, to my mind, were constants, as they did not vary significantly from one course to the other; the curriculum, therefore, must have been the critical variable. If my goal was not merely to teach texts for skills and content, but rather to teach ideas and thoughtful, reflective decision-making, my English classes were the better places to foment such learning. T. S. Eliot (1964) cites Ben Jonson’s description of literature as “the absolute mistress of manners, and nearest of kin to virtue” (46). This became a key epigram for me, because moments of literature serving as the catalyst to a discussion of manners and or virtue occurred far more often in English class than in Bible class.

Indeed, it was an essay in English class, not a Bible class, where one tenth-grade student, Erica, confessed that she had been struggling with issues of anorexia. As students wrote about journeys they had taken (after we had read *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Remains of the Day*), this student chose to write about the journey of her battle with food and her body image. I was used to my English students opening up regarding their own connections to the text. Rosenblatt (1995) reminds us that when the reader draws on “past linguistic and life experience,” he or she “links the signs on the page with certain words, certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences” (30). Erica had connected the texts we had read with her own journey and had come up with a narrative of her fears about her weight. This was both a psychological connection as well as a

moral one for Erica: she saw this issue as a choice between right and wrong. In Rosenblatt's (1995) words, Erica drew upon the texts' "special meanings" and "submerged associations" (30). When, after nervously receiving coaching from the school psychologist, I discussed the topic with Erica and later, with her father as well, both pooh-poohed my concerns: this was merely an essay for English class, I was told. Still, I remained unconvinced that she had left this journey. Her writing was too compelling. For me, as a rabbi and teacher, the moral issues raised for me by this confession required me to act responsibly, with what Rogers (1980) calls "realness" (271). I will return to this concept in chapter six.

Erica is fine today: I attended her wedding a few years ago (she married another former student, no less). She recently became a mother herself. But the essay that she wrote some fifteen years ago – in what is her own mini-autoethnography, I suppose – came to light in the context of English class, not in an informal weekend retreat session or in a Jewish law or philosophy class. It occurred in the class where she felt comfortable discussing how she felt and what she thought. The moral issues raised by students abounded in such classes.

When I taught Dickens's *Great Expectations* over several years to tenth graders, I found myself time and again focusing on the moral elements of the story: namely, those aspects that addressed the character's interpersonal relationships and evaluations of their behavior, choices and ethics. For example, on one essay assignment, I asked students to choose between topics that included comparing two parent-child relationships in the text ("characters need not be biologically related," I added); comparing "different models of homes that Dickens creates in the novel," which asked students to "discuss Dickens's vision of a perfect home;" and discuss "the influence of money on the characters" in the novel.

My goal in this assignment was to have students think beyond concrete questions of vocabulary, plot, and dialogue and instead to make connections between characters and think about those characters' relationships. Ultimately, I wanted them to draw connections to their own lives and their own relationships. Rosenblatt (1995) reminds us that in "a turbulent age," students need to learn to understand themselves and to "work out harmonious relationships with other people" (3). She reminds us that while in another age such "development of emotional attitudes" would have been the job of the home, this has now become the job of the school (161). Another of my exam prompts therefore read:

We have discussed that the protagonist of this novel may not be its most heroic character. Why do you think this is so? Why would Dickens place the principles that he values in characters other than Pip's?

Each of these topics was designed to bring students to think along lines of values – of judging the choices made by the novel's characters and evaluating them as good or bad. The agenda of inculcating moral decision-making through the understanding of literature was clearly already part of my educational goals for my class. I say this with confidence, relying on Chang's (2008) postulate that by studying what I recall and what data I choose to present, I can "discover how [my] present thoughts and behaviors are rooted in past events" (134). Although I only began to be able to articulate this personal educational philosophy when I found the language to do so while in graduate school, the connection was nonetheless there. Blau (2003) makes a critical distinction between students and teachers. The latter have "a fairly sophisticated capacity to recognize and talk about the condition of our understanding." He explains that teachers who are sophisticated readers typically "know the difference between what [they] do and don't understand and to what degree [they] do or don't understand. [They] are, in other words, metacognitively aware" (41). My students were not able to articulate their transactions at

whatever level they were occurring. Despite these developmental differences, I still wanted students to begin to articulate their own sets of values, to begin becoming metacognitive.

The theory of Booth and Nussbaum enables me to better understand the way I am a reader and the way I want my students to become readers as well. The compassion that I felt for the characters I read and taught, from those of Wouk to those of Dickens was the empathy of the “judicious spectator” that I had developed as a reader and teacher of text. It is the lens of Robert Coles, whose work spurred me not only to feel for the characters I read but actually influenced my actions and speech, to which I now turn.

Chapter Six

A Third Lens: The Kinship of Books

I. Kinsmen and Advisers: Literature as a Values Teacher

I understood intuitively what Coles (1989) means when he writes that stories “can not only keep us company, but admonish us, point us in new directions, or give us the courage to stay a given course.” Coles sees this power of stories in his classes at Harvard College and Harvard Medical School. He adds that stories “can offer us kinsmen, kinswomen, comrades, advisers – offer us other eyes through which we might see, other ears through which we might make soundings” (159). As I gained reading independence and I began reading novels, I became conscious of developing an identity as a “reader,” *i.e.*, someone who found reading pleasurable, and I enjoyed having that identity. I added it to my list of personal characteristics: oldest sibling, only son, New Yorker. Muncey (2010) writes that “multiple identities and reflexivity give us the capacity for empathy and entry to another’s world of meaning” (23). I found a new identity to add to my own persona, which deepened my empathy. I began to develop an awareness of the needs, likes and dislikes of others, and the books I read helped me to do so. While this was not yet a purely moral lens, it was definitely the beginning of my development of one.

Muncey (2010) writes that “what makes autoethnography different from normal autobiographies is that an autoethnographic account should attempt to subvert a dominant discourse” (31). The dominant discourse of Language Arts and English classes in my own education had been the inculcation of skills and knowledge; I sought to subvert that discourse and replace it with one of moral decision-making. In my case, I am not so much accomplishing

this through autoethnography as much through my own reading and teaching life. Current trends, as we will see, do not see reading and English education in this way, but for a long time prior they were indeed seen this way. From Sidney to Arnold, and on in many ways to Rosenblatt, Greene and Blau, literature has been seen as a primer for making ethical or moral evaluations.

However, my own literature education, at the elementary grades at least, reflects the current “dominant discourse.” On my fourth-grade report card, the “Language Arts” section is divided into the categories of “Reading,” “Grammar,” “Spelling,” “Composition,” and “Handwriting.” There is no meaning-making in sight. (Indeed, what does “Reading” even mean here? It is a vague category, and likely refers to mechanical aptitude, but it does not seem to be a category gauging deep reflection.)

Figure 2.

RAMAZ SCHOOL
 ישיבת רמז
 The Middle School
 125 E. 85th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10028

PROGRESS REPORT
GENERAL STUDIES

Name Kobrin, Jeffrey
 Grade 4H Marking Period 1
 Teacher Mrs. E. Shaw
 Supervisor Ms. S. Brickman
 Days Absent _____ Times Late _____

Code: Grade: E = Excellent VG = Very Good G = Good M = Marginal P = Poor (Failing Work)
 Effort: 5 = Excellent 4 = Very Good 3 = Good 2 = Marginal 1 = Poor Effort

SUBJECT	GRADE	EFFORT	COMMENT
LANGUAGE ARTS			
Reading	VG	3	Jeffrey prepared two very good book reports. Considering his ability, he made very little progress in reading skills work. Also, I'd like him to make a greater effort to improve his cursive writing.
Grammar	E	4	
Spelling	VG	4	
Composition	VG	4	
Handwriting	G	3	

The teacher’s comment, after complimenting me on “two very good book reports,” goes on to say that “Considering his ability, he’s made very little progress in [unintelligible] reading skills work.” My teacher, Mrs. Shaw (whom we all loved and feared; she was a legend at school) concluded with a reminder to “make a greater effort to improve his cursive writing.”

There is no mention of whether I was an empathic reader or whether I was able to conduct the texts that we studied. The entire focus of the commentary and the categories of grading seems to be skills-based. I loved to read, to think about the ideas about which the narratives made me think, and (when I found it possible) to discuss my impressions with others. I remember writing my first-ever “book report” in fourth grade, on a biography of Alexander Graham Bell. I recall summarizing key facts from the book, spending a long time trying to create an attractive cover, but very little time reflecting on what ideas or values the book raised for me. I do not fault Mrs. Shaw for teaching us in this way, and I do not recall ever trying to share my values or impressions with her – but I do not recall ever being asked what the books we read made us think about, what values or ideas they addressed, challenged, or reinforced.

My fifth-grade report card presents similar criteria.

Figure 3.

RAMAZ
ישיבת רמז
 The Middle School
 125 E. 85th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10028

PROGRESS REPORT
GENERAL STUDIES

Name Jeffrey Kobrin

Class 5H Fall 19..... Spring 1980.....

Teachers Mr. L. Sandomir
 Ms. C. Lust

Days Absent..... Late.....

Code: E=Excellent VG=Very Good G=Good M=Marginal P=Poor (Failing Work)

SUBJECT	GRADE	TEACHER'S COMMENT
LANGUAGE ARTS		<i>Jeffrey's abilities in Language Arts are quite extensive. During the course of the school year, Jeffrey has produced some truly excellent work. He needs, however, to maintain the high standards he is capable of more consistently.</i>
Reading.....	F	
Grammar.....	VG+	
Spelling.....	F	
Written Expression.....	VG+	
Handwriting.....	VG	

The categories are the same as those of the prior year. The comment, from my teacher Mr. S., now reads that my “abilities in Language Arts are quite extensive.” Although I did

produce “some truly excellent work,” I need to “maintain the high standards” that I was “capable of more consistently.” I think he was referring to the independent creative work that was assigned. In class, we read assigned texts (more on that below), and also had the option of selecting independent texts for creative group work. Mr. S. allowed us to be imaginative in the group projects that we produced. Wilhelm (2008) notes that “little emphasis has been placed on what readers actually do to go beyond simple comprehension of story action to evoke the text and elaborate upon it as a ‘story participant’” (121). Indeed, Mr. S. had an elaborate points system that awarded students “Reading Points,” which were awarded based on what level reader the teacher had rated each of us, and “Project Points,” which were based on creativity and on our attention to detail – and which were relatively more objective. I vividly recall the project I worked on with two classmates, creating taped interviews of characters from Roald Dahl’s *James and the Giant Peach* (1961). We all received high “Project Points” for creativity and attention to detail; my classmates received much higher “Reading Points” for reading this book than did I. This stung, because I had already begun to realize that certain books were “too easy” for me and were not “too easy” for some of my classmates, and I found this difference to be a burden – it was being held against me. I do not think such a system taught me to reflect on the values of the books I was reading, nor do I remember ever being asked to provide such reflections. If anything, it taught and encouraged the commodification of books.

While Mr. S. in fifth grade took a more creative approach than did Mrs. Shaw in fourth grade, neither teacher demanded of me to access the moral impressions that were already accruing in my psyche. (In Mr. S.’s defense, I will add that he did attempt to have students access their creativity in ways that other teachers did not. An aficionado of creative student response, Mr. S. would play record albums for us in class to stimulate creative writing and

assigned our class a “Freedom Project” which explored the concept of freedom in literature and, by extrapolation, in our own experience. Wilhelm and Novak (2011) cite Elbow, who writes that “When we teach students to write, that which they write is itself a literary text and an introduction to the literary community” (42). Mr. S. believed so.) Still, the overt empathy of which Coles writes, the identity of Nussbaum’s “judicious spectator,” and Booth’s coduction were all missing from my student experience – despite the fact that it was beginning to occur for me spontaneously.

Rosenblatt (1995) writes that teachers of literature have greater impact on students than do other teachers, because “they foster general ideas or theories about human nature and conduct, definite moral attitudes, and habitual responses to people and situations” (4). It is unclear from either of these documents if my teachers did or did not subscribe to such a philosophy. The categories and comments certainly do not indicate any emphasis on developing what Rosenblatt (1995) calls “an inner center from which to view in perspective the shifting society” (3). These categories were deliberately established by teachers and administrators. But did those teachers in fact attempt to help me make connections to develop what Rosenblatt (1995) calls the “social imagination” (179)? Leavis (1958) similarly writes that the study of literature “is, or should be, an intimate study of the complexities, potentialities, and essential conditions of human nature” (184). Was that taking place in my fourth and fifth grade classrooms?

Not much of the dominant discourse has changed: in the school which I now lead, fifth grade report cards have the following categories for Language Arts: *‘Just Right’ Book Reading Level; Spelling Usage; Vocabulary; Listening; Comprehension; Oral Expression; and Written Expression*. Additional categories are *Displays Organization; Shows Effort; Follows Directions; Works Independently; Completes Homework; Class Participation; Completes Classwork;*

Respects Others; and *Shows Self-Control*. I am saddened but not surprised that there are no such categories as *Coducts Well with Others* or *Transacts Deeply and Thoughtfully*. When mentoring new teachers at the elementary and middle school levels, I have tried to introduce the idea of “asking thinking questions” as a means to engaging students at the ideological or proto-moral level, but they are not always able (or willing) to do so, as they are often more concerned with their students attaining specific reading and decoding skills than they are with students’ moral growth.

Teachers in my private school come by such reluctance honestly: our school in Great Neck directly competes with some of the best public schools in the country. The district’s curriculum is Common Core driven, and our teachers must teach the same materials and approach if we are to retain students. The dominant discourse of the current ELA Common Core Standards ignores the moral dimension of literature entirely.:

The 2018 Common Core English Language Arts Standards look to teach “the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas, to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems, and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and nonprint texts in media forms old and new.”¹⁰ There is no mention of the potential moral or ethical influence of literature. In order for students to be prepared for college and career, they need to be “proficient in reading complex informational text independently in a variety of content areas.” Much of what these students will need to read in college and beyond, note the authors, is going to be “informational in structure and challenging in content.”

¹⁰ See <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/introduction/key-design-consideration/>, accessed 4/1/18.

The Core Standards argue for a return to mechanics, one where students will “demonstrate independence,” “build strong content knowledge,” “respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose and discipline,” “comprehend as well as critique,” and “value evidence.”¹¹ While these are all inarguably admirable curricular goals, there is nothing about the character growth that students could – or should – attain through encountering literature. While students do “come to understand other perspectives and cultures,” they do so in order to “communicate effectively with people of varied backgrounds” and to “vicariously inhabit worlds and have experiences much different than their own.” This is the closest the Standards come to any type of moral awareness, but the trajectory is more utilitarian than morally directed: wide reading will help the reader effectively navigate a variegated world; it will not help them alter their values or thinking.

Searches for the terms “judgment” and “morality” within the Standards returned no results. A search for the term “moral” returned the following from the Grade 2 Reading: Literature Standard: students need to be able to “Recount stories, including fables and folktales, from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.”¹² A similar Standard appears in Grade 3, which adds that students should also be able to “explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text”¹³ So although the Standards do acknowledge the existence of morals, the “moral” is little more than yet another textual element to be proven and analyzed. This is far from the definition of “moral” with which I have been operating but is one with which teachers across the country are saddled. Interestingly, I would further add that the

¹¹ See <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/introduction/students-who-are-college-and-career-ready-in-reading-writing-speaking-listening-language/>, accessed 4/1/18.

¹² <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/2/2/>, accessed 4/1/18.

¹³ <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/3/2/>, accessed 4/1/18.

dominant discourse of the Judaic Studies sides of both my own elementary school report cards and those employed by my school today have categories that are largely similar to those of the language arts categories listed above, with one important exception: students' aptitude and ability in Hebrew decoding and comprehension is paramount. However, there is an additional grade given for *tefilla*, "prayer," which essentially asks teachers to observe and report on how seriously and fervently their students pray each day. An analysis of how that might be accurately observed is beyond the scope of this study, but the uniqueness of the additional category is noteworthy.

By scrutinizing my own report cards from 1979 and 1980, I see that in my elementary years I was not overtly held to the standards of coduction or empathy which I came to see years later were (or at least should have been) the goals for my reading life, and I understand the context in which my teachers operated and in which educators today continue to operate. Despite my fuller understanding, I still see a tremendous gap.

II. Lost Opportunities

When I became a teacher and eventually became a graduate student and researcher, I slowly gained an adult perspective on the phenomenon of readers who choose to engage in texts at varying intensities, but what still bothered me was the lost opportunity for the text to impact them. Rosenblatt (1995) would say such readers' reading was "efferent," *i.e.*, focusing "primarily on the impersonal, publicly verifiable aspects of what the words evoke" (xvii). I wanted everyone to evince an immediate (and ideally dramatic) "aesthetic" reading, one which focused on and experienced "the moods, scenes, situations being created during the transaction"

(xvii). As Booth (2010) writes, “The change may endure for only the few hours of the reading encounter... Or the effects may be more lasting, with spillover into my actions tomorrow or even for the rest of my life...” (85). I wanted everyone to experience the latter. While in elementary school, I was bothered when my friends did not seem to be as entranced by the books we read as I was. I recall the sense of frustration, echoes of which I still feel today, although I have long since resignedly accepted it as reality: why couldn’t my friends see the same agent for change that they held in their hands that I saw?

At the same time, I readily acknowledge that this is an unfair assessment: how can I know another reader’s transaction, and how can I know that it did not take place in a different way – or perhaps even at a different time? Perhaps the specific texts we were reading did not speak to them as other texts did or would later in their reading lives: Coles (1989) notes that different readers find different texts that address their emotional and psychological needs. Other students connect with other texts. As Coles also notes, “Obviously, even a novel or story that produces moral implications for some readers can fail to have such an influence on others” (181). At the time, I did not understand this: for me, every book seemed to be impactful, sharpening and influencing my values. Like the voracious reader described by Davis (1992), I often felt (and still do) “addicted” to reading. He writes that “Of course *literally* his life did not depend upon reading. But it was as if psychologically, emotionally, spiritually – call it what you will – it was true: he was reading for dear life” (xix). This was how I felt when a new book fell into my hands; my life depended on reading it.

Of course, not all my school reading experiences were thrilling or ecstatic romps. I think many students undergo a split in their reading lives: there is the literature that they are assigned and the literature that they enjoy – and the twain seldom overlap. I vividly recall the

first book I was assigned in school that I did not enjoy: Conrad Richter's *The Light in the Forest* (1953), in the same fifth grade class mentioned above. Unlike the independent reading option that allowed students to choose the books for points, we also were assigned texts to be read by the entire class. I found the pace of Richter's novel slow and the story uninteresting. I did not care about the plight of the main character, a boy who had been raised by Lenape Indians who is reunited in young adulthood with his natural family. I remember feeling guilty that I could not summon more empathy, but I just could not forge a connection with the characters or the situation. Nonetheless, I was committed to completing the reading even when I did not enjoy the text. It was revelatory for me that it would be difficult to connect to a book assigned in school. At the time, I thought this depressing, but anomalous. I vividly remember the first time I skimmed on assigned reading was not until my first year of college, when I ran out of time to read Virgil's *Aeneid* before the final exam in my Literature Humanities course at Columbia College. I read a summary instead. I still feel guilty – and like I missed out on something really good – to this day. (And, in full disclosure, I have not yet returned to that text.) The assigned texts often did not have the same pull for me as did those I chose on my own.

Rosenblatt (1995) writes that a “reader seeks to participate in another’s vision – to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will make his own life more comprehensible” (7). I avidly sought with each reading to “reap knowledge,” and find that I still do today as my reading life continues. Rosenblatt describes an ideal reader, one that I often felt that I was, but not one I could always be, as the assigned reading would occasionally feel fathomable, but more often the literature that I chose for myself seemed to offer greater riches.

III. Welcome Back, Kobrin

When I began teaching English after several years as a Judaic studies instructor, I wanted my English classroom to be a space where students analyzed right and wrong, good and evil – and learned how to make thoughtful choices. Arnold (1865) famously argues that “poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life, – to the question: How to live” (353). My tenth-grade students were curious, and genuinely wanted to learn “how to live.” Coles (2010) writes that certain books “treat these questions: How does one live a life? What kind of a life? And for what purpose?” (181). I was – and remain – convinced that my English class could help my students find the answers to some of these questions or, at the very least, help them learn how to better articulate.

I vividly recall the first day of teaching English. I had already established myself and my reputation in the school as a Judaic Studies teacher, but it was clearly somewhat jarring for the students to meet me in their English classroom. In the school, Ramaz, a Modern Orthodox Jewish high school (and my *alma mater*) teachers were for the most part easily categorized: Judaic studies classes were taught by rabbis or Orthodox Jewish women, and General studies courses were taught by teachers who either did not practice their Judaism or were not Jewish. The English department was no exception; and students were initially not sure what to make of me as their teacher. One, who had seen from her schedule that she would be seeing me again later in the day in a Jewish law class, asked, “Do we need to call you ‘Rabbi’ in English class too?” At the time, I found this funny – but in retrospect I began to think that if a “rabbi” was a teacher of moral decision making, then I could be a more successful “rabbi” by using English texts than I sometimes could using traditional Jewish texts.

Coles (1989) writes of Richard, one of his undergraduate students at Harvard, who, when diagnosed with a tumor, found solace and support in reading works of fiction. Richard told his father that he was consulting with a group of people, and humorously revealed that their names were a list of famous novelists. Coles describes how Richard “was trying, really, to imagine the unimaginable, with the help of those who are quite good at putting the imagination to work.” Richard did so “not only for aesthetic reasons but for an urgent moral reason: how ought I bear myself, if at all possible, under these extraordinary circumstances?” (186-188). In many ways, I saw my students as potentially similar to Richard (fortunately not medically). I wondered if there was there a way to bring them to make such connections. I could not imagine that it requires a life-threatening experience to bring about such an ability or such a desire; it had not taken any such experience for me to ask myself these questions. I wondered if I had thought this way at my students’ age with or without realizing that I did.

Kress (2012) writes of the pitfalls that befall teachers who seek not to approach “youth as partners” but rather to “fix” their students’ attitudes and ideals. I was (and to a degree remain) guilty of such a mindset. But as I discussed in Chapter 2, I rely on Holtz’s (2003) “didactic” approach to inculcating moral values as a guideline for my own approach.

IV. Literature as a Primer

There is a deep tradition of seeing literature as a potential primer for teaching values or ethics. One of the earliest sources is Aristotle (1987), who in the *Testimonia* describes music (which, in his classification, includes poetry) as containing “especially close likenesses of the true natures of anger and mildness, bravery, temperance and all their opposites, and all of the

other [traits of] character...” He adds that “we are moved in our soul when we listen to such things” (58). As a reader, I had been “moved in my soul” by such authors as Norton Juster, Stephen King, Herman Wouk, Harper Lee, and Arthur C. Clarke. I continued to be moved by authors both new and familiar, both those assigned in school and those chosen independently. This became a goal for me as a teacher and a researcher: I wanted to develop literature as a primer.

When, as a graduate student and more experienced classroom teacher, I deepened my understanding of this ideology by reading Nussbaum (1995), who argues that reading novels allows readers to “investigate and embrace” the lives of ordinary citizens. This investigation and embrace allows readers to feel deep empathy for others. As Nussbaum explains, “an ethics of impartial respect for human dignity will fail to engage real human beings unless they are made capable of entering imaginatively into the lives of distant others and to have emotions related to that participation” (32). It seems to me a noble goal to imbue students with respect for human dignity. The literature classroom can be much more than just a training ground for critical readers.

In my lecture notes from those years (ca.1997 – 2000), when I was teaching tenth graders at Ramaz, I find references to overt points of “moral sensibility.” In my notes on Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for example, I wrote “[Lord] Henry doesn’t believe in sin – Morals are fear of society; Religion is fear of God – [it is] all based on cowardice.” I felt it important to highlight the passages of Wilde’s novel that directly addressed the topic of morality. My notes continue: “[He wants to] deny sin’s reality – ‘The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it.’” Apparently, I was not content to let this point stand on its own. Immediately below this, with a large bold arrow, I wrote: “[This is the] opp[osite] of [Maimonides], where greater

[reward] is given to those tempted who [nonetheless] deny temptation.” While I cannot recall the class discussion this engendered (or didn’t), my clear goal was to make a moral point. This was one of my goals in teaching across the curriculum from Judaic studies to General studies, and I made such points consciously. After all, I was a rabbi in English class too.

I followed up such discussion with assessments. On an in-class writing assignment dated September 10, 1997, one of the optional topics was “Critics in the 1890’s called *The Picture of Dorian Gray* ‘a poisonous book.’ Do you agree? Is the book a bad influence?” I was clearly inspired to use English class for such thinking. On an exam, one of the statements to which students could opt to react read as follows: “When the Rabbis said ‘a sin creates [another] sin,’ they could have been talking about Dorian Gray.”¹⁴ By including rabbinic phrases and concepts, sometimes in the original Hebrew, I clearly sought to have my students make certain connections between the text and their outside knowledge. This is the idea that Coles describes as he writes that

the whole point of stories is not “solutions” or “resolutions” but a broadening and even heightening of our struggles – with new protagonists and antagonists introduced, with new sources of concern or apprehension or hope, as one’s mental life accommodates itself to a series of arrivals: guests who have a way of staying, but not necessarily staying put (129).

I wanted the lens that I brought, whether from traditional Jewish sources or from other sources of literary criticism, to provoke my students into thinking about what their “guests” had made them consider – and to heighten and broaden their struggles. When this worked, it was very satisfying. When it did not, I was very frustrated at the missed opportunity for growth.

¹⁴ The original Hebrew (which is how it appeared on the exam) is עברה גוררת עברה, which literally translates “one sin drags along another,” a phrase which itself is a corollary to the statement מצווה גוררת מצווה, “one good deed creates another.”

I could not understand why my students did not adopt my own lens. Greene (1995) writes that “most of us are finding out how necessary it is to discover the things we want to teach appear to young people who are often so unlike our remembered selves.” This was indeed my experience. As she continues,

Listening to them, we frequently find ourselves dealing as never before with our own prejudgments and preferences, with the forms and images we have treasured through much of our lives. What we have learned to treat as valuable, what we take for granted may be challenged in unexpected ways (188).

This was to be an ongoing challenge for me, as it had been since I began reading alongside others. What follows is one example of my experience.

V. Teaching Mockingbird in Great Neck: A Case Study

When the time came to teach Harper Lee’s (1960) novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I was ready for my students to make direct Colesian “heightening and broadening” of their struggles through the text. The Jewish community in Great Neck is a *mélange* of cultures and ethnic groups; the school in which I teach and am Head of School, the North Shore Hebrew Academy, is a microcosm of the larger community. Some sixty percent of the school’s student body is composed of students of Iranian descent, some of whom are first-generation Americans. The rest of the students are relatively landed gentry, descendants of Ashkenazi (Western European) Jews whose families have been in America for at least two generations. Although at first blush the two ethnic groups (and sub-groups within each group) would seem to share many religious values, in reality their immediate customs, practices and values systems – fueled by a disparate thousand years of cultural history and experience – often highlight their differences rather than their commonalities. Not only are the traditional foods and languages different: the diversity

runs even deeper. For example, while the Ashkenazi group has many members whose immediate ancestors are Holocaust survivors, none of the Iranian counterparts can relate to such a formative experience, as their entire community did not experience the Nazi occupation at all. Indeed, each group has its own synagogues, organizations and social networks. Indeed, in the small-town Jewish community of Great Neck, one of the only meaningful shared spaces of interaction between these diverse ethnic groups is the school itself.

The small town of Lee's fictional Maycomb County, Alabama, with its intricate social hierarchy and exclusivist (or, more accurately, racist) social policies has many parallels to my students' community in Great Neck. Indeed, middle school students in general, extremely conscious of their social groups, often create exclusive cliques or groups populated by those of their cultural and historical background and interests. I thought that all that remained was for me to open the eyes of my eighth graders to Lee's lessons and the stereotypes would begin to erode before my eyes.

The overtly moral text of *Mockingbird* seemed the perfect vehicle for teaching the evils of prejudice and racism. My goals were straightforward: after identifying easily with the novel's characters and its situations, students would be able to learn vicariously through those characters' experiences. I wanted first to foster connections between my students' understanding of themselves and their community with those of Lee's characters in 1930's Alabama; and then to encourage and facilitate a Colesian "broadening and heightening" of their "struggle" (129).

After providing students with a brief history and cultural overview of the Depression-era South and introducing such terms as *bildungsroman* and "Southern Gothic," discussion of the novel began. We discussed narrative voice, plot and character, but my real agenda was to give over the ethical concepts of the evils of succumbing to peer pressure; of admiring the individual

who stands up for what she believes is right; of the evils of prejudice and racism; of the positives and negatives of small town community life; and of parallels to the students' own lives in Great Neck.

In determining how best to teach these moral objectives, I first identified thematic tropes from Lee's novel: for example, Atticus Finch's advice to his children to see things from another's point of view (30, 154, 157) or Atticus's ideal of equality for all in the eyes of the law (205). The passages mentioning these tropes were read aloud in class and were discussed at length. The readings were accompanied by my overt focusing explications such as "this is very important," "make sure you underline this passage," or "this is a main theme in this book." In retrospect, I realize that such directions were too heavy-handed. Blau (2011) notes that teachers can fall into the trap of wanting their students to derive particular wisdom or insight from particular texts, which causes those teachers to "short-circuit the process" that the students must undergo to attain those insights and wisdom for themselves (6). Wilhelm (2008), mentioned above, advocates for the use of dramatization to engage students (145). He notes that use of drama helps move students into Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (150). Using drama, which had been effective when I taught the drama *Twelve Angry Men*, would have been a less direct mode to bring about an emotional connection with the text for my students – but I did not think of it at the time.

I next sought to find points of connection between the students' experience and that of the novel's characters. Such points ranged from those that were specific to the school and local community to those that related to being a teenager seeking definition of self. Examples included mentioned the setting of the overtly religious community of the fictional Maycomb County, with such sects as the town's "foot-washing Baptists" (44), and compared them to the

religious groups with which students were familiar in their small town of Great Neck; we analyzed the relationship between Atticus Finch and his children, Jem and Scout, and discussed what makes an effective parent; we spoke of the double life that the children's African-American housekeeper, Calpurnia, reveals when she takes them to her church (44), and discussed if anyone in class has such diverse ways of relating with different people in their lives; and we discussed the need that the novel's children (and many other characters) have of accurately categorizing others as "black" or "white" or "poor" or "country,"¹⁵ and commented that many eighth graders (and others) feel the need to do the same in our school. We also spent a great deal of time discussing racism, both within the novel and beyond it. Again, if I could do it all over again, I would ask the students to generate their own lists or questions, perhaps while working in small groups, which would enable them to obtain their own knowledge and experience of the text rather than what Blau (2011) calls "borrowed knowledge," which is not their understanding of the text, but rather is only an understanding of *the teacher's* understanding (4).

This may well explain why some students were frustrated when reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Some found the book's vocabulary and length difficult. In an anonymous survey response, one wrote that the book "was a slow read and did not make me want to know what happens." Another wrote that "although parts were interesting and exciting[,] the majority of the book was slow and boring." But while some students had difficulty accessing the text, I experienced different frustrations as their teacher. I thought that the connections between the novel and the students' experience would be as blatant for the students as they seemed to be for me; these connections, however, did not always seem to resonate for the class. Blau predicts this

¹⁵ For example, when Mr. Dolphus Raymond, a white character with a black wife, is introduced, Jem and Scout have difficulty determining where in the community he would fit (161).

as well, noting that teachers who have decided on a particular understanding or meaning of the text will resist any questions or lack of enthusiasm, seeing them as challenges to their own authority as teachers (5).

On the other hand, the experiences reported by students of feeling disconnected from the text and its messages were not universally negative. One student wrote that he liked the book “because it was filled with suspense.” This was not the connection for which I had hoped, but it was something. In the Rosenblattian (1995) sense, this was a connection of verbal stimuli to a kind of “intense experience” out of which “social insights” would hopefully “arise” (31). And indeed, they did arise: on a deeper level, the same student added that he could relate to the book because “I’m a Jew and the book is filled with racism.”

One immediate challenge that arose was the difficulty of assessing the successful teaching of a moral lesson. If such growth occurs when a belief or value alters within an individual, can such learning even be assessed at all? In a paper that I wrote in spring of 2011 for a graduate school course, I asked: “Are there specific formats of questions for a unit test? Is an essay superior to short answer questions in determining student knowledge – or, more accurately, absorbing – of such lessons? The best way of determining student moral growth in a written (or even oral) assessment is unclear.” I would add the following questions today: are there multiple formats that could be used – and what might each format yield for my students? What, for example, would an essay provide that short answer questions would not, and vice versa? I had students write mini-paragraphs of two- to three- sentence reactions to specific prompts at arbitrary points during class discussion, and I asked them to write an essay on an instance of racism that they had experienced and their reactions to it. Students also took part in a non-graded, anonymous survey six weeks after finishing the novel.

I did not see the mini-paragraphs. Students only them read out loud on a volunteer basis, and they served as self-reflective assessments rather than as graded ones. The essays, on the other hand, provided me with much more data. The prompt for the student's essays was the following:

An act of racism is when someone says something or does something to someone else based on assumptions about their color, religion or nationality.

In four or five paragraphs, briefly describe an incident where you were either party or witness to an act of racism. After your brief description, explain how you felt at the time (or afterwards).

Students wrote essays during class time to ensure that they submitted their own work and were not helped at home by others or by internet research.

A number of the essays were insightful. One student described an incident of an anti-Semitic comment to his friend and the impact of the comment on the victim. He concluded: "I saw how much racism can change a person, so after that day I made a vow to never make a stereotypical [sic] comment again." Another wrote of her grandmother's unintentionally loud racist comment about her African-American caregiver. These and similar responses were satisfactory to me in that they demonstrated that students had an understanding of the term "racism" as we had defined it and they had made a successful connection to outside knowledge, all of which are the beginning of Wayne Booth's "coductive" learning experience and show a Colesian process of "heightening and broadening." As Rosenblatt (1994) explains,

the reader's attention to the text activates certain elements in his past experience... Meaning will emerge from a network of relationships among the things symbolized *as he senses them*. The symbols point to these sensations, images, objects, ideas, relationships, with the particular associations or feeling-tones created by his past experiences with them in life or in literature (11).

This "making of meaning" was what I hoped was taking place.

It was difficult, however, to determine fully from the student writing if an emotional awareness and actual moral learning was achieved. “When a person is racist in our generation it is scary and confusing,” wrote one student. “Everyone feels uncomfortable in racist situations [sic] and you have to learn to ignore them.” The student did not elaborate on what such a situation might be. Was this written from the perspective of a victim, or that of a bystander? Another student wrote that racism is “a gruesome thing and it can lead to physically destroying whole races at a time, as well as mentally damaging someone, from the inside out.” I was (and remain) curious about what past life or literature experiences this student drew upon – but the student did not share them. I would love to be able to help students to articulate that process for themselves as they learn to become more “aesthetic” readers. Rosenblatt (1994) writes that such a reader “pays attention to the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that these words and their referents arouse within him.” The reader’s attention is thus “*centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text* (25, italics in original). It is difficult for an emerging reader, with little ability to be metacognitive, to describe his or her transactional process.

Blau (2003 and 2011) suggests that students create their own lists of questions as they read specific texts rather than respond to teacher-generated queries. With the caveat that “many students are also unwilling to do the work that would be required for a thoughtful interpretation” and can produce quick and “inattentive and irresponsible” interpretations (2011, p. 7), they still need to be pushed to have their own experiences of literature, if only so that they will understand that a “strong reader” does not mean a reader without questions (8). The student responses indicated an understanding that racism is evil, but they lacked a more subtle and nuanced comprehension – one of which I felt my students capable. Perhaps, however, the comprehension

was achieved, and students were unable to express it – which reminded me again of the inadequacy of such assessments.

Blau urges teachers to help students learn the “value of the interpretive problems, confusions, and questions they encounter in their reading” so they will see such moments as opportunities to grow in their own understandings of texts, rather than seeing them as “obstacles to their success as readers” (11). Wilhelm and Novak (2011) suggest that students email or post a “transactional journal” the night before they come to class to allow the instructor to prepare for the class discussion (133.) The teacher can then show students how they are each reading the text differently and assist them in what Booth would call comparing coductions. I did not employ any such methods in this instance. Kress (2012) cites Smith and Denton, who note that some teachers are shy about teaching teens about religiosity. There is “a curious reluctance among many adults to teach teens when it comes to faith.” Adults do not want to seem “uncool” and therefore will only “expose” teens to religion and will not openly teach it (141). I wondered if I had a similar reticence and therefore stopped short of fully engaging the students in the text.

The student surveys were completed some six weeks after the *Mockingbird* unit ended. Students were assured that responses were anonymous, and the students were therefore more likely to respond with candor. The survey consisted of the following four questions:

- 1) What I remember most from *To Kill a Mockingbird* is:
- 2) I think that the moral of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is:
- 3) I liked / did not like this book because:
- 4) I could / couldn't relate to this book because:

Students had varied responses. In their responses to the first question, some remembered plot (“When Bob Ewell attacked them in the woods. It was fantastic.”); some remembered characters (“Atticus”); some appreciated the representation of the 1930’s Southern setting.

Others remembered what seem to be moral lessons. One student wrote that “What I remember most from TKAM is when Atticus said you don’t understand a person till you truly [sic] walk in their shoes.”

Interestingly, even those students who firmly stated that they could not relate to the text had no difficulty making an ethical connection to the book. The same student who responded that she could not relate because she is “growing up very differently than Jem and Scout and I have never experienced the same things as them” also wrote that she “liked this book because it is realistic and it teaches good lessons...” and added that “the moral of TKAM is... you can judge people once you already get to know them.” Although some lessons (insofar as they were assessable) may have been learned, overall this proved an unsatisfying experience for me. I wanted the students to experience the connection that I had made, to achieve what Rosenblatt (1995) calls their “inner center” (3) through the lens provided by Lee with *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Noddings (2002) writes that “stories... play a central role in establishing identity and in both moral and political education” (62). I wanted my students to establish their identities, but perhaps I was too ambitious, or perhaps they were not yet ready. Or perhaps my goals themselves were somewhat misguided. Further thought was definitely required.

Chapter Seven

A Lens, but of Torah

I. The Missing Link

Each of the lenses detailed in the preceding three chapters have been very helpful in framing the modalities of my transactions with texts as well as the transactions I hoped to foster for my students. But a gap still yawned for me on a personal philosophic level. I firmly believed in the divine origin of the Biblical texts. As such, how could these texts themselves not be the most inspiring? How could they not be the best vehicles for conveying morals and the ability to make moral decisions? In short, if I really believed the adage of Ben Bag Bag quoted in chapter five of the Ethics of the Fathers which reads *הפך בה והפך בה, דכולא בה* – “search in it, and search in it, since all is in it,”¹⁶ what excuse did I have for looking to general literature for its moral educative power? Could it be that my attraction to secular literature and my observations of its efficacy were merely second-rate compromises? Rabbi Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein’s theology, ideology and philosophy bridged the gap for me.

During my college years, Lichtenstein became a role model for me in how to see literature as a means to teaching good decision-making – although he does not frame terms as such. Lichtenstein is a Matthew Arnold man; Arnold (1865) defines poetry as “nothing less than the most perfect speech of man, that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth” (346). The Victorian Arnold sees ethical education dimming: “morals” are losing their luster and have become “bound up with systems of thought and belief which have had their day; they are

¹⁶ The reference is to the Torah. The maxim continues, “and in it you should look, and grow old and be worn in it; and from it do not move, since there is no character trait greater than it.”

fallen into the hands of pedants and professional dealers; they grow tiresome to some of us” (354). How, then, to instruct students in the values that befit citizens of an ever-expanding world? Arnold wants literature to fill this void, and, as we have seen, writes that “poetry is at bottom a criticism of life” and should answer “the question: How to live” (353). Arnold’s ideas were encouraging, but the gap still yawned. Arnold’s sentiment is echoed by Winters (1987), who writes that “the moral intelligence is merely the knowledge and evaluation of evil; and the moral intelligence is the measure of the man and the poet alike” (101). I defined my use of the terms “moral” and “morality” in chapter two. Before accessing Lichtenstein’s thought, however, the terms “moral” and “morality” require some further explication.

II. A(nother) Brief Glossary of Terms

As noted in chapter two, Hansen (2001) and Alexander (2001) provide the underpinning of my use of the term “moral.” Hansen explains that “moral sensibility” is a combination of reason and emotion; teachers should seek to inculcate such in students. Hansen explains that this sensibility is a fusion of “humaneness and thought” in the way one both “regards and treats others.” Reason and emotion, he explains, must “mutually inform each other” (32). Without such a fusion, one would either err on the side of sentimentality or harshness. This appeals to me: it echoes the famous rabbinic description of God as balanced between רַחֲמִים, or mercy, and דִּין, or justice. Hansen urges teachers to be morally “attentive,” which he defines as “being alert to students’ responses to opportunities to grow as persons – for example, to become more rather than less thoughtful about ideas and more rather than less sensitive to others’ views and concerns” (10). This was the idea I invoked when dealing with Erica’s confession of anorexia described in chapter five: her tale required me to be attentive to her needs. Erica was seeking a

growth (or, in this case, a healing) opportunity. This was a moment for mercy, not justice. Hansen urges teachers to display “moral responsibility and moral seriousness,” which “encompass a concern for the impact on others of one’s beliefs and knowledge” (55). This responsibility and seriousness, for me, is complemented by Rogers’s (1980) reminder that a teacher must also exhibit “realness, or genuineness,” which he explains means that the teacher enters into a relationship with students “without presenting a front or a façade.” This enables the teacher to come “into a direct, personal encounter with the learners, meeting each of them on a person-to-person basis” (271). The human connection is what teaching has always been about for me in both English and Judaic studies settings.

As a teacher of Judaic texts, ideas and ideals, Hansen’s and Roger’s philosophies of education deeply resonate for me. The agendas of Hansen and Alexander align with that of Nussbaum: all three see an improved society emerging from such an education. This definition is my own hybrid creation: Ely, Vinz *et al.* (1997) describe how a researcher can act as “*bricoleur*,” who selects

from a vast storehouse of existing theory, perhaps devising a new theory of one’s own, and relating theory to theory in a manner that best helps to interpret one’s findings among the various perspectives that compose for us circles within circles of theory (230).

(Indeed, mixing-and-matching has been my methodology throughout this study, and throughout all of my research. My hybrid method of literary-auto-ethno-pedogography is most certainly of the *bricoleur* school of theory. What Lichtenstein offers is the missing piece that bridged my internal worlds and completes my understanding of literature and its effectiveness.)

Like Hansen, Alexander sees the inculcation of such values within the purview of the teacher: “Teaching,” he writes, “...is a moral activity... in the sense that it strengthens the moral

agent within, empowering students to make moral choices more intelligently on their own”

(143). Although neither Hansen nor Alexander delineates a particular discipline in which their ideas can be best enacted, a successful literature classroom would certainly serve. There is of course no guarantee that such any classroom, whether studying literature or any other subject, will succeed in inculcating moral sensibility. George Steiner (1970), who worries about the example of Nazi death camps run by highly literate and educated individuals, writes that

Unlike Matthew Arnold... I find myself unable to assert confidently that humanities humanize. Indeed, I would go farther: it is at least conceivable that the focusing of consciousness on a written text, which is the substance of our training and pursuit, diminishes the sharpness and readiness of our actual moral response (61).

The challenge for readers and for teachers of readers is to make the leap from the text to the “actual moral response.” Whether this is accomplished through a Colesian lens, by Nussbaum-like empathy or by a Boothian coduction of a what-if scenario – and both I and my students experienced all three, at various points – the connection between reader and text ought to lead to “intelligent spirituality” and to what Hansen (2001) describes as a student “who can act in the world rather than merely being acted upon.” Someone like this, he continues, is “a person who not only can think and judge but who also connects and embeds thought and judgment in actual conduct” (60). Wilhelm (2001) writes that literature teachers should worry less about teaching books and more about “processes with which to approach books” (181). If these three lenses through which I have viewed the reader’s transaction all follow parallel paths, there is a fourth lens as well, one which has had a major impact on my reading and teaching life, and in many ways complements and bridges the first three with my Orthodox Jewish sensibilities. This is the lens of Rabbi Dr. Aaron Lichtenstein.

III. A Fourth Lens

The late Rabbi Dr. Lichtenstein was the leader of Yeshivat Har Etzion, an Israeli Talmudic academy, or *yeshiva*, in which I spent two years of study upon completing my BA at Columbia. Lichtenstein's educational background is atypical for a classic *rosh yeshiva* (the dean of a yeshiva). He proudly held a doctorate in Milton from Harvard; his writings and talks are peppered with references to general culture, literature, philosophy, and history. A polymath, Lichtenstein believed in the utility of general culture – and literature, specifically – as a vehicle to better understand God's word and God's world, two non-negotiable tenets of his belief system.

For Lichtenstein, the study of literature complements and augments the study of traditional Jewish texts; the point of studying those traditional texts is both an attempt to explore the mind of God and to understand how to conduct oneself. Studying general culture, he explains, can help one reach those goals. Lichtenstein (2003) writes that "Secular studies possess immense intrinsic value insofar as they generally help to develop our spiritual personality. Time and again, they intensify our insight into basic problems of moral and religious thought" (93). For Lichtenstein – and for me – the study of literature thus becomes a spiritual act. (His definition is more religiously traditional than that of Alexander's [2001] "intelligent spirituality.") In this Lichtenstein is akin to Winters (1987) who writes that he cannot help believing in a greater power. Winters writes

If experience appears to indicate that absolute truths exist that we are able to work toward an approximate apprehension of them... then there is only one place where those truths may be located, and I see no way to escape this conclusion (14).

Religious spirituality and the reading of literature are not contradictory; rather, they complement one another. Lichtenstein connects the previous lenses for me as well, as when Coles (1989) writes that he saw literature as a “spiritual mainstay” for his Harvard Medical School students “throughout their education” (99).

By deepening my understanding into how people think, feel, and relate with others, I have a better appreciation of the world, one that I believe God created. I would smile and wince simultaneously each time I taught my class and re-read aloud the passage in chapter four of Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1861) where Pip’s simple but good-hearted brother-in-law, Joe Gargery, repeatedly tries to mollify Pip’s hurt feelings as Mr. Pumblechook, Mr. and Mrs. Hubble, Mr. Wopsle, and Pip’s sister, Mrs. Joe take turns criticizing him. All the inarticulate and outnumbered Joe can do is ladle more onto Pip’s plate. Each time I read Pip’s repeated observation of how “Joe gave me more gravy,” I would feel Pip’s embarrassment and Joe’s compassion, and I appreciated the uniquely Dickensian combination of sweetness and pain that was at once comical and true to life. This is what Nussbaum (1995) observes when she writes that “the reader’s delight in this novel has yet a further moral dimension as a preparation of moral activities of many kinds in life” (42). For me, the moral and the spiritual are inextricably linked: a truly spiritual person is one who is truly moral as well. Vicariously feeling Pip’s pain and Joe’s kindness made me want to avoid feeling such embarrassment (and to avoid embarrassing others) and made me want to show others kindness as well. Lichtenstein’s thought gave me a way to connect the feelings evoked by the text with the values of Torah.

Greene (1995) explains that art can be “a way of knowing.” It offers a completely different means of accessing ideas. As she continues, “The experience and knowledge gained by this way of knowing opens new modalities for us in the lived world; it brings us in touch with

our primordial landscapes, our original acts of perceiving” (149). Reading Dickens – and then teaching and reteaching Dickens – connected me with my own “primordial landscape.”

Noddings (2002) writes of the need for an “exercise of ethical imagination that forces us to consider the conditions under which we might lose our very way of being in the world” (50). Retelling this story accesses memories of such exercises – and causes me to perform them again. While I cannot say if Lichtenstein and Nussbaum are universally applicable to or resonant for every reader and every teacher of readers, their thought certainly applies to and resonates loudly for me. But even were I to deny what the religious overtones seen by Lichtenstein and Winters offer me, I can fall back on Moffett’s (1994) explanation that “Spirituality is connectedness.” As Moffett elaborates, a spiritual person “identifies with the rest of humanity and nature and sheds feelings of boundaries.” He continues: “The more we identify with others, the better we treat them... Selfishness merely indicates an early stage of individualism, and one outgrows it by going forward, not backward” (71). Moffett would undoubtedly take issue with Steiner (1970), who as I mentioned seriously questions the ability of the humanities to “humanize” (61). Moffett writes that “highly developed individuals become necessarily more moral” (71). I would argue that by utilizing a Lichtensteinian lens, one is less likely to emerge a Nazi than to emerge as Moffett’s morally connected individual.

IV. The Profundity of Reading

Whereas one might think that science, rather than literature, might shine greater light onto God’s handiwork, Lichtenstein (2003) demurs. He writes: “History and the sciences show us the divine revelations manifested in human affairs and the cosmic order. The humanities

deepen our understanding of man: his nature, functions, and duties” (93). Elsewhere (1997), he adds that

the humanities... deal with *homo sapiens* proper: with his existence and experience, his responses and reflections, with the insights of his rational faculties and the progeny of his creative powers... the humanities’ basic shared concert confers common spiritual import – and hence, to a degree, common status – as a complement to Torah (242).

As discussed above, I see no contradiction between the search for meaning in text and the source of meaning in Jewish religious tenets and texts. Carmy and Zuckier (2015) quote Lichtenstein’s reflection on appreciation the best in culture: “There are human beings... whose historical mission is a mission of creativity – literary creativity, moral creativity. There are people in whom you see greatness, greatness of soul, moral greatness” (309). My own love of literature is a love of such greatness, but it is ultimately a love of people – of their foibles, their thoughts, and their feelings. To study literature is to study people: both those detailed within it and those responsible for creating it. Lichtenstein (1997) writes that “the study of great literature focuses on a manifestation, albeit indirect, of [God’s] wondrous creation at [the cosmos’] apex” (245). This was my experience as a reader and teacher of readers.

Noddings (2002) cautions that “To produce good people we must provide a morally good education” (154). By inhabiting the minds of the characters that I read, whether characters I adored from realist fiction such as Dr. Farrokh Daruwalla from John Irving’s *A Son of the Circus* (1994) or those of fantasy fiction such as Tolkien’s Hobbits, I gain a deeper understanding of actual “characters” – *i.e.*, actual people – which has been a major part of my own “morally good education.” Booth (1988) writes that “... we are all equipped, by a nature (a “second nature”) that has created us out of story, with a rich experience in choosing which life stories, fictional or “real,” we will embrace wholeheartedly (484). What we read forms who we are. Whereas

Tennyson's Ulysses is "a part of all I have met," a reader is the mirror image: every part of a reader is composed of a book her or she has "met." My reading has introduced me to any number of stories that have deepened my understanding of others and thereby made me who I am. I seldom if ever think about the choices I (or those recommending or assigning me books) made along the way – the Hardy Boys series; Isaac Asimov's science fiction; the Harry Potter novels – and what impact those choices had on my character. But they have: Booth (1988) cites Paul Hunter, who questions how much "of modern human history has gone the way it has because people at crucial moments have said or done a certain thing in imitation of some character in a novel?" (229).

Reading is thus a profound experience for me. Lichtenstein (1997) writes that "great literature, from the fairy tale to the epic, plumbs uncharted existential and experiential depths which are both its wellsprings and its subjects" (244). Without entering into a discussion of how to define "great literature," I have been impacted upon and my perspective altered by Stephen King and Clarke as well as by Shakespeare and Dickens. Akin to Nussbaum, Lichtenstein writes that "Literary exposure to a broad range of social, historical, and personal experience helps us transcend the insular bounds of our own time and space." This allows us to "disengage the local and accidental from the permanent and universal, to understand both intellectually and empathetically, situations we had not otherwise confronted or possibly even envisioned" (255). This brings me to what is for me one of Lichtenstein's greatest ideas: even though the Torah contains all ideas, abundant alternate sources of wisdom are not only allowed, but may even be necessary.

V. Why not the Torah?

Nachmanides, Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, the medieval commentator and kabbalist, teaches that each קוצו של יוד, each decorative textual flourish in the Torah's text, is what Lichtenstein (1997) describes as "part of an all-embracing concatenation of ineffable divine names" (252). It is a matter of faith for me that all wisdom is contained in the Torah. For Nachmanides, all knowledge – scientific, philosophic, everything – is "literally embedded within the Torah's words and script" (251). However, not everyone has the keys to unlock such wisdom.

Indeed, there are limitations and challenges to teaching Jewish traditional sources. Holtz (2003) points out that such texts by nature reflect a "theistic conception of the world;" they assume a set of "divinely ordained rules" by which we are to live our lives; they have a "particularistic consciousness about the world," wherein the Jewish people have a special relationship with God; the Torah – as we have noted – is viewed as the ultimate source of wisdom, which Holtz calls an "exclusivism about the nature of truth;" and finally that Jewish tradition is "powerfully oriented toward the community rather than the individual" (27). These difficulties inherent in teaching Jewish texts as sources of wisdom are part of the challenge. Other sources of insight can and must be found – and, at least within the Modern Orthodox worldview, alternate roads to wisdom do exist. Modern Orthodoxy embraces secular wisdom: science and medicine are studied, not rejected. What literature offers is a tool to unlock the moral wisdom embedded in the Torah.

Literature is a more direct and therefore quicker way to attain Hansen's fusion of reason and emotion and Alexander's spiritual awareness. It is accessible, and it deepens our understanding of the Torah's text: Lichtenstein points out that Milton helps us better understand

the character of the blind biblical Isaac. The Talmud also tells of Rabbis who were blind – Rabbi Sheshet and Rabbi Yosef are repeatedly mentioned as suffering from this affliction in various contexts of Jewish law. But, as Lichtenstein points out, they never wrote about how it *felt* to be blind. Milton, on the other hand, provided us with “On His Blindness” (255), a heartfelt reflection on his struggle with this handicap. While Rabbi Sheshet may have agreed that “they also serve who only stand and wait,” he never told us about it; Milton, on the other hand, quite eloquently did. Lichtenstein, in a moment of Colesian empathetic connection, notes that for this reason it was Milton, not Isaac, Jacob or Rabbi Sheshet, who helped him understand the pain that his own father endured when he suddenly lost his sight at the age of eighty-one (254). Literature helps us understand the human condition itself in more immediately accessible ways than Torah can.

This is the counterpoint to what Holtz (2003) describes when he asks teachers of Bible to be mindful of the ways in which their culture shapes and influences how they teach their texts. These texts get “rewritten” by living in a non-Jewish culture. “How,” asks Holtz, can we teach the Lord’s song in a strange land?” (11, italics in original). My experience with English literary texts is the mirror image of what Holtz describes, and I ask myself how I can teach *those* songs in a Jewish context.

For me, any insight that helps understand the how one copes with a given situation (not merely insight into understanding a Biblical or Talmudic text) is an insight that I appreciate and often try to share with others. This is Moffett’s (1994) concept of “connectedness” (71) that comes from a “totally cosmopolitan” spirituality, which is based on a “cosmic framework [that] is all-inclusive” (xix). When I read and taught of the impact of Pip’s unforeseen great expectations on his character or of *The Stand’s* (1978, 1990) Larry Underwood’s trek through the

Lincoln Tunnel, I gained human insights that have remained with me. “If we regard literature and the other arts not just as works to be understood,” writes Moffett (1994), “. . . but as experiences to be undergone,” then they can “cast a spell” (75). The spell has been cast on me by many of the works mentioned, and by many I have not had space – or recall – to mention.

VI. And Therefore...

Leavis (1958) writes that the study of literature “is, or should be, an intimate study of the complexities, potentialities, and essential conditions of human nature” (184). Booth supplies the lens of “coduction,” which allowed me as a reader and teacher to create “what-if” scenarios for myself and for my students, scenarios such as “How would you thank Miss Havisham if you were Pip?” or, after reading such works as Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* and Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day*, asking students to “Describe a journey you have taken and its impact on you.” Nussbaum provides the lens of the “judicious spectator,” which is the kind of person that I hope that I have become and that I have helped students become. Coles offers a model of books as advisors, giving me a framework through which to view my own and my students’ ethical development. Finally, Lichtenstein’s lens uses literature to appreciate the best that man and God have created, and it provides the key link for me between my own philosophical and ideological worlds. Each of these lenses has been and continues to be a way I have intimately studied Leavis’s “complexities” and “potentialities.”

Through the integration and overlapping of these various lenses, I have sought to create what Ely, Vinz *et al.* call a “third factor” or “third space,” which “are places where multiple perspectives coexist” (264), and which occur when “perspectives are in dialogue with each other” (265). This is based on the work of Homi Bhaba, who calls it “hybridity,” which

underscores new articulations of perspective by delimiting and determining how any one position might fail to explain a ‘reality’ and might more essentially contain conceptual prisms through which we attempt to see into new spaces (40).

Indeed, I have sought throughout my work – and this is how my brain seems to work in general – to “hybridize” the theory I have learned and to emerge in this “third space.”

Ellis and Bochner (2000) write that autoethnographic work ought to be a “systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall” which leads one “to understand a way of life” (737). Through the presentation and interpretation of internal recollections and external artifacts, I have attempted to reconstruct my journey thus far and to understand my “way of life” and to find a way to explain the power of literature specifically for a product of Modern Orthodox Judaism. Farrell (2004) sees reading as a “pedagogic” experience. Through reading, he claims, “we become aware more reflectively of our patterns of identification and investment, of the ways in which we set ourselves in relation to an ethical world, and through reading we develop more complex versions of these patterns” (21). My own relationships to the world and to others have only been deepened by my life as a reader, and I have seen no contradiction between that world and the world of my religious beliefs. I have overtly expressed to my students that I wish the same for them through their own reading lives.

One of the first sources I encountered when beginning my research into the literature on English literature’s utility as a teacher of ethical sensibility was Sir Phillip Sidney. Sidney, who is in many ways the progenitor of the models of Booth, Nussbaum, Coles and Lichtenstein writes (2004) that the “ending end of all earthly learning” is “virtuous action” (13). For Sidney, the best way to attain that learning is through the reading of literature. He explains that “This purifying of wit, this enriching of memory, enabling of judgment... the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can

be capable of' (12). Thus far, I have attempted to recount and analyze pieces of my own journey, of my perceived purifications of my wit, enrichment of my memory or enabling of my judgment. What follows is a series of suggestions of how other reader and other classrooms may be able to continue the experiment.

Chapter Eight

A Methodology of Reading Literature and Life – and a Vision for the Future

I. What Do We Want?

Based on my own development as a morally thoughtful individual through my reading of literature, I want to attempt to repeat the process with and for my students. I have found a balance between my Orthodox Judaism's stress of Torah as the source of all wisdom and the insight offered by general culture, and I have seen that the literature of the latter can be an excellent teacher of the moral decision-making of which the former would approve. I have tried to become a teacher of what Chazan (1985) calls "a process of moral deliberation." While some theorists, he argues, would like the teacher to serve as a transmitter of values or as therapist, others advocate for the teacher "to develop in children that process of judgment or deliberation, which constitutes the essence of morality" (116). Chazan's model appeals to me in that it allows for individual judgement and opinion. It is thus distinct from the ideal offered by Lickona (1991), who writes that teachers can serve as "models" of good ethics and morals and should "serve as ethical mentors" (72). Lickona would have teachers go beyond an academic connection and offer their students "personal moral commentary that helps students understand why behaviors such as cheating, stealing, bullying and name-calling are hurtful and wrong" (80). This seems to me intrusive; it will not help form independent and nuanced thinkers and feelers. It may not be the "realness" that Rogers demands of a teacher. Lickona advocates assigning values to certain behaviors in a mathematical way; for me, the world is more complex.

Teaching is more than the mere imparting of information, skills, or even specific value assignments. As noted in chapters two and six, I cast my lot instead with thinkers like Alexander (2001), who writes that teaching is inherently “a moral activity, not in the sense that it entails endorsing a particular doctrine, but in the sense that it strengthens the moral agent within, empowering students to make moral choices more intelligently on their own.” But this is not only about teachers: Alexander adds that “Genuine learning is likewise a moral activity” in that it consists of the acquisition of moral skills (143). Students need to learn how to think and act morally just as they need to learn any other academic skill. I would add that the learning of literature, if properly done, cannot but become a simultaneous learning of morality. Whatever lens, whatever model the instructor chooses (and I will suggest a number below), the student should come away with more than a mere appreciation of the text’s literary elements – there should be a moral takeaway as well.

Kress (2012) cites Walter Feinberg, who cautions against the dogmatic teaching of morality because “it can overwhelm individual moral intuition and moral novelty with premature commitments to established moral theories.” Kress then cites Steven Glazer, who counterargues that “material identity” is already being imposed upon students by the media, especially television and film (127). There is a need for the learning of morality – albeit one that is questioned and thought through by the student – to counter some of popular culture’s indoctrination. Although this admittedly edges closer to Lickona territory, I believe there is a middle ground.

Thus, the ultimate goal of such an educational project is not to create moral robots, but rather to create independent thinkers and doers, *à la* Alexander. Holzer (2016) explains that the study of text (although he refers to rabbinic texts, the idea is the same), or what he calls the

“interpretive encounter,” has the power “to move the reader in two directions: a backward direction, in making her aware of some of her own prejudices, and a forward direction, in causing her to deepen, expand, or alter her own view of the topic” (29). An understanding of self, and creating what Kress (2012) calls “self-schema” (see below, section VII), is key for fostering such intellectual and moral development. Rogers (1969) writes that an educated person has “learned how to learn... how to adapt and change ... who has realized that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of *seeking* knowledge gives a basis for security.” Rogers coins the term “Changingness,” which is “a reliance on *process* rather than upon static knowledge, is the only thing that makes sense as a goal for education in the modern world” (104, italics in original). This “process” is vital to inculcate in students, and it is one which I received from my own reading. From reading the works of Stephen King to those of Herman Wouk, and those of Charles Dickens to that of Harper Lee, I feel that I have always been – and continue to be – in a process of change.

Greene (1994) notes that students must learn “to look through multiple perspectives,” which is something I tried to give my students when reading *Twelve Angry Men* or *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Doing so, says Greene, will help them “build bridges among themselves” so that “they will be provoked to heal and to transform” (167). Classroom dialogue, the theory and practicalities of which we will explore below, is the key to achieving such cross-pollination. Greene dreams of classrooms in which “there might emerge some consciousness of interdependence as well as a recognition of diverse points of view” (177). On the best days at the best moments, my classroom attained such a level. This is the Boothian “coductive” experience, one where each student connects to the text, then shares that connections with others, compares it, and grows from the very act of comparison. Rogers (1980) describes the future at

its most ideal when he dreams of a “person-centered scenario of the future” which “will be more human and more humane.” This world, he says, “will explore and develop the richness and capacities of the human mind and spirit. It will produce individuals who are more integrated and whole. It will be a world that prizes the individual person – the greatest of our resources” (356).

I identify, as discussed in chapter seven, with Lichtenstein, who sees the humanities as one of man’s greatest explorations of the mind of God; for the great works of literature are a celebration and elaboration of God’s most sophisticated creation, humankind. I would love it if my reading life or my literature class – or if anyone’s reading life or anyone’s literature class – could help bring us to such a Rogerian “new world,” one which celebrates humanity, but with a sense of humility, if that is possible, without undue humanist glorification. The Jewish educator in me has developed what Kress (2012) calls “Jewish developmental process knowledge,” or JDPK. This is the “knowledge that educators possess in order to create environments that are most likely to promote identity development.” This approach takes into account the needs of the learner, the curricular goals, and the structuring of the environment to “enhance the developmental-learning aspects of the curriculum” (157). My goal in the classroom – both in Judaic studies as well as in English – has been to foster the development of a moral identity.

II. What Gets in Our Way?

Students do not always understand a context for moral decision-making: they need to learn not just how one *should* make such decisions, but also need to understand the type of situations in which such decisions are necessary. As we noted in chapter two, Buckley and Erricker (2004) see the issue as a psychological one: students are missing a “metanarrative.”

Those students have “no coherent ‘story’ that tells them how they should live... They have choice, and who tells them how to choose?” (182). In a world with a wide variety of ideological options, and with access to all of them, even my yeshiva students (who are products of a religious, ideologically-driven system) are pressured to make “wise” decisions – yet they are consistently not taught how to do so. Even though Haidt (2012) writes that religions “are moral exoskeletons,” and adds that religious communities enmesh their inhabitants in sets of values and organizations that influence their behavior (313), I have observed that general educational systems do not necessarily provide the enmeshing or the metanarrative that students and communities require; indeed, confusion occurs. And even my Modern Orthodox yeshiva students, who would theoretically be more enmeshed in a “moral exoskeleton,” were often more “modern” than “orthodox” in their worldview, and thus did not seem compelled by the religious values that I attempted to teach and model for them and which were part of the school’s mission. Such a lack of mooring could be an obstacle to attaining Greene’s and Roger’s vision of an interdependent, humane sharing of ideas.

The overemphasis on the rights, thoughts and feelings of the individual may well be part of the problem. Moffett (1994) writes of the need for a “spiritual framework” to provide for “lifelong learning,” with an ultimate goal of “inner growth for meaning.” With such a goal, he writes, “one’s talents and traits, predispositions and predilections, would develop not merely for their own sake but as part of an individual’s evolving toward spiritual fulfillment...” (332-3). Students – indeed, all members of society – need to realize that they are part of a larger whole, and as such need to work towards building some greater unified community.

Alexander (2004) feels that schools are the vehicle for delivery of such a societal agenda; he also thinks that they have fallen down on the job. In an unconscious echo of Matthew

Arnold's Victorian lament, Alexander writes that "spiritual interest" has grown due to "the sense that schools and other contemporary educational institutions have lost their moral compass" (viii). He bemoans the artificial schism placed between knowledge and religion and ethics, adding that the relegation of spiritual values to home or places of worship, and the exclusion of these values from "the public spheres of work or politics" (which includes the bulk of schools in the United States) is an unnecessary and ultimately detrimental outgrowth of the Enlightenment politics that have influenced our current system of education (xi).

Indeed, my own students are all products of a dual-curricular religious educational system, one with a very clearly defined set of values, yet I have observed them consistently boxing their religious subjects into one area of practice and/or belief, while either refusing, failing, or being unable to utilize religious or values-oriented thinking in the area of the development of character and moral ways of thought and behavior.

One would think this would not occur. Chazan (1980) writes of the assumption that "the study of classical texts can... stimulate one's motivation or desire to be moral." He adds that "Jewish tradition sees the study of texts as a moral act in itself. Thus, the very act of studying the texts contributes to a child's moral development by enabling (or forcing the child) actually to perform a moral deed" (305). Additionally, Kress (2012), citing Rachel Kessler's 2001 study, points out that adolescents specifically experience "an awakening of energy when larger questions of meaning and purpose, of ultimate beginnings and endings, begin to press with an urgency much too powerful to be dismissed as 'hormones'" (13). Tanchel (2013) adds that while during early adolescence "the authority for a teenager's beliefs resides principally with the authority figure," most experience what she terms a "disruption" which leads them to "realize the limits of literalism" and / or to see a clash between their own experiences and what they have

learned from an authority (258). Despite such awakenings and disruptions, students in my classroom did not always seem motivated to be “moral.” The Modern Orthodox schools in which I have taught have had their share of cheating scandals and bullying issues, in what seems at no lesser frequency than any other private day schools.

Still, I wish my students to see beyond themselves and, like I feel I have, attempt to better the world. I too am a product of such a system. To do so, however, they need grounding in quality ideas and the judgment to interpret new situations and challenges with wisdom. As Alexander (2001) writes, a person educated in such a system

is not afraid of the world, or scared of intellectual challenge, or frightened by new ideas. She is open to the possibility of a better tomorrow, confident, hopeful, and optimistic. By the same token, she is deeply committed to a vision of the good, either the one in which she had been educated, or another that she has chosen with the tools that she acquired through the educational process. Put simply, such a person is empowered (188).

How best, then, to empower students who often struggle to find the metanarrative? What follows are some models and suggestions.

III. Addressing These Issues

Moffett (1994) offers a solution: make education “more personal,” which includes making it both “more social” and “more relational.” He advocates simultaneous individualization and pluralization: “that is, coach personal decision making but orchestrate the plurality of personal choice so that everybody is teaching everybody else and all learn enormously more than they would if herded through a common course set at a common denominator.” (51). While Moffett advocates the elimination of standardized curricula as the mode to his vision of “spiritual awakening,” I argue for a different agenda: relevance. Moffett

writes that people “actually learn” from “inner agendas acted on through communal means” (51). I agree that students must find their curriculum relevant in order for them to successfully connect to it but wonder if everything must become completely individualized in order to do so. We will return to this idea below.

In their study of effective classroom discussion, Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith (1995) note that readers “quite literally make sense” of a text in a Rosenblattian mode by drawing upon “their own histories, their own emotions” (4). Marshall *et al.* note that successful classroom discussion happens when students are “moving into a higher level application of the piece of literature to their own lives or to a deeper understanding of the piece” (19). Indeed, students connect best on the transactional level when they find the text “relevant” to their lives (22).

This connection most effectively takes place, argue Marshall *et al.*, when students actively take part in class discussion: teachers who lecture, they claim, do not allow for this key process to occur (73). Defining the teacher’s role in guiding the discussion, however, is more situationally specific. While one teacher they quote takes pride in “organizing the potential ‘chaos’ of discussion into coherence” (21), another teacher is deemed “quite effective in helping the students develop their interpretations and participate actively in the discussion” by using Rogerian techniques of “listening and extending” and basing “his questions on students’ contributions” (93). I have employed both approaches in my own classrooms, as both are necessary in different class groups at various times: not every class could handle an independent conversation, even when guiding questions and other similar rubrics were assigned to them.

While much of their data is culled from classroom observation, Marshall *et al.* also observed book club discussions, from which they in turn draw additional conclusions. They note that in order to make relevant connections and attain an effective transactional reading

experience, participants in the discussion need to internalize “the voices of other members of the group” (119). This recalls for me Booth’s (1988) model of coeduction (71), discussed in chapter four. It is unclear, however, whether a teacher in a classroom setting, who tends to create “authoritative discourse” can foster the same comfort level and the same type of Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith’s “internally persuasive discourse” (119).

Furthermore, the authors note that for some of the teachers in their study, successful classroom discussion includes not only elements of “question and answer” between teacher and students as well as “higher level applications” of knowledge by the students to both the material as well as to their own prior knowledge. While the teachers studied felt that students needed to review the “basic technical components” of the class text, they also wanted students to move to what one teacher described as “an interaction of interested minds on a common topic” (19).

But how to attain such “interested minds” in the first place? As I mentioned, Moffett (1994), argues for the “individualization” of education. He explains that doing so “requires developing all levels of one’s being towards self-realization and self-transcendence.” Moffett’s model of the “universal schoolhouse” is at once pluralistic and democratic: “it offers God’s plenty and leaves selection to the learner.” Moffett, however, has no curricular requirements in his “schoolhouse.” This in turn “makes everything possible” (158). I disagree with Moffett: I require the study of literature, seeing it as the key to attaining the self-transcendence which Moffett trumpets, which is also the “empowerment” described above by Alexander (2001).

IV. Why Literature?

As Garrod and Bramble (1977) note, “so many of the best poets and writers have addressed themselves, directly or indirectly, to issues of moral significance.” Their examples include Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* and John Knowles’s *A Separate Peace* (105). Considerations and discussions of values in classes using such texts are likely to be richer than those of the same issues in philosophy classes. As Singer and Singer (2005) explain (practically paraphrasing Sir Philip Sidney), “discussions of ethical issues in fiction tend to be concrete, rather than abstract, and to give a rich context for the distinctive moral views or choices that are portrayed” (xi). When students can discuss specific choices that characters have made, and when they know those characters and the plot implications of their choices, the conversations and the thinking that they engender are that much more rooted and real.

There is a danger of using literature as a source for moral thinking: curricula and the teachers or administrators who select that curricula may feel limited to certain works – or to certain examples of moral choices. Alexander (2001) therefore cautions against the “rigid thinking” that “emphasizes the role of tradition in the quest for goodness.” When the canon of texts as well as the meanings assigned to them become fixed, the key element of the critical eye is threatened. Alexander finds the idea that the well-read student must be exposed to “essentially only one hundred Great Books” not merely quaint and outdated, but downright wrong and dangerous (125 - 6). Literature is a powerful teacher of values – and as such, its power must be respected and cannot be abused.

Hazony (2012), in establishing a rationale for appreciating the educative aspects of the Biblical narrative, cites Nussbaum, who writes that

certain truths about human life can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist. With respect to certain elements of human life, the terms of the novelist's art are... perceiving where the blunt terms of ordinary speech, or of abstract theoretical discourse, are blind... (68)

Literature's language and depth allow for a discussion of values that is far more meaningful – and therefore (once again!) relevant – to students than would be a straight discussion of “values.”

Not all educators who argue for a curriculum in moral education agree on the efficacy of literature *per se*. Chazan (1985) notes that Durkheim “surprisingly focuses on science and history as the two important curricular areas for moral education.” Art can be misleading, says Durkheim, in that it “makes us live in an imaginary environment; it detaches us from reality and from the concrete beings that comprise reality.” For Durkheim, science and history, with their focus on “larger social patterns and motifs,” are far better modes through which to teach a moral curriculum (17-18).¹⁷ I find Durkheim, however, to be far less compelling than the arguments and approaches of Arnold, Sidney, Lichtenstein or Nussbaum.

In addition to my own predilections, though, I would add scientific evidence to further refute Durkheim. Annie Murphy Paul (2012) writes of psychologist Raymond Mar's 2011 MRI studies, which show a “substantial overlap in the brain networks used to understand stories and the networks used to navigate interactions with other individuals – in particular, interactions in which we're trying to figure out the thoughts and feelings of others.” Citing other studies, done by Mar and others, Paul reports that “individuals who frequently read fiction seem to be better

¹⁷ Oddly enough, another Jewish educator, for whom I had tremendous respect, once commented to me of his surprise that my mentor Rabbi Lichtenstein, who had an affinity for the Aristotelian rational thought of Maimonides, did not seek (and find) God in the sciences rather than in literature. I think that educator did not really understand literature's power in the way that Lichtenstein and I learned to.

able to understand other people, empathize with them and see the world from their perspective.” This science serves to confirm the thinking of Nussbaum, Booth, Coles, and others.

Greene (1995) adds an additional perspective to the idea of the power of literature when she writes of the importance of each student – indeed, of every person – creating their own “narrative,” one which recalls their own “childhood landscapes” and allows them to understand the vital role of imagination. This is accomplished “through the recovery of literary experience that have been significant at various times in our lives.” Greene explains that “The reading of literature may nurture all kinds of understanding of lived structures of meaning, although not chronologically necessarily, not in any particular logical order.” (75 - 76). This is exactly what this entire project has been for me: the very work of writing and then autoethnographically analyzing my writing, using the four critical lenses detailed in the preceding chapters, has demonstrated the validity of literature’s potential as moral primer.

I have been, unknowingly and unwittingly, a reader as Rosenblatt (1994) describes, one who, when reading a new work (or even when re-reading a familiar one), is “stimulated to clarify his own values, his prior sense of the world and its possibilities” (145). She explains how this works:

The possibilities are infinite: the insights derived from contrasts with my own temperament and my own environment; the empathy with violence, the sadistic impulse, that may now be faced and perhaps controlled; the compassion for others formerly felt to be alien; the opportunity for what C. S. Pierce called “ideal experimentation,” that is, the trying-out of alternative modes of behavior in imagined situations (146).

I want my own students to achieve such self-reflection, or at least to learn the method for achieving it so they can do so at some later point in their lives. Levisohn (2001) points out that for Jewish educators the challenge is “to articulate their (or their communities’) understanding of

the genre of the traditional text, and of their own historical situations, so that the truth claims of the text can amount to more than just vague admonitions” (30). As an English teacher with a moral bent, I want to similarly articulate the way a Modern Orthodox individual would understand the genre of the text at hand in order to make sharper sense of its “truth claims.” Moffett (1994) points out that such self-reflection is key, urging us to “consider the fundamental role the arts play in making things, whether objects or knowledge.” He reminds us that “Creativity is not a sentimental or romantic concept; it is the most practical fact of human learning.” Language arts, he concludes, “t the inner life with the physical and social worlds. They partake of both mind and matter. In this sense, as incarnation, they are all soulful and best learned soulfully” (243). Moffett’s concept of the “spiritual” echoes and reinforces that of Hansen’s “moral” classroom and Alexander’s “spiritual awareness,” and is one that I seek for my own classroom.

V. What Such Reading Looks Like

My research and my experience has led me to several examples of the utilization of literature toward a moral agenda. The works that follow fall into the Lichtensteinian category more than into the categories of Nussbaum, Coles or Booth in that they are overt uses of various forms of literature with moral goals in mind. Carmy and Zuckier (2015) cite Lichtenstein’s early dissertation on Henry More, where Lichtenstein writes that “knowledge *within* a moral context is very different from knowledge without it, and that within such a context, the quest for wisdom and its possession may be essential aspects of right human character” (305, italics in original). The following three writers seek to place literature within a moral context and use it as a springboard for ethical thought and discussion.

The first is the subtle, integrated approach of William Kolbrener (2011), whose work (unlike those we will see below) does not overtly address pedagogic methodology. Although he does not explicitly explain how he attempts to use literary texts to moral ends, Kolbrener constantly provides a model of reflective comparison between traditional Jewish texts and classics of Western philosophy and literature. His goal is to achieve a better understanding of the world at large by integrating the worldviews of Torah-infused thought and that of English literature, philosophy and general culture. Kolbrener, a professor at Bar Ilan University and a Columbia Ph. D in Milton, has fused the two worlds in his own work and thought. Blau (2003), who suggests three categories for such literacy, writes of students attaining “textual literacy, or *procedural knowledge*... Intertextual literacy, or *informational knowledge*... [and] Performative literacy, or *enabling knowledge*” (203, italics in original). Kolbrener writes of his “conviction that attuning to the voice from Mount Sinai means first an open-mindedness to the self” (xiv). Such “open-mindedness” is nothing less than a type of Blau’s “performative literacy,” which is not merely an understanding of the text, but an activation of other kinds of knowledge needed for what Blau calls “a critical or disciplined literacy,” i.e., an ability not only to make connections beyond the text, but to grow as a result of making those connections.

For Kolbrener, different literary paths represent different ways to understand the world; the voice of each, however, must be heard. Thus one essay on the observance of the Sabbath includes references to Oprah Winfrey, Tony Soprano, Sigmund Freud, and Deuteronomy (136-7). In another essay, Kolbrener contrasts Plato’s division between heart and mind, based on “the Socratic distinction between ‘rational principles’ and ‘pleasure,’” with that of the Talmudic sages, who think, writes Kolbrener, with their “hearts.” “From this perspective,” he writes, “the sages’ counsel [of] ‘make for yourself a teacher’ is not just practical advice to find someone to

answer questions about how to make your oven kosher... but an injunction to cultivate a relationship.” (52). This hearkens back to Booth’s (1988) notion of books as friends.

Kolbrenner’s breadth and his openness to all texts as potential sources of ideas greatly inspires me, and I agree with his ultimate end: using the classical secular texts as a means, he continually returns to the traditional Jewish texts as his source of moral values. Other educators take a slightly different tack on integrating the various texts.

Two other proponents of using English literature to promote a moral agenda are far more overt in connecting the two and both explicitly articulate their respective methodologies. Herbert Cohen (2010) puts forth a theory that “Judaism does not believe in ‘art for art’s sake.” For Cohen, literature “has value, art has value, but only to the extent that they enhance our knowledge and understanding of our spiritual selves. The context is everything.” (14). His philosophy drives both his selection of texts as well as their mode of presentation. Cohen advocates choosing texts which either “drive student discussion or... provoke students to think about life in a complex way” (53). His approach illustrates his theory and method: Cohen analyzes the Biblical character of Jethro, father-in-law of Moses, by contrasting him with Frank Alpine, protagonist of Bernard Malamud’s *The Assistant* (1957). Cohen attempts to understand Jethro’s conversion to Judaism by comparing the experiences of Malamud’s Italian-American convert (41-43). Literature, for Cohen, is a tool with which greater understanding of the narratives and values of the Bible can be better achieved and thereby internalized.

Whereas Lichtenstein (1997) used Milton’s “On His Blindness” to gain insight into the experience of the blind, Cohen uses the poem more globally, to illustrate what he calls the “Torah value” of perseverance “in the face of adversity.” Noting that God can punish, but that “tribulations are vehicles of emotional and spiritual growth,” Cohen applauds Milton’s notion

that “They also serve who only stand and wait” (91). Cohen does not derive the moral values he teaches from his texts; rather, he approaches his text with values already firmly in hand, looking to the texts either as prooftexts for established ideas or, more accurately, as modes of delivery for previously determined moral messages. In this he is closer to Lickona (who, we saw in section I, advocated that teachers serve as direct instructors of moral messages) than he is to Alexander or Noddings, and is therefore a bit heavy-handed for my taste.

A parallel approach to Cohen’s is that of Rosenberg (2011), who has developed a values curriculum based on the narratives of J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. Rosenberg writes of his love of the Bible, saying that “Its rhythms and poetry are the beat to which I live,” and his love of *Harry Potter*, saying that “It resonates within me as only truth does.” His own book, Rosenberg writes, “will be a welcome pretext to think about universal themes that give life meaning, and which find expression in holy and secular scripture” (vii-viii).

Rosenberg thus sees Harry’s decisions to break rules as an opportunity to apply Talmudic standards of when a positive commandment supersedes a contradictory negative commandment, noting that any decision is a choice of value (5). The characters and plot of Rowling’s novels trigger discussions of Jewish law and values. Rosenberg contrasts the characters of Rowling’s headmaster Albus Dumbledore and the Biblical Aaron, both of whom face death with “dignity” and “control.” Rosenberg writes that

the true vanquishers of death are those who sense death’s inevitability but continue to live heroic lives, accomplishing their life’s mission for as long as they are able... and never allowing death to rob them of the *tzelem elokim*, the image of God reflected in every human being (70).

Whereas Cohen approaches literature with a pre-determined agenda, Rosenberg’s approach is more open-minded: while Rosenberg is clearly well-versed in the heavily moral texts

of classical Judaism, his tone implies that he is a reader who enjoys reading the *Harry Potter* books for their exciting narrative and enjoyable characterizations, and who only later sees the moral implications of the text. Rosenberg is closer to Kolbrener in his approach, allowing the texts to make the connections for him, leading him where they will. This recalls for me the Boothian coductions I myself have made, of the Colesian kinships that books have provided me.

Still, Kolbrener, Cohen and Rosenberg each make no bones about the agenda of their thought and pedagogy: they all wish to further a specific moral agenda. The variance among the three is how much weight the secular sources are given relative to the (always far weightier) ideas and values of the traditional Jewish texts, and what comes first, the inspirational idea or the text that inspires it.

Cohen and Rosenberg both make clear their desire to impact upon their students morally as well as intellectually. The emphasis on teaching students rather than teaching texts or curricula is not new. Indeed, Louise Rosenblatt's reading as transaction is often invoked in discussion of such teaching. As noted above, Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith (1995) note that student transactional response better occurs when there is active student participation in class discussion; teachers who lecture, they claim, do not allow for this key process to occur (73). The question that remains, obviously, is how to best facilitate this process. I found a number of means to that end.

VI. How Do We Get Students to Talk?

Holtz (2003) advises student teachers of Judaic texts to think of a number of issues as they prepare a lesson. Each is completely relevant to teachers of literature as well. The list of

questions a teacher ought to ask herself includes: “What do you, the teacher, find difficult or confusing in the text?” “What in this text will your potential students find difficult?” “What preconceptions (prior beliefs) will your potential students bring with them?” and ultimately, “What key ideas, practices or values would you want to teach these students about this text?” (166). These are key questions for preparation, but the teacher must also take care not to overly “spoon-feed” her students.

Blau (2003) rightly notes that the intellectual lives of students are filled with “unearned interpretations,” *i.e.*, those that they receive by reading or hearing others’ interpretations of the text before them. The goal, he notes, is for students to find independent, “earned interpretations,” those which

push students to enter for themselves into the hermeneutic arena and engage in acts of interpretation that will produce meanings that they themselves can trace back to the evidentiary reasoning, textual facts, and ideological engagement that plausible meanings are built on” (187).

Blau advocates a student transactional experience built not exclusively on verbal discussion, but rather upon writing as well. Citing Scholes, he notes that the process of interpretation is only complete when the student “has produced an interpretive text of his or her own” (152). In teaching my high school students, the bulk of the writing that I demanded of them, I realize in retrospect, was less of the “earned interpretation,” and more of the “unearned interpretation.” Only occasionally were my students asked to provide their own insights or opinions and to derive them from a text. Later, when I began teaching middle schoolers, I swung slightly more to the “earned interpretation” side of the scale, but only somewhat. Wilhelm, Baker and Dube (2001) urge teachers to be constructivist: to “take more time to do fewer things and to do these things thoroughly, providing lots of practice and support...[to] emphasize

learning, and learning as performance” (237). I was guilty, as are so many teachers, of worrying about finishing the curricular unit; I was teaching books, rather than teaching students.

Blau notes that asking students to write out the questions they have on a particular text – indeed, *the very act of writing out the questions* – causes the questions themselves to evaporate. “I found that my questions cleared up as I wrote them,” he quotes one workshop student as saying (38). This act of writing, of articulating difficulty or difficulties with the text, is itself the earning of the interpretation. This is the “unique task of selection, synthesis and interpretation” of which Rosenblatt (1994) writes (52). I need to do such teaching more often with my students. Greene (1995) urges teachers to “emphasize the importance of persons becoming reflective enough to think about their own thinking and become conscious of their own consciousness” (65). By earning their interpretations – which can come through any of the lenses, those of Booth, Nussbaum, Coles, or Lichtenstein – students can attain such consciousness.

VII. The Relevance of Reading

“If we can enable more young persons to arouse themselves in this way,” writes Greene (1994), “to make sense of what they see and hear... they may begin to experience art as a way of understanding.” Such experience enables sensitivity and insight, at least as far as this reader and teacher is concerned. And Greene agrees with me, as she continues, “The experience and knowledge gained by this way of knowing opens new modalities for us in the lived world” (149). The transition to the “lived world” has been a key concept throughout my experience as a reader, and it informs my entire approach. While I do value the sensitivity that students may have developed towards accused murderer Tom Robinson as they studied *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I am

more concerned that they develop such sensitivity towards their classmates and others around them in the “lived world.” Kress (2012) writes that Jewish educators “aim for holistic Jewish development within a variety of spheres including cognition, behavior, affect, and attitudes,” with the goal of students incorporating these into a “Jewish self-schema,” one that is in turn located within a “more general sense of self or even as an organizing schema for this general sense of self” (39). My agenda as an English teacher was and is clearly influenced by my agenda as a Jewish educator.

In section III, I cited Moffett’s (1994) recommendation for a curriculum that is personally chosen by an individual student as an argument for a relevant curriculum. Rogers (1969) agrees that relevance is vital. The student, he writes, must “be confronted by issues which have meaning and relevance for him.” This is important in a culture (which has only worsened in this regard since 1969!) where “we try to insulate the student from any and all the real problems of life.” The goal is fostering concerned, informed and involved members of society, and therefore “if we desire to have student learn to be free and responsible individuals, then we must be willing for them to confront life, to face problems” (130).

Rogers’s ideology is put into practice by Wilhelm, Baker and Dube’s (2001) technique of “frontloading,” which involves organizing student reading experiences to be both “personally and socially relevant” and asking such questions as “How might this text lend itself to exploration of a contact zone or lead to social action (‘something that mattered’)?” (102).

Wilhelm, Baker and Dube then suggest thinking about pertinent background information that students will need to know prior to reading a text; what “procedural knowledge” they will need to have; and what knowledge and skills “will have the most transfer value and be most useful as a touchstone to return to throughout our unit and beyond” (103). Hansen (2001) similarly urges

teachers to expose students to “questions from tradition,” which will make them appreciate from whence they (and their texts) hail (142). These questions take time to answer, and a teacher with an eye on the curricular clock will find this mindset a challenge to adopt.

Hansen (2001) also suggests the methodology of “focused discussion” (which returns the venue to verbal conversation, in addition to Blau’s (2003) advocacy for written commentaries as supplements to discussion). Such classroom discussion “contributes to an environment conducive to communication” and “spurs participants to formulate, to cultivate, and to heed ideas, interpretations, knowledge, emotions, insight, questions, and more” (83). Hansen urges teachers to make use of such focused discussion, as it can “deepen qualities such as responsibility, open-heartedness, and seriousness” and

can help equip persons with what it takes to tackle problems in respectful, thoughtful, and non-for-or-against ways. That is, it can spotlight the dangers in presuming to take the moral high ground on an issue, rather than conceiving the task as clearing moral ground (112).

If students can feel comfortable and motivated to express their values respectfully and openly, maintaining an “open-heartedness,” they have learned an important life skill that has the potential to improve themselves and society. This will also take them over the hurdle of integrating the value under discussion into their own sense of self. Kress (2012) cautions that classroom discussion “generally stops short of delving into what the core concept of theme of the lesson has to do with the student’s identity, how it integrates into his or her self-schema” (85). Hansen’s “focused discussion” will help bridge this gap.

VIII. Freedom of Choice

Rogers (1969) strongly advocates for student self-evaluation. “It is when the individual has to take responsibility for deciding what criteria are important to him,” he writes, “what goals he has been trying to achieve, and the extent to which he has achieved those goals, that he truly learns to take responsibility for himself and his directions.” (142-3). Without such independence, students will be that much less invested in their own learning, and they will be that much less successful in accomplishing it. Without it, students risk attaining, in Blau’s (2003) terminology, “unearned interpretations,” and experiencing what Wilhelm, Baker and Dube describe as a classroom where “the teacher tells and the student listens, then the student tells (or regurgitates information on a written test) and the teacher evaluates.” Such knowledge, complain Wilhelm, Baker and Dube, is “declarative, decontextualized, and inert” (10). This does not mean each student gets to make his or her own curricular choices; but it does mean that they must have an active voice in determining how their understanding of the curriculum will be assessed.

Rogers (1969) further bolsters my vision when he writes that the educational system as a whole must develop “a climate conducive to personal growth” and “a climate in which innovation is not frightening.” He adds that creative individuals, those open to and accepting of change, can only be developed by the creation of “a climate in the *system* in which the focus is not upon *teaching*, but on the facilitation of self-directed *learning*” (304, italics in original). Rogers (1995) therefore also recommends doing away with “a compartmentalized world,” explaining that the successful person of the future strives “for a wholeness of life, with thought, feeling, physical energy, psychic energy, healing energy all being integrated in experience” (350 – 351).

Rogers's ideas are manifest curricularly in Moffett's (1994) thinking, when Moffett argues that educators have begun to realize that "self-containment of subjects is self-defeating."

He writes that even

math and science need the concrete particulars of personal experience and purpose, the realism of problems drawn from other subject matter, and the working over of mathematical and scientific concepts and procedures within the contemporary social contexts that establish their fuller meaning (209).

Indeed, leaving math and science aside, the connection to "personal experience" is pure Rosenblatt; the connection to "purpose" is our concept of relevance.

IX. Connecting to Others

In addition to pressing for relevance and individual choice, I argue for students to understand and fully appreciate the need to connect to others. For me, a non-negotiable facet of what students need to attain as they learn to make wise moral decisions is sensitivity towards the thoughts, feelings and ideas of others. Noddings (1991) writes compellingly of the power of what she terms "interpersonal reasoning," which is the "capacity of moral agents to talk appreciatively with each other regardless of fundamental differences" (157). She lauds this quality, explaining that "Interpersonal reasoners build each other's confidence and self-esteem, and they direct their efforts toward strengthening the relation" (162). Once a student gains confidence in his or her own opinion, can ground it in the text (*a la* Blau), and can have a conversation with others, is it not vital that he or she be able to listen to and integrate the ideas and opinions of others? And again, literature is precisely the vehicle to foster such interactions. "Literature deals in complexity," writes Gregory Currie (2013) in the *New York Times*. Citing Nussbaum, he adds that literature "turns us away from the simple moral rules that so often prove

unhelpful when we are confronted with messy real-life decision making, and gets us ready for the stormy voyage through the social world that sensitive, discriminating moral agents are supposed to undertake.” With some forethought, a teacher can provide his or her class with complex fodder for discussion, and they can arrive together at the interactions that Noddings seeks to foster in students.

Holzer (2016), based on a reading of a Talmudic passage,¹⁸ argues for interactive, student-to-student “argumentative learning” in the style of the traditional Jewish *beit midrash*, or study hall. Students, usually in pairs, dissect a text and vociferously argue for the accuracy of their individual readings. The danger in employing such a method is that a student who is skilled at argument may become arrogant. The antidote, and one with which Noddings would agree, is what Howard Gardner calls “*intrapersonal intelligence* – the capacity to detect and access one’s own range of emotions, and to label, assess, and use them as behavior guides” (55, italics in original). Noddings further writes that schools could become “places in which teachers and students live together, talk to each other, reason together, take delight in each other’s company” (169). As such, schools are unique venues for the type of cross-pollination of ideas that she advocates. And whereas Moffett (1994) advocates for a jettisoning of the curriculum, and Wilhelm, Baker and Dube (2001) urge teachers to slow down and do fewer things better, Noddings optimistically declares that “when schools focus on what really matters in life, the cognitive ends we are now striving toward in such painful and artificial ways will be met as natural culminations of the means we have wisely chosen” (169). In such schools, students could and would become (to use Alexander’s phrase) spiritually aware, (to use Hansen’s) open-

¹⁸ Shabbat 63a.

hearted and humane, and would possess Rogers's quality of "changingness," to say nothing of the Blavian "performative literacy" they would gain.

X. One Further Suggestion

My own journey in this project, that of mining my own story as a reader and teacher of readers, all as a series of data and as sources of wisdom and insight, has been a remarkable and enlightening one. It has allowed me to articulate the balance I have found between my own ideological worlds and enabled me to articulate how I have utilized various sources of wisdom and insight. The theory and process of autoethnography have allowed me to triangulate what Chang (2008) calls the "external data" alongside my memory's "internal data" (55). If such a process has been beneficial to me, I must imagine it would help others as well: what if students were asked to produce a similar document, albeit on a smaller scale? What would the process and product do for their own sense of becoming readers and of expanding their moral sensibilities? Indeed, as we mentioned earlier, Tappan and Brown (1991) urge precisely such a narrative approach to moral education, asking students to write of a moral story that occurred in their lives. This method is effective, they explain, "because when an individual tells a moral story about an experience in his life, he must necessarily *reflect* on that experience..." Tappan and Brown explain that "such reflection also entails *learning* from the event narrated, in the sense that the individual has the opportunity to consider what happened, what he thought, felt, and did, and how things turned out" (184, italics in original).

As we mentioned, Blau (2003) advocates for writing as a learning process to aid students to attain "earned interpretations" of texts. This would ask students to learn something else,

something deeper, through their writing. “Authorship not only expresses itself through narrative,” write Tappan and Brown, “it also develops through narrative” (182). What if the text about which they write is, like my own preceding work, their *own experiences* as readers? One can imagine a tremendous impact on such students, on their self-awareness, on their quality of Rogerian “changingness.”

And why limit such an exercise to students? What if teachers wrote their own autoethnographies (again, with adjustments for the scale of the project)? I would humbly suggest beginning such a movement with teachers of literature before taking this idea to a more global stage. My own experience in researching and writing this project has been revelatory – to me, if to no one else. Florio-Ruane (1991) suggests the creation of a bank of “‘stories of teaching and learning’ in which practitioners play key author roles,” which, as she explains, are advantageous for several reasons:

teachers can add richness and validity to accounts of their work by uncovering and sharing their own “implicit theories” about teaching and learning... Second, stories are representations of knowledge that do not dodge moral consequences... Third, teachers’ stories are a largely untapped source of information about teaching and an opportunity for teachers to communicate about their work to others (242).

This has been precisely my experience in narrating the preceding tale of my own moral development and my own teaching. I can personally and passionately attest what benefits such an experience has had on one educator; I can only imagine what would happen to the profession and the morale of its practitioners if such benefits were shared across collegial lines.

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