Reading Reading in First-Year College Composition

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
under the Executive Committee
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2021

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Abstract

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First-year composition (FYC) courses are a backbone of undergraduate instruction, with nearly every institution of higher education requiring a version of the course. The majority of FYC courses assign reading, especially the reading of contemporary essays, for students to respond to in their own writing. However, a common concern among compositionists who focus on reading is that composition studies as a whole does not, and has not, focused enough on reading theories and pedagogies in FYC. Using a method of close reading and analyses, and borrowing from post-qualitative research the idea of reflexivity, this study examines texts in composition studies and adjacent fields, published primarily from the mid-20th century to the present, to explore how reading is, and has been, understood in relationship to writing and composition. Further, this study explores pedagogical and theoretical consequences of the "place" of reading in FYC. It ultimately contends that the marginalization of reading in composition studies as well as FYC limits both the pedagogical and reading possibilities of this universally required course.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments v

Dedication vii

Chapter 1: Reading Reading in First-Year Composition 1

1.1 Early Observations 5

1.2 "'The Reading Problem'" 11

1.3 Some Existing Reading Compositionist Research 16

1.4 Research Questions 19

1.5 Clarification of Terms 20

1.6 Organization of Chapters 24

Chapter 2: Humanities, Qualitative Research, and Methodology 26

2.1 Research in Composition: All Over the "Map" 27

2.2 "Mixed Media" Research 29

2.3 Cautious Purposefulness 33

2.4 Close Reading as a Method of Map-Making 38

2.5 Representation in Research with "No Human Subjects" 41

2.6 Locations on This/My Map 44

Chapter 3: "Reading" and "Literacy" in Three U.S.-Based Histories of "English" 50

3.1 Resistance to Reading in Composition Studies 51

3.2 Perceptions of Reading in English Studies 54

3.3 What is "English?": Interrogating my Assumptions 56

3.4 "Reading" in Applebee's Foundational Tradition and Reform 58

3.5 Literature, Composition, and Humanism in Composition in the University 63

3.6 Reading, Literacy, and School in Changing Our Minds 68

3.7 Reading, Literature, and Literacy in Composition: Some Early Thoughts 75

Chapter 4. Layered Bifurcations: Reading, Literacy, Remediation, Literature 78

4.1 Exploring the Institutional Divides 79

4.2 Situating FYC: A hinge point between high school and (the rest of) college 81

4.3 Reading Instruction and Theory: Literary-based and Literacy-based 84

4.4 Contradictory Influences in Composition 93

4.5 Thinking Through the Layers 100

4.6 Implications… However Situated, Qualified, and Tentative 102

Chapter 5: Exploring Disciplinary and Pedagogical Implications of a Reading/Writing Divide 105

5.1 Form vs. Content 106

5.2 The Debate through the Lens of Reading Instruction 111

5.3 "Form-First" and Anti-Formalist arguments: The "Sides" of the Debate 112

5.4 The Content Problem 115

5.5 Including Reading Changes the Conversation 119

5.6 The “Form Vs. Content” Debate…Now, with Reading! 127

5.7 Practitioner Thoughts 130

Chapter 6: Reading, Writing… and Rhetoric? 134

6.1 Rhetoric Through the Lens of Composition 135

6.2 Rhetorically Speaking… 137

6.3 Rhetoric, Speaker-as-Subject, and FYC 140

6.4 “Sensible of a Beauty in Discourse” 143

6.5 “A Frankly Male Tradition” 149

6.6 Reading, Writing, Rhetoric 153

Chapter 7: Difficulty and Non-Literary Reading 156

7.1. This is Not About Student Deficit 157

7.2 Reflections on “Maps” of Reading in FYC 159

7.3 Reflections on Traces of Student Reading 162

7.4 Reflections on Reading Essays 167

7.5 Essays and Interpretation 173

7.6 The Difficulty of Comprehension and Interpretation 176

Chapter 8: Not a Conclusion, But a Stopping Point 179

8.1 Exploration and Action: Challenges and Opportunities in Reflexivity 179

8.2 Reading (in) the Current Media Landscape 183

8.3 Navigating “Comprehension” in a Post-Modern World 185

8.4 “Defining Critical Reading” ... 189

8.5 Reading, FYC, and Equity ... 192

8.6 The “End” ... 194

References ... 197

Acknowledgments

This acknowledgments page represents an embarrassment of riches and cannot possibly mention everyone who has offered me the support, encouragement, help, space, and time required to complete a doctorate.

First thanks go to my parents, including parents-in-law, for your support, which took many forms. To say I couldn't have done it without you is an understatement. Thank you also to the friends who kept me in memes and offered encouragement at every turn: Nora Aboali, Dorell Thomas, Joyce Maxwell, and Maria Oujo, you are my TC crew; Leigh Boyd, I'm sorry about "Lex Time;" Jessica DeCola and Brandyn Heppard, thank you for All The Things that carried me through Everything That's Going On; Karen Gaffney, thank you for being the first to say "doctoral program." Michelle J. Brazier, what can I possibly say? You've quite literally been there from beginning to end. Thank you. Your new title is Michelle J. Brazier, Ph.D., BFF. To everyone else in the RVCC English department and on the "third floor," thank you for your care, your brilliance, and your passion—and for those invaluable doorway conversations.

I have the extreme fortune of also having institutional support from Raritan Valley Community College. The tuition reimbursement program made this possible financially, and the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship kept me fed intellectually as well as literally (I genuinely appreciate the snacks). In particular, thank you to the Faculty Interest Groups, especially Research Writing, Reading Across the Curriculum, and Critical Theory Reading. Within Research Writing in particular, I must thank everyone who read drafts of chapters—that includes many of the above as well as Jamie Parmese, Andy Manno, Carl Lindskoog, Emilie

Stander, and Lauren Braun-Strumfels. How many people get to work with such a collection of minds and disciplines? Thanks must also go to the Faculty Federation, and all faculty unions, which protect and nurture such programs and spaces.

At Teachers College, thank you to Sheridan Blau for being the first to welcome me to the program and to Ruth Vinz for never-ending warmth, encouragement, and questions ("patchwork!"). Most especially, thank you to my advisor and sponsor, Janet Miller. I am forever indebted to you for introducing me to new and impossible ideas, and also for your friendship, which means the world to me. I cannot wait to get dinner with you in NYC.

Finally, to my family. Gist, there's nothing I can say here that you don't know already, including that none of it is possible without you. Thank you for always being up for a new adventure, even when I'm the one going on it. Eliza, I owe you the world.

Dedication

Dedicated, with love, to my daughter Eliza. Thank you for putting up with me saying "next semester will be easier" for more semesters than we can count. I'm sorry I keep wandering into deadlines.

Chapter 1: Reading Reading in First-Year Composition

Imagine a college classroom. More specifically, imagine a classroom located near the English department offices in a community college: the furniture started out cheap and has been there for at least 15 years; the heating unit rattles to life whenever it reaches 90 degrees outside or the quiet kid in the back starts to speak; on at least one occasion, a not-insignificant number of bees invaded the room after making a home in the walls.

Now imagine the students. They are not as ragtag as the classroom. This is a college composition course, the ENGL-111 class that counts toward their eventual degree. Imagine that these students have been asked to get into a circle to participate in a reading activity, and that they've obliged this request with remarkable goodwill.

This is an actual description of one of my classes. The activity is called "The Reading Circle" and although that may sound more "elementary" than college-level, I do the Circle with every new text I assign to my first-year composition students. They often think it sounds elementary too, but seem to see the value in it as soon as we begin, and often name it as one of their favorite parts of the class. As with many of my best teaching strategies, I learned it from a colleague.

Every time I do the Reading Circle, I learn something new about how my students read, what they struggle with, and how these struggles with reading can become writing problems. On the particular occasion I narrate here, I learned something about word-level comprehension that for me opened up a new way of thinking about how difficult *reading* really is.

On the occasion in question, the text was the epilogue, "Home and Hope," from Matthew Desmond's Pulitzer Prize winning book, *Evicted*. Per Reading Circle procedure, I handed them the text for the first time after they had moved their chairs into a circle formation. I, too, had a

copy of the text, and I also grabbed a chair and joined the circle. After working through a short introduction of the activity and scanning the text with the students to look at its length and other visible elements like subtitles and footnotes, I turned to the first student to my left and asked them to read the first paragraph out loud. They read the following:

> The home is the center of life. It is a refuge from the grind of work, the pressure of school, and the menace of the streets. We say that, at home, we can "be ourselves." Everywhere else, we are someone else. At home, we remove our masks. (Desmond 293)

When that first student finished reading, I turned to the student immediately to their left and asked: "What is 'the home'?" Having done this activity before, the second student knew that I was looking for *one* answer that was *directly* from the text. After a pause, during which the student re-read the paragraph, they said:

"The center of life."

This being one correct answer, I turned to the next student: "What else is 'the home'?"

"A refuge from the grind of work, the pressure of school, and the menace of the streets."

To the next student: "What do we say about home?"

"That we can be ourselves."

To the next student: "What else do we say about home?"

"At home, we remove our masks."

Once I had asked all of my questions for that paragraph, the next student read the next paragraph and I asked more questions, with each student answering just one before moving on.

Whenever someone read out loud or gave an answer, especially a wrong answer, I learned something about that student's reading, and also something about the text. When someone struggled with a question I didn't anticipate being difficult, I learned a lot. With "Home

and Hope" specifically, part of what I learned was that, while I found the epilogue easy to read and inviting, students found it dense and even opaque. Consider the fifth paragraph of the chapter:

> Working on behalf of the common good is the engine of democracy, vital to our communities, cities, states—and, ultimately, the nation. It is "an outflow of the idealism and moralism of the American people," wrote Gunnar Myrdal. Some have called this impulse "love of country" or "patriotism" or the "American spirit." But whatever its name, its foundation is the home. What else is a nation but a patchwork of cities and towns; cities and towns a patchwork of neighborhoods; and neighborhoods a patchwork of homes? (294).

There are a number of things that make this paragraph difficult for students. Some of these I predicted before conducting the Reading Circle; others, I learned while watching students struggle in the classroom.

One difficulty I predicted was that students would struggle with the fact, in the paragraph, Desmond's argument is "split." The first half ("working on behalf of the common good" is "vital") is separated from the second half (the "foundation" of this work is "the home") with several examples and details. To string the paragraph together, readers have to connect the pronouns in the second, third, and fourth sentences (underlined below) with the opening phrase (italicized):

> *Working on behalf of the common good* is the engine of democracy, vital to our communities, cities, states—and, ultimately, the nation. It is "an outflow of the idealism and moralism of the American people," wrote Gunnar Myrdal. Some have called this impulse "love of country" or "patriotism" or the "American spirit." But whatever its

name, its *foundation is the home*. What else is a nation but a patchwork of cities and towns; cities and towns a patchwork of neighborhoods; and neighborhoods a patchwork of homes? (294; annotations mind).

Given that prediction, I was surprised when, before grappling with the multi-sentence main idea and the series of pronouns stringing it together, one student got stuck on something I considered much more straight-forward: the word "patchwork."

One of the goals of the Reading Circle is to get students started thinking about word definitions and how to use the dictionary *with* an author's sentence to understand the word in context and, ultimately, the sentence as a whole. Because this can be challenging for any reader, and it takes time, during the Reading Circle, questions of word meaning are for the entire group together. I asked the students to take out their phones or other device/dictionary, and then asked, "What does 'patchwork' mean, in this context?" But instead of looking up the word first, one student answered confidently.

Patchwork, he said, meant "duct-taped together and falling apart." I asked him why he thought so, and he said, "because it's patched." Because "duct tape" and "patched" are not part of the definition of "patchwork," I had the class look for "patchwork" in the dictionary. As a group, they ultimately choose a dictionary definition that meant "variegated."

Though I didn't anticipate the student's misreading, I wasn't surprised by it in retrospect. This is what I've observed students doing, over and over again, in my years teaching reading and writing: they use context clues, like the word "patch" in "patchwork," to cobble together meaning and barrel forward. This strategy has varying degrees of success. In this case, the definition of the word more familiar to him—"patch"—was close enough for the sentence to have meaning, but incorrect enough that what the student understood was not the sentence

Desmond wrote. Where Desmond calls up a variegated, diverse, haphazard American quilt of individual homes (the “center of life,” the “refuge,” the place where we can “’be ourselves’”), which connect together to creates cities and towns (an extension of that refuge) and ultimately a nation (a place of “idealism,” “moralism,” and “spirit”), my student saw tumble-down, cracked, broken, duct-taped precarity. The primary problem with thinking that “patched” means the same thing as “patchwork” is that it makes it harder to understand Desmond’s larger point, which is that “home” is an important foundation for democracy.

This moment offers one snapshot of reading in a college writing class. It is an example of something I have noticed in my years as a teacher of college writing courses, otherwise known as first-year composition (FYC): What students need to know and do to read the assigned texts is far more complex, nuanced, and difficult than instructors and composition scholars often recognize. While it isn't uncommon for instructors to notice, or even complain, that students don't read the way they “should” (Jolliffe, *Deep Reading* 3), understanding what is required to read, understand, and respond to nonfiction texts is not often the subject of scholarly attention, even in composition studies.

1.1 Early Observations

This project was born in part out of my observations that my college-level students struggled to read complex texts. But it was, perhaps even more, born out of my need to understand why reading hasn’t been more integrated in, and central to, the work of composition studies. In spite of the fact that FYC has long been the most-required course for undergraduates (Crowley 1), and studies on its history, pedagogies, and purposes fill volumes (for example Brereton 1995, Coxwell-Teague and Lunsford 2014, Warner 2018, and many more), studies on reading in first-year college composition are relatively few and far between. They exist,

certainly, but more often than not, my early database searches on reading in FYC led me to articles on developmental English (also called Basic Writing), English as a Second Language, secondary English, and to teaching literature.

Yet, scholars who are concerned with the marginalization of reading in FYC—I call them "reading compositionists"—have for years been arguing for the integration of reading and writing in the course, and in the discipline of composition studies more broadly. These reading compositionists see *reading* as vital to student success, and they do not assume that students enter the course with all of the necessary skills already in place. Though they are in the minority in composition studies, there are many reading compositionists and they have had some success in their attempt to make reading a more central project of FYC. Still, these same reading compositionists often express a sense of frustration at fighting an uphill battle.

Interest in integrating reading into writing courses is not new. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky appealed directly to students in their 1987 FYC textbook/reader, *Ways of Reading: An Anthology for Writers*. Their introduction to students said, "Reading involves a fair measure of push and shove. You make your mark on a book and it makes its mark on you" (Bartholomae, "Introduction" 272). This framing of writing as a reading project presents the two as deeply integrated, and this very successful textbook/reader is currently in its twelfth edition. Yet Ellen Carillo, writing in 2015, expressed fear that compositionists were "leav(ing) the work of defining reading to other fields" (*Securing* 11), and David Jolliffe, in 2017, wrote about "'the reading problem': the failure of the field [of composition] to interrogate the roles that reading plays in high school and college writing…" ("Continuing" 3). In March 2021, the Conference for College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the "world's largest and professional organization for researching and teaching composition" (cccc.ncte.org), issued a "Position

Statement on the Role of Reading in College Composition" that "affirms the need to develop accessible and effective reading pedagogies in college writing classrooms…" It also makes the claim that "Not since the 1980s and early 1990s have those outside of community colleges paid sustained attention to reading as the counterpart of writing in the construction and negotiation of meaning" ("Position"). In spite of these examples, one common narrative among reading compositionists is that reading is marginalized in FYC. That, as David Jolliffe wrote in 2003's "Who is Teaching Composition Students to Read and How Are They Doing It?", reading never takes "center stage" in FYC (258).

Another common narrative is that interest in reading ebbs and flows. This is often seen when reading compositionists provide a context for their work, which typically includes their perspectives on the place of reading in the field of composition studies at a particular moment in time. These scholars use various measures to try to quantify or illustrate this context, such as the frequency or place of reading in major disciplinary organizations. In spite of this common perception—among reading compositionists—I think the level of interest may actually be much more stable. And that interest, needless to say, is relatively low.

The "ebb and flow" narrative is compelling, and educational trends frequently do come and go, but in this case, I find the data somewhat unconvincing. For example, in *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition*, Ellen Carillo claims that there was a "proliferation of scholarship on reading" during the 1980s and 1990s (4). However, in 1994, another reading compositionist, Kathleen McKormick, described the research on reading in composition as "fragmented" (as qtd in Carrillo, *Securing* 3). This would have been immediately after, or perhaps even during, the "proliferation" of studies Carrillo references. In 2003's *Intertexts: Reading Pedagogy in College Writing Classrooms*, Marguerite Helmers wrote that reading was

the “least studied” area in rhetoric and composition (Introduction 4) , but in 2012, Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori and Patricia Donahue, two more influential reading compositionists, wrote, “Over the past few years, there appears to have been a revival of interest in reading … within the field of studies variously known as composition, composition studies, composition/rhetoric, or writing studies” (“What Is” 199). Carrillo also, in 2015, wrote, “I am excited to point out that we may be again entering a period like the 1980s and 1990s wherein compositionists are starting to (re)turn to questions surrounding the teaching of reading in composition” (*Securing* 4). If there was a “proliferation” of work in the 1980s-90s, but it was still “fragmented” and reading was “the least studied,” and if a “revival” occurred several years before 2012, and if we are “again entering” such a period, it begins to seem that the “ebbs” and “flows” overlap considerably. This is not to say that there are no ebbs and flows, but to suggest that things are still pretty dry even in the most “flowy” periods.

For example, data gleaned from CCCC indicates that interest in reading fluctuates somewhat, but overall maintains its marginalized status. David Jolliffe analyzed the CCCC’s 2003 program of panels to reveal that “In the titles of the 574 concurrent sessions, workshops, and special-interest group meetings… the word ‘reading’ appears only twice” (“Who is Teaching” 128). Writing later, in 2015, Carrillo said that “[p]rior to a 2012 change in the…(CCCC) call for proposals, it had been almost two decades since composition’s professional organization encouraged panels and presentations on reading” (6). My own analysis of the 2017 CCCC’s program, *Cultivating Capacity, Creating Change*, suggests that an increase in panels on reading had occurred, but that it was still underrepresented in the conference as a whole. In the 2017 program, the word “read” appeared more times in the *advertising* pages of textbook publishing companies than in panel titles. “Read*ing*” appeared 19 times in session titles,

but a number of those were unrelated to student reading or reading instruction in FYC—for example the panel title "'When Making Was All the Rage: Reading Contemporary Maker Movements alongside the Arts and Crafts Movement'" (*Cultivating* 119). Thus, while the 2017 program showed an increase from the 2003 program, the 19 sessions that included "reading" did not represent a huge "flow," especially as compared to the nearly 700 instances of "writing" that also appeared in the same program.

This relative lack of movement on the topic of reading in the context of composition studies is important to recognize in trying to understand the reading theories that inform composition studies and how and when they developed. If the situation is stable—reading is always underrepresented—it is likely not the result of recent educational trends or contexts. Rather, it begins to seem more foundational to FYC and/or composition studies. Consistent low representation suggests that a lack of interesting in reading is built in—woven into the very fabric—rather than something that recently developed.

In fact, for many compositionists, reading does not seem "underrepresented" in composition studies because, for them, it is not part of the discipline at all—at least, not in terms of instruction or theory. In *Intertexts*, Helmers suggested that compositionists may not think college students in FYC or other composition courses need reading instruction. She wrote:

> What does it mean to teach reading? The question may seem surprising when it is raised in the context of the first-year college writing course. … the issues of reading as a practice to be studied and nurtured seems moot, for, by the time the students arrive in college, they are assumed to "know how to read." (Introduction 3,4)

In other words, it may be that reading is commonly recognized as relevant to writing, but that it is not considered relevant in first-year composition *courses* because it is assumed students can already do it.

Such a view is not limited to that of experts in the field of composition, or even to people in education writ large. The idea that people finish learning to read at a young age is also common in the general public. Kathleen McCormick opens the first chapter of her book, *The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English*, with:

> When people sitting next to me on a plane ask me what I am writing, and I tell them I am writing a book on reading, they immediately assume that I must be involved in elementary education, that is, teaching young children how to read….Their assumption is that reading is a skill, not unlike riding a bicycle, that one has to be taught at an early age, and that once one has learned how to do it, one simply does it, without much thought, when the need arises. (1)

Her description emphasizes that these are non-expert assumptions—she's referring to the general public: people she happens to be sitting next to on a plane. This indicates not only that these assumptions may be based on very little knowledge or relevant experience, but also that they are very widespread. Just about anyone a person might sit next to might have the same thought.

Perhaps this pervasive assumption influences the very definition of composition, for many compositionists define "composition"—the act of composing, the first-year composition course, and the discipline—in a way that excludes reading. Consider, for example, Deborah Coxwell-Teague and Ronald F. Lunsford's summary of composition in the introduction to their book, *First-Year Composition: From Theory to Practice*:

> Our view of this history [of composition] is that, from the beginning, it represents something of a tug of war between those who would reduce *writing* to form and formulas—e.g., those who instituted the first "writing" courses at Harvard—and those who see *writing* instruction as something more—e.g., those who founded CCCC." (xxv; emphasis mine)

They go on to outline different views of writing instruction over time. They do not mention reading instruction at all, nor is reading instruction a major part of any of the chapters they, as editors of the volume, chose to include in the book. They do see FYC as shaped by a long-term "tug of war," but for them, this has nothing to do with ebbs and flows in any focus on reading. Instead, for them, the very history of the field is defined by a tug of war over ways of seeing *writing*.

1.2 "'The Reading Problem'"

David Jolliffe refers to the state of reading in composition studies as "'the reading problem'" ("Continuing" 3). But what exactly makes the lack of reading integration a "problem" rather than simply a characteristic of the field? For me, as for other reading compositionists, it is that reading itself is not actually absent in FYC courses. Reading *instruction* may be relatively absent, reading *theories* may be implicit or underdeveloped, but nevertheless students are assigned reading tasks. Further, there is evidence to suggest that students are evaluated on their ability to complete those reading tasks successfully. Consider, for one example, the language adopted in 2016 by the New Jersey Council of County Colleges' (NJCCC) Center for Student Success. The Center is an organization that "exists to assist the state's community colleges [to] improve student outcomes, strengthen services to the students they serve, and serve as a statewide resource for innovation and best practices" (Center). Through a process that included "full-time

faculty in a series of statewide faculty meetings," the Center identified "Core Student Learning Outcomes…for consideration of college adoption in the highest enrolled general education courses" in New Jersey, including first-semester FYC courses ("Strategic" 1). The list is as follows:

1. Apply the writing process: invent, draft, revise, and edit using the conventions of academic writing.
2. Analyze and synthesize textual evidence to produce academic writing with attribution.

Alternate Outcomes for Institutional/Departmental Consideration:

3. Evaluate and integrate sources using proper documentation.
4. Compose essays that assert and develop a debatable thesis statement by using relevant evidence in academic discourse. ("Strategic" 1)

Note that this list does not include the word "reading." A close look at the four above points, however, indicates that reading, while in one sense absent from the Outcomes, is, in another sense, embedded within three of the four: "Analyze and synthesize textual evidence," "evaluate and integrate sources," and "use[] relevant evidence." It seems obvious that in order to analyze text and evaluate sources, one must *read* those sources. In fact, even to "edit and revise," per the first item on the list, requires reading of one's own writing. Because reading is included in the Course Learning Outcomes, but not explicitly named (as compared to "writing" or "the writing process," which are), the indication is that reading can be evaluated or assessed through the writing.

If reading is not just assigned in FYC, but actually cited as a learning objective (albeit indirectly), then it isn't just that students are indirectly assessed on their reading via the writing they produce, but that they are actively supposed to show *improvement* over the course of the

semester. As Lisa Bosley argued in "'I Don't Teach Reading': Critical Reading Instruction in Composition Courses" in 2008:

> Reading is not granted 'core' skill status in the General Education curriculum. It is, however, a stated objective of many general education courses, including the freshman composition sequence…Although improvement in critical reading is an often cited objective in many freshman composition courses, there is little research that describes how composition instructors teach critical reading strategies" (285).

Thus, students are expected to improve their reading abilities in their FYC courses. Yet there are few studies that help clarify what kind of reading instruction may or may not be happening in FYC classrooms, or what students might need. There is a mismatch between the expected outcomes, the stated language, and the assumptions regarding the skills students bring with them to the course.

A complicating factor in trying to understand how, when, or why reading is taught or ignored in FYC is that reading is undertheorized in the context of college writing courses. Whether because of various assumptions made by educators or the general public, or because the embeddedness of reading renders it relatively invisible, or a combination of factors, when reading *is* assessed or measured, the way "reading" is conceptualized—which is to say, what people mean when they say "reading"—can be problematic. For example, in 2017, Patrick Sullivan, Howard Tinberg, and Sheridan Blau opened their book, *Deep Reading,* with the following:

> We began this project with great enthusiasm—and with perhaps an even greater sense of urgency. We have grown concerned with the lack of attention given to reading in our disciplinary conversation about the teaching of writing, and we are alarmed by the

> impoverished and reductive understanding of reading that has worked its way into curriculum and state standards… (xiii).

This was in response specifically to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and its "solitary—some would say manic—focus on close reading" (Jolliffe "Continuing" 9). While many states have since dropped or shifted their relationship with the CCSS (Sawchuck), the conditions that led to "the impoverished and reductive understanding" in the first place have not necessarily been rectified, especially if little research about reading in the context of writing courses has happened since.

Another way to say it is that institutional attention to reading—that is, institutionalized attention to the *evaluation* of students' reading *abilities*—is not what reading compositionists are urging when they argue for an integration of reading into writing classes. Instead, such an inspection of students' reading abilities is seen as "impoverished and reductive." In the case of the Common Core State Standards, it seems that the problem wasn't a *lack* of interest in reading, but a *poorly executed* interest in reading. And, given the widespread assumptions that students enter, or should enter, college knowing how to read, along with the vacuum of reading theory and established reading pedagogy in FYC, it stands to reason that, unless something changes, these kinds of problematic requirements and standards will continue to be embedded within FYC course descriptions and outcomes, as well as within the college preparation courses students take in high school that are meant to prepare them for FYC.

Given all of the above, I began this project with concerns regarding the marginalization of reading in college writing courses. It felt somehow dishonest, because in all of the FYC courses I was aware of, reading amounted to a large portion of the homework students did, and that reading was assessed via their writing. This felt like an important issue to me, especially

given the gate-keeping potential for required FYC courses—that is, because it is a "near-universal requirement" (Crowley 1), students who cannot pass the course are barred entry from many courses and programs for which FYC is a pre-requisite.

Further, in our current media landscape, filled with accusations of "fake news" and rampant conspiracy theories, it seems to me more important than ever to understand the role that FYC plays in developing certain reading habits in students. As McCormick argued in *The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English,* "The different ways students are asked to read imply particular values and beliefs about the nature of texts, the nature of readers as subjects of texts and as subjects in the world, and about meaning and language itself" (7). To this, I would add that it is not only how student are asked to read, but also what they are asked to read and how they are authorized to respond to it, that shape not only their ideas about texts, but also about the nature of facts, opinions, claims, and evidence. This is a heavy responsibility for composition at a time in which the term "post-truth" was named "word of the year" by Oxford Languages ("Word").

But while it may be a complex issue and a heavy responsibility, FYC is uniquely positioned to have a huge influence on these issues. It is the primary site of writing instruction in undergraduate programs throughout the U.S., and the one course which nearly every student takes. And in many ways, it is already seen as a site of the kind of work that requires strong reading skills: it has been called "one of the few places in the academic curriculum…where students learn the basics of argument, or how to make a claim, provide evidence, and consider alternative points of view" (Duffy). To me, this description indicates that FYC values claims, evidence, and alternative points of view—key ingredients to valuing text-based *interactions*—reading and writing and the relationship between them. And yet, "reading as a praxis, in other

words as a process that lies along the boundary between practice and theory, is the least studied of the present areas of research and emphasis in the field of rhetoric and composition" (Helmers, Introduction 4). This, in essence, is "'the reading problem'" in FYC.

1.3 Some Existing Reading Compositionist Research

A common thread among reading compositionists is to advocate for, and provide data to support the need for, more research on reading in composition. Some call for more research on specific teaching approaches or outcomes, as Bosley did in "'I Don't Teach Reading…'" saying, "there is little research that describes how composition instructors teach critical reading strategies" (285). Echoing this need for research specifically focused on composition instructors, Ellen Carillo wants to "expand the field's understanding of how instructors who are currently attending to reading in their first-year writing courses are doing so" (22, 23). Her perspective may have been shaped by her inspiration, which she cites as Michael Bunn's 2010 dissertation, "Reconceptualizing the Role of Reading in Composition Studies." In it, he said, "Examining what instructors have to say about teaching reading contributes to a better understanding of some of the ways that reading is currently being taught in first-year writing, and allows for comparisons between how instructors define and describe the reading approaches with the definitions and descriptions found in scholarship" (Bunn 82). Bosley, Carillo, and Bunn started with the assumption that reading is important to FYC success, and that students struggle with it. All three therefore focused on gathering more information about what instructors are doing and thinking about reading. While my interest is less focused on individual instructors, it is relevant that all three see reading as underrepresented in FYC, especially given the support that students seem to need.

The above studies on instructor practices suggest that scholars and practitioners use certain words like “critical,” “close,” and “rhetorical” without consistency (Carillo *Securing* 30). For Carillo, one reason to focus on reading in FYC is to “help organizations like WPA and CCCC [Council of Writing Program Administrators and Conference for College Composition and Communication] articulate more concretely what they mean by ‘critical reading’ when they list it as one of the elements of first-year composition instruction” (12). This indicates that these organizations do not currently articulate this element of FYC “concretely.” If it is not well-defined at the organizational level, perhaps it is not surprising that Bunn’s 2010 findings “reinforce just how imprecise and inexact the definitions for these reading approaches are; several instructors report difficulty in distinguishing between them, and the data also shows instructors confusing and/or conflating the names of various approaches” (Bunn 82).

It is important to recognize that all of the above is focused specifically on credit-bearing college composition. The relationship to reading and composition is somewhat different when considered through the lens of developmental English. In “’What’s Expected of Us as We Integrate the Two Disciplines:’ Two-Year College Faculty Engage with Basic Writing Reform,” Erin E. Doran offers a brief history. She shows that studies support the integration of reading and writing for student success, where it has been common practice to offer different developmental reading and writing courses (149). This is already a difference with FYC, where there has never been a corresponding required reading course. Another difference that Doran’s history reveals is that developmental English has been subject to legislative influence in the context of “college readiness initiatives and developmental education…policy discussions,” which she says “dominate” discussions in the state in which she conducted her research (149). Because FYC—the focus of this dissertation—is credit-bearing, it does not have the same relationship to “college

readiness initiatives" legislation that developmental English courses do. For that reason, and because of the different histories of separate reading and writing courses, the scholarly research regarding the integration of reading and writing in developmental English is not typically included in discussions or considerations of FYC. I will point out, though, that even in this context, Doran's title indicates a bifurcated understanding regarding reading and writing instruction, which are identified as different disciplines entirely.

Crucially missing from the research literatures in the specific context of FYC are analyses of reading theories and assumptions, explicit or implied, that undergird this disciplinary and pedagogical disconnect between reading and writing. This suggests to me that there is a need for a better understanding of just what the place of reading in FYC has been, not only since composition studies developed as a field unto itself, but also since FYC gained a foothold as a required college course. If the place of reading in FYC is not, in fact, one that shifts and changes with the trends, but is instead relatively stable in its marginal place at the edges of the field of composition, then perhaps the place of reading in composition—which is to say, the relative absence of reading in composition—is deeply rooted in the histories, theories, and practices of English studies. This would help explain how reading could simultaneously be so embedded and so invisible in FYC—part of nearly every assignment, but underrepresented as a topic in disciplinary conferences and journals.

Some studies offer a brief analysis of the history of English studies to account for the current marginalization of reading in composition. But the major histories about the broad discipline of English studies are focused on *either* literature or composition, not on the historical place of reading *in* composition. These include Arthur Applebee's foundational *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English: A History*, which details some of the history of composition

but is primarily focused on “the aspect of teaching that has, since the beginning, taken up the largest proportion of the teacher’s time, energy, and enthusiasm: the teaching of literature” (x). On the other “side” of this—the composition side—is Sharon Crowley, whose *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*, does not even include “reading” in the index. I believe that all of this indicates a need for a more holistic understanding of the histories and theories of “reading” as they pertain to the rise of college composition courses and the related field of composition studies.

Additionally, reading theory is underdeveloped in composition studies. In *Intertexts,* Helmers said, “Reading as praxis… as a process that lies along the boundary between practice and theory, is the least studied of the present areas of research and emphasis in the field of rhetoric and composition” (Introduction 4). I take this to mean that, in addition to gaining insight into what individual instructors are doing in individual classrooms, the field of composition should link that insight to conceptual work with reading as well, to understand not just practice, but praxis.

1.4 Research Questions

I began this project seeking to better understand the (dis)connects between reading and writing in composition studies, how reading has been understood, and what kinds of reading have been valued in composition studies and first-year composition, as well as in the broader field of English studies. My inquiry was guided by the following questions:

- What theories of reading inform the field of composition studies?
- What were some of the material, institutional, and pedagogical circumstances under which these theories developed?

- In what ways do these theories or perspectives influence – or not influence -- scholarly ideas about students, classrooms, and instruction in first-year composition?
- What reading challenges are posed by the current and highly contentious social and media landscapes, and how well-suited is FYC—if at all—to meet these needs?
- What might my research contribute to the field of "college composition" that always is socially, culturally and politically inflected and situated?

1.5 Clarification of Terms

In the context of FYC specifically and English studies more broadly, different terms may be used by different people at different times. Some of these differences in meaning or connotation are the subject of this study. In some cases, even knowing that a given term may, to some scholars, have implications I didn't intend, I nevertheless had to make some decisions about which terms to use, if only for the sake of consistency within this document.

English Studies:

Although this study is ultimately focused on reading in composition and FYC, one of its contentions is that many of the prevailing ideas about reading came from other disciplines, many of them under the larger umbrella of "English studies" and adjacent fields, including early childhood literacy, literary studies, and English education. The term "English" is, itself, potentially unclear. Sometimes, the topic under discussion has to do with the teaching of English, sometimes with the discipline and field of scholarly concerns in English, and sometimes with both. Applebee refers to "English-the-discipline" and "English-the-school-subject" to attempt to deal with this potentially confusing double use of the term "English" (194).

Here, then, I will use "English studies" loosely, to include both composition and literary studies as well as K-12 education. Although my primary focus is composition, it has an entwined

history with literary studies and with K-12 education, particularly, I will show, when it comes to ideas about reading and teaching reading. Therefore, my use of "English studies" as an umbrella term that includes all of these fields indicates what I see as a shared history that continues into the present day. Crucially, in the fact that a degree in "English," typically meaning literary studies, is considered an appropriate requirement for teaching FYC.

I do not use the term this way to argue that English *should* include this variety of fields. Rather, I use it as a descriptor because of how often it does include this variety of fields. To be sure, there are many scholars in these and other fields who would argue that the fields should be separated from each other. But in practice, they so often are not. An internet browser search for "English professor" or "English teacher" returns many results for jobs that consider candidates with degrees in any of the variety of fields, which are often referred to as "related." Similarly, in many, though certainly not all, institutions of higher education, the English department houses all of these fields.

First-Year Composition:

The term "composition" is likewise open to interpretation. The first composition courses for first-year college students date back to the late 1800s (Applebee 30). It has been a required course for nearly all first-year college students ever since, though naturally it tends to go by different names in different schools. When discussing the course, I use "first-year composition," or FYC, because it distinguishes the almost-universally-required course, which is the central work of so many writing programs and compositionists, from advanced composition courses and from the field of composition. Different colleges and universities do, of course, have different designs and foci for FYC, but it is common practice to refer to all first-year or first-semester

required college writing courses under the umbrella of "FYC," and to then tease out pedagogical trends and emphases between and amongst different course designs.

Composition Studies:

The academic field of composition, or what Stephen North calls "Composition…capital 'C,' is much newer than the required first-year course (9). It developed closer to the mid-20th century, as measured by the dates that conferences and academic journals on the subject, such as the CCCC, were established. Composition studies is sometimes called "writing studies," sometimes "rhetoric and composition," or "rhet/comp," and sometimes just "composition." I like and use the term "composition studies" because I find it more flexible than "writing studies." "Composition" can be interpreted to mean "the construction—or *composition*—of meaning," which can incorporate "both practices of reading and writing" (Carillo, *Securing*, 5). I choose not to use "rhetoric and composition" mostly because I think FYC today has a complex and varied relationship with rhetoric. Further, composition studies sometimes engages with rhetorical theories and histories, but sometimes doesn't. When I use "composition studies" in this dissertation, it indicates the academic field of study, wherein Composition studies can be "housed" in a variety of locations, institutionally speaking, and in some cases are separated from English at the FYC level and also at the graduate level—including English departments, Education departments, and, sometimes, Composition or Writing departments.

Reading:

When I say "reading" in the context of this project, I mean the reading of texts. I do not focus in this project on the "reading" of social cues, body language, or even "texts" like films or advertisements. I realize that these can also be considered "texts," I do consider them to be examples of important kinds of reading, but they are not my focus with this project, for the

reason being that comprehension and interpretation work differently in written text than in other forms/media. Additionally, in most of the history of composition, "reading" refers to print-based materials, and some of what I examine involves the "mechanics" of reading print—that is, the literal reading of printed words on paper or digital file.

My purpose in here defining reading in this project is not to suggest that this particular definition is, or should be, the definition for reading in all contexts or projects. As Shirley Brice Heath argued in "Protean Shapes in Literacy Events: Ever-Shifting Oral and Literate Traditions," it is important not to mistake the narrow definition of "reading" I employ in this project for the only, most meaningful, or advanced form of literacy practices. Listening to conversation is not less valuable than reading, even though, as Heath said:

> …[E]xisting scholarship makes it easy to interpret a picture which depicts societies existing along a continuum of development from an oral tradition to a literal one, with some societies having a restricted literacy and others having reached a full development of literacy. This is an inaccurate picture. (349)

Her argument is that different social and cultural literacy practices are not more or less advanced, even if they are more or less text-based. I agree with her, but I distinguish between text-based reading and other kinds of reading for three reasons. First, it would become simply too large a project if I tried to include all possible interpretations of "reading." Second, written language has features that do not exist in other kinds of reading, such as punctuation and paragraphing, that pose specific reading challenges and opportunities. And, third, because this project focuses on the theories and histories of reading in composition and related fields, and those fields have almost exclusively focused on text-based notions of reading, it is by far the most relevant form of

"reading" to consider. I also do not address alternate forms of text-based reading, such as audiobooks and braille, largely for the same reasons.

Throughout this dissertation, I have quoted scholars who use a qualifier in front of the word "reading," as in "critical reading" or "deep reading," and others who use "literacy," such as "critical literacy." Part of what I address in this dissertation is that the uses of these terms are slippery: While often defined within a specific text, there is little to no disciplinary consensus around these various terms. Sometimes different terms are used synonymously with each other, and sometimes the same terms are used by different people (and, indeed, sometimes by the same people) to mean different things. The most common term is probably "critical reading," but my sense is that this is most often used as a stand-in for "good reading," or to distinguish the kind of reading instruction that is thought to belong in college from other kinds of reading instruction such as decoding.

1.6 Organization of Chapters

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I outline my research methodology and methods. Chapter 3 takes on the question "What theories of reading inform the field of composition studies?" by close reading—which I define therein—and analysis of three historical accounts of English education and composition studies. One thing this analysis establishes is a dual bifurcation in English education between composition and literature and between high school and college education. In Chapter 4, I delve into those bifurcations to consider some of the reading theories from outside the field of composition and to suggest that they all influence composition in different, and sometimes conflicting, ways. Chapter 5 further explores the reading/writing divide in composition studies and asks how this divide influences classroom pedagogies and ideas. In Chapter 6, I posit that the history of classical rhetoric and rhetorical

studies continues to influence the reading/writing divide and the underrepresentation of reading in composition studies. Chapter 7 argues that comprehending and interpreting nonfictional, persuasive texts, such as those that are the focus of rhetorical studies and the bulk of reading assignments in FYC courses, is difficult, "college level" work that deserves instructional attention in every FYC classroom. And in Chapter 8, I conclude with a reflection on the particular reading challenges of our current media landscape, and consider how FYC might be positioned to respond to these challenges. I also, there, reflect on some of the remaining questions and issues with which this dissertation did not engage.

Chapter 2: Humanities, Qualitative Research, and Methodology

In Chapter 1, I described a classroom. Imagine, now, a hallway of faculty offices in that same community college. This hallway is on the third floor—the "penthouse," as one administrative assistant called it—and in some ways looks like a hallway in a dorm room: doors, some open, some closed, all labelled with names and schedules, line its length. Almost all are also festooned with taped-on posters, cartoons, photographs, and other items that identify, at least to some degree, the personalities and interests of those inside the doors.

All of the full-time English faculty have their offices on this hall. But also on this hall are almost all of the full-time faculty offices for the HSSE department—"Humanities, Social Sciences, Social Work, and Education." (That department, like its name, proved too large, so the full-time professors of Education, of whom there are two, share an office one floor down). Due to a general lack of planning as well as an active sense of collegiality, there is no "English side" or "HSSE side"— offices housing English and HSSE faculty are interspersed down the full length of the hallway.

My office is exactly halfway down this hall. This is literally true, but it also feels symbolically appropriate. My entire academic path has been situated in the middle between "English" and "Humanities, Social Science…Education" (not, I'll grant, "social work"). As an undergraduate, I majored in English and Sociology, and worked as a tutor at my university's Writing Center. I earned my Master of Arts in Teaching in Secondary English Education, and while there, took some courses in English literature, some in writing, some in education, and some in the teaching of English. I also completed a semester of student teaching in a high school; while there, I taught Honors Sophomore English and Journalism. As a doctoral student,

the program I am in is called English Education, and it is located within the Department of Arts and Humanities.

So: English, Humanities, Social Science, and Education. If I were to depict them in the form of visual art, I think it would be a mixed-medium: watercolor in some places, with the different paints so blended together that they become an entirely new color, and a collage in other places, layered, connected, glued together, but not actually mixing. For this project, I chose to lean in to this mix of disciplinary backgrounds. To put simply what I will explain further in this chapter, my methodology is post-qualitative, while my method is a close reading analysis. The post-qualitative aspects of this project are informed by my social science and education background, while my close read analysis is informed by my English background.

2.1 Research in Composition: All Over the "Map"

My "mixed media" background is not unusual in composition studies. As of March 2021, there were only 94 doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition in the country ("PhD Program Map"). With over 4,000 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities in the United States ("Fast Facts"), and virtually all of them requiring some version of FYC, it is clear that the majority of FYC instructors do not have a PhD in rhetoric and composition. Instead they, like the English faculty at CJCC, have degrees in literature and English education.

Given this, it is perhaps not surprising that research in composition studies includes a wide variety of types and styles. Some are versions of conventional qualitative research, like Ellen Carillo's national survey conducted in 2012, which surveyed FYC instructors and students and then did follow-up interviews with a smaller sample of survey participants (Carillo, *Securing*, 25). Others provide a documentary history, like John Brereton's foundational book, *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875–1925: A Documentary*

History. Other history-based work includes James Berlin's *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges*. In this volume, Berlin's research centers on his analysis of various other sources, including some primary, like John Quincy Adams's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory*, and others secondary like Arthur Applebee's *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English*. Berlin's book is primarily organized chronologically, with further categorizations of each time period—for example, his chapter that focuses on the years after the Civil War is called "Current-Traditional Rhetoric." Each chapter amounts to an essay on his focus for each time period he identified.

Compositionists have not always used chronology as an organizing framework, even when they have used primary and secondary text-based sources to develop arguments that include the histories of composition and related fields. One example of this is Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*. Her work is critically engaged, by which I mean it engages not just with intellectual histories and theories in composition studies, but also with the material, political, and institutional contexts of the field. Her table of contents is, as the book's title suggests, a list of essay titles: "Literature and Composition: Not Separate but Certainly Unequal," and "Terms of Employment: Rhetoric Slaves and Lesser Men." Somewhat similarly, in *A Theory of Discourse*, James L. Kinneavy organized his ideas around what he called "a hierarchy of importance for matters in the field of composition around which considerable debate has raged traditionally and recently" (ix). The book also offers various summaries and analyses of other texts, and organizes them primarily around issues or debates rather than chronology.

In *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field,* Stephen North was explicit about borrowing heavily from the social sciences—he called himself a

"participant observer," though he stressed that this "anthropological perspective must be regarded as partly metaphorical (4). In other words, his observations came from his years working in the field of composition but they were filtered not through case studies or other anthropological tools. Rather, he studied "the public life" of the communities that make up composition studies, which are "manifested primarily in their written records" (5). This may be the best example I have of the cross/interdisciplinarity of composition studies, in that his analysis of published texts could be considered more humanities-based than anthropological/social science, but his influence is anthropologist Clifford Geertz. And, not surprisingly, the book's organizing structure is groups of people—"subcultures"—within composition (5). It has chapters on "The Practitioners" and "The Formalists," in which he analyzes what the different groups see as knowledge in the field, and how they gather and analyze it.

2.2 "Mixed Media" Research

This, ultimately, is a study *about* reading that *utilizes* close reading as its primary analytical "tool." With such variety of academic backgrounds among composition scholars, and so many research methods being utilized, a major challenge of this project was determining the "right" research path for the questions I was asking. Surprisingly, or perhaps not, given the mix of academic influences in my own background, I kept being drawn to what I might call a "literary lens," meaning that my first impulses weren't formed enough to be called a method or methodology, or even a research plan, but they were shaped by ways of thinking or ways of seeing that I'd learned in my undergraduate and graduate literature courses. For me, seeing through a "literary lens" meant reading texts again and again, letting certain sentences or passages rise to the top of my awareness, pulling them apart, thinking about the sentence

structure and the word choices, all to develop my interpretation(s). This is how I think of the process of interpretation and analysis—or what many in English would call "close reading."

But historical accounts, qualitative research write-ups, and polemical essays are not literary texts. A historian is not a fictional character. So, what does it mean to interpret a historian's use of the word "reading" and to draw conclusions? What does it mean to parse a scholar's sentence structure and "mine" it for meaning? Can a reader—that is, can I—accurately or responsibly represent another person's ideas and thinking via close reading analysis of that person's published works? These questions brought me to thoughts of representation, and the crisis of representation in social science research. In "Confession, Catharsis, or Cure? Rethinking the Uses of Reflexivity as Methodological Power in Qualitative Research," Wanda Pillow explained the "crisis of representation" in the wake of poststructuralist theories that fractured previous assumptions about the nature of truth and objectivity. That is, poststructuralism fractured any assumptions that one singular, universalized truth or an absolute, fully conscious objectivity exist. In qualitative research, this had implications for the researchers' ability to "know" their subjects and to "accurately" represent those subjects. This further led to "debates concerning the foundations of our [qualitative] research practices" in which "existing structures for validating and legitimizing" that research were "called into question" (175). Questions that have consistently been raised since include: "Who benefits from our representations? Are our representations valid? Do they matter? Who can research whom, when, and how?" (175-176).

Research that focuses on reading and analyzing published scholarly works does not raise every one of the concerns of Pillow and other qualitative researchers concerned about the ethics of representation. Published texts are, in a sense, public. As such, especially as academic texts, they were published with the understanding that others would read them and have opinions about

them, whether positive or negative. If the texts are the “data” of the research, these data are available to anyone who questions my representations. Further, the authors of such published academic texts tend to enjoy positions of relative privilege—sometimes a lot of privilege—and may be well-known. Still, relative privilege and public-ness of data does not render a researcher exempt from taking full responsibility for ethically infused iterations of care in representation.

And then there is the issue of “accuracy.” What does this mean, in the realm of interpretive close reading? Outside of temperature readings and height measurements (and even then), what does “accuracy” ever mean? I think the problem of accuracy is in many ways the real heart of the crisis of representation. If a researcher could know that their representation was accurate, it would not *eliminate* ethical concerns, but it would change the nature of those concerns. For if the publication of an accurate representation hurts a person or population, at least it also builds or collective knowledge and adds something “real” to the conversation. But if a representation is both harmful and inaccurate, how can its existence ever be considered justifiable? What does it add to the world to make up for what it takes away from a person or group?

When it comes to questions of accuracy, the problem posed by “the posts,” as in postmodernism, poststructuralism, etc., is that these “post” perspectives fracture the assumptions that truth and objectivity exist in fixed and immutable forms. These questions often frustrate readers and researchers, who may ask: If we can’t even strive toward accuracy because there is no such thing, then what, as researchers, are we even doing? But some researchers argue that all is not lost. James A. Berlin, a compositionist and theorist, argued that, although “the postmodern experience is marked by fragmentation, incoherence, and the lack of a stable center or foundation for experience,” this does not mean that “history is one damn thing after another without

significance" ("Literacy" 249, 251). As I read this, Berlin suggests that there is a way to recognize complexity and continue moving forward through, without avoiding, that complexity. In this, I see a sense of cautious purposefulness that I appreciate, and which helped me situated and ground my work throughout this dissertation. He said:

> Although history is without any inherent plan or process, it is the product of complex interactions of people, political and social institutions, ideologies, technological conditions, and material modes of production. To abandon the attempt to make sense of history is for the vast majority of people everywhere to accept being victimized by it. ("Literacy" 251)

What this passage says to me is that researchers can hold two contradictory ideas at the same time: one, that there is no absolute, universal truth, and, two, that we still can and should try to understand the world around us better. When it comes to research, there may not be *an answer* to a research question, but we can come to better understand the "complex interactions" that are part of the question, and from there we can develop more nuanced questions and offer arguments and opinions that are informed and care-full.

I will add here that there is a meta-layer to this dissertation that was both a challenge and opportunity throughout: Any questions I have, as a researcher, about accuracy and interpretation of my data, are very similar to the questions I have when it comes to student reading and interpretation. This is a reading project on reading—a "close reading" of "reading" in composition studies and fields that inform composition studies. If accuracy is not possible, is not even the goal, of close reading analysis, can I say that students can misread the texts they are assigned? This is a question I raised in Chapter 1 and return to at the end of this dissertation. It is one of the questions I think composition studies could be asking, as I believe our pedagogies

would be richer as a result of discussion on the topic, even if consensus was not reached. In the absence of robust, disciplinary-level conversation on that topic, I will here say that I do not think the answer will be a simple binary. I believe we can say that there is no singular, fixed, immutable meaning, without suggesting that nothing means anything at all.

2.3 Cautious Purposefulness

One response to the crisis of representation was the development of "reflexivity" as one element of the process and product of qualitative research. Reflexivity is a process of delving not just into the limitations of a particular research project or method, but delving also into one's own limitations as a researcher. It is a process of attempting to recognize, as a researcher, one's own shortcomings, biases, and gaps in knowledge and perspective. But these, by their very definition, are difficult to see and recognize, rendering reflexivity itself as imperfect, incomplete, and potentially problematic.

Reflexivity, and other qualitative research methods intended to work through and with complexity, can become especially problematic when they are too pat, too easy. Qualitative researcher Elizabeth St. Pierre uses the term "conventional humanist qualitative methodology" to label qualitative research that is "so disciplined, so normalized, so centered…that *it has become conventional*, reductionist, hegemonic, and sometimes oppressive and has lost its radical possibilities…" (613). Along similar lines, Pillow questions the habituated or expected version of reflexivity as something that has "an invested ideology… that the researcher can be honest about her(him)self, particularly in relation to an 'other' (182). As reflexivity becomes "normalized," what stops it from becoming just another thing, another box to check to show that we are doing what we are "supposed" to do because we are supposed to do it? What impact does that have on

our research? Given that the hope of reflexivity is that it fractures the “supposed to,” a major challenge is in maintaining that goal even as reflexivity becomes an expectation or norm.

Interestingly, literature may offer insight on ways to tackle such impossibile aspirations as “reflexivities of discomfort.” In fact, I often find that literature is particularly well-suited to raising questions that are nurtured rather than answered. I found myself drawn to one novel in particular as I worked through the “how” of this research project. It is almost a narrative of my mixed-media approach with this project. *Annihilation,* by Jeff VanderMeer, explores research, the impossibility of objectivity, and the ethical questions surrounding both. *Annihilation* is a fictional story, but it is also about the humanness of researchers, and what that means for *how* we know, *what* we know, how we articulate and communicate what we know, and where all of the attempts to know and to communicate fall apart.

The main character in *Annihilation*, who never reveals her name, is a biologist. She, along with three other women—an anthropologist, a psychologist, and a surveyor—set out on an expedition to explore a place called Area X. Area X is an ever-expanding area in “the Southern Reach,” a fictional location in the United States. Area X, for reasons unknown to the researchers, has a profusion of unexplainable biological phenomena. An invisible border, also of mysterious origins, separates it from the rest of the world. Previous teams of researchers went into Area X, but most did not return, and those who did were significantly altered in their behaviors and thoughts.

To prepare for the expedition, the biologist and everyone on the team were given a map of the area drawn by previous researchers and told to study it. After entering Area X and spending several days in Area X, exploring the area and attempting to record data, the biologist said:

> The map had been the first form of misdirection, for what was a map but a way of emphasizing some things and making other things invisible? Always, we were directed to the map, to memorize the details on the map…. We became so comfortable with that map, with the dimensions of it, and the thought of what it contained that it stopped us from asking *why* or even *what*. (66)

Crucially, the biologist did not accuse the mapmakers of being inaccurate or of lying. The map wasn't a form of misdirection because it was a *bad* map, but because it was *a* map. *Any* map—"a map"—will always, by virtue of attempting to represent emphasize some things and disregard or deemphasize other things. Simply by virtue of being a map of Area X and not Area Y, it renders some things invisible. And what the biologist is also saying is that, while any map will emphasize some things instead of others, a map can also be used in more and less obfuscating ways. It is when they become comfortable with the map, when they stop asking questions of the map—"*why* or even *what*"—that the map truly misdirects.

In research, awareness of the limitations of a map help that map be less of a *mis*direction. But when the map becomes too "centered" or "conventional," when, St. Pierre says, "*We've forgotten we made it up*" (613), a map becomes "the first form of misdirection." Any map that is relied upon too heavily, and too uncritically, becomes a process of memorization rather than thinking, following without asking, and finding comfort and guarantee instead of learning.

Post-qualitative research can be uncomfortable precisely because it resists convention, direction, and in some ways even clarity. But the opposite of comfort is not chaos. To paraphrase Berlin, to abandon the attempt to do research is to be victim to the supposed "knowledge" of others—usually others with more power. St. Pierre says, "*I do not and cannot offer an alternative methodology*—a recipe, an outline, a structure, for post qualitative research—another

handy 'research design' in which one can safely secure oneself and one's work" (613). This does not mean that a researcher cannot create a map or plan, or even that one researcher's map or plan cannot be inspired by another's. I do take it to mean that every researcher can and should work to be as aware as possible of the map or plan as an invention—a thing they "made up"—for a particular purpose in a particular context. To never cease asking "*why* or even *what*" as they use the map to move through the complexity of their research.

Pillow offers "reflexivities of discomfort" to distinguish from so-called reflexivity that is "conventional" or uncritical. While she, like St. Pierre, offers no "solution" to the ethical and epistemological impossibilities of representation, she suggests ways of working through/with the complexity. She encourages reflexivities that:

> acknowledge, find, discuss, and challenge the limits of existing notions and understandings of what is acceptable research practice while at the same time forefronting [sic] the necessity of engaging in critical reflection about how it is we do the reflexive work of subjectivity and representation. (Pillow 188)

The discomfort here, as I see it, is in the insistence on understanding one's own limitations as a researcher. It is uncomfortable because it is constant work—it is so easy to slide into certainty—and because, in questioning ourselves, we may cause others to question us as well, or even reject out of hand any work that we have preemptively described as imperfect, conditional, and difficult.

In the context of this particular project, my close-reading analysis of a variety of texts in and around the area of English studies, I attempted to always remember and describe the parameters of my "map"—which I "made up." By this, in part I mean that I have included, where possible, descriptions of my own experiences through "English" and "composition," both as a

student and as an instructor, to be as transparent as I can about my biases and contexts as regards the *content* of my research. I also have made an effort to describe my research methods and underlying methodologies, not only in this chapter, but throughout the dissertation, in an attempt to be transparent about my research *process**es***. I did this in the hope of offering at least a modicum of transparency regarding what I have chosen to emphasize and what I have rendered invisible—to show a map of the map, in a sense. My hope is that this brings the limitations of the map, as well as its emphases (and value), into the conversation.

All of that said, this project is not a post-qualitative, or even qualitative research study; rather, it is primarily a humanities-based, close-reading study. Even more than Stephen North, I use ideas about (post)-qualitative research in a non-literal sense. They inform my analysis—deeply so, I believe—but at its core, this is not a project rooted in the social sciences, per se. Nor do I employ either quantitative or qualitative research, the typical forms of inquiry in the social sciences generally and the field of education especially. This work instead is influenced by post-qualitative ideas, especially those that focus on "reflexivities of discomfort." What I take from post-qualitative work, in part, is the call to question. This call includes a call to question the self-as-researcher: not only to question her assumptions, biases, and expectations she brings to her inquiries, but also to question her *own interrogations* of such. This call is also a call to question the very conventions of research and the content of the research (the data, the subject(s), and/or the participant(s))—in terms of "reflexivities of discomfort," she may work with "data," but she rejects pro forma versions of data coding and categorizing and instead works to leave space for silences, contradictions, and gaps in that "data." Post-inflected inquiries thus question dominant discourses that shape researchers' over-arching assumptions about the self, research, and data, and, further, constantly call attention to all categories and orderings of such as both invented and

non-static. This all is, I think, not only relevant to all types of formal or official research, but also to any observations of the self and interactions with the world.

2.4 Close Reading as a Method of Map-Making

There are many ways to understand "close reading," which is the term I am using to describe my textual analyses in this project. As initially developed, it "was a method of reading literary texts that involved detailed analytical interpretation" (McCormick 34). It has since been applied more broadly to indicate close attention to and analysis of any text, including nonliterary texts. In "The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters," Jane Gallop described it as a way of reading that "emphasizes small details" as a way of attending to "what is actually written" and to "break free of…preconceptions of what should be in the text" (Gallop 11). She added that "'close reading' means looking at what is actually on the page, reading the text itself, rather than some idea "behind the text." It means noticing things in the writing, "things in the writing that stand out" (7). Gallop applies this kind of reading to all texts, saying that, rather than being "a way to read a particular kind of text," close reading becomes "a particular way to read all texts" (8). This "particular way," Gallop argued, involves "read[ing] NOT what SHOULD BE on the page, but what IS" (8).

There is much in Gallop's description of close reading that appeals to me for the purposes of this particular research project, in which I've tasked myself with "reading reading" in and around the discipline of composition not for what scholars *should think* about reading, but what they *do write* about reading. Gallop said, "Reading what one expects to find means finding what one already knows. Learning, on the other hand, means coming to know something one did not know before" (11). Such learning is, I think, the goal of research.

There are, however, two things I want to add to Gallop's idea of close reading, especially regarding the idea of "looking at what is actually on the page" and "coming to know something one did not know before." The first has to do with where meaning "is." I don't know that Gallop would disagree with it, but it isn't emphasized in "The Ethics of Reading," and I want to emphasize it here: While a reader can read for the words and sentences that are "actually on the page," there is also a limit to the meaning that can exist "on the page." This is not a new idea—per Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading presented in 1978's *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, meaning does not reside *in* the text, but rather in the relationship—the transaction—between the text and the reader. She observed that, when presented with an unfamiliar poem, her graduate student readers were "not a blank tape registering a ready-made message" but instead were "actively involved in building up a poem" (10). In addition to reading the words "actually on the page," as Gallop described it, Rosenblatt's students were "paying attention to what the signs pointed to in their external world" and to "the images, feelings, attitudes, associations, and ideas that the words and their referents evoked in them [the students]" (Gallop 10). This does not imply that anything can mean anything, but that meaning can be debated and negotiated.

I also want to add that I think that there's an extent to which Gallop's notion of "looking at what is actually on the page" is aspirational. There's value in the reader or researcher casting aside her preconceived notions and her expectations and looking, dispassionately, for what is there. Of course, this is never fully achievable, for readers and researchers do have preconceived notions and expectations, including those they do not even realize exist and so cannot effectively ward against. In the case of my research, my questions about reading presuppose, if nothing else, that reading is a worthwhile activity about which to ask questions.

Even if I could be genuinely neutral from that point on about what I see when I look for what is "actually on the page," the fact that I'm reading *this* page instead of *that* page—Arthur Applebee instead of Robert Scholes, or Ellen Carillo instead of Alice Horning—is due to choices I've made as a researcher. Some of those choices are deliberate, but others may have more to do with convenience or even randomness or chance. And this is to say nothing of the cultural, political, and economic system in which I live and which probably accounts for the fact that all four of the published scholars I just listed above, as well as the *vast* majority of scholars I cite in this dissertation, are white people, with a heavy skew toward maleness. No less relevant is my particular path through English and composition studies—the particular interests of the professors I happened to have because I chose *this* doctoral program instead of *that* one, for example.

So, neutrality, or at least openness to seeing that which one did not preemptively expect to see, can only ever be aspirational. But I want to complicate the idea a bit further even than that. I want to raise the question of what it might mean, or what it can mean, to not only accept but also embrace the fact that researchers bring their experiences, feelings, and associations—as Rosenblatt said, "their external world"—to their research. Such a situation is not just as a liability, but also can be an asset. This, again, is a reason I've included parts of my own experiences and personal contexts in the chapters that follow, to bring that "external world" into my own reading process in an explicit way.

I think that Gallop emphasized the value of the "words actually on the page" to indicate that readers learn from texts when they not only read them for their "main ideas," as she says they've largely been taught to do, but also for the "small details." I agree with her that such attention to detail can provide a new perspective on the text and can encourage a reading process

that makes fewer assumptions about "what SHOULD BE on the page." But I also think that there can be a fruitful tension, for a reader, in recognizing what they *think* should be on the page, and what actually *is*, and observing the distance between the two. Gaining a better understanding of the ways in which a text conforms to or challenges the readers preconceived ideas, how it matches or challenges the reader's "external world," is also a strength and value of "close reading" as "a way to read a particular kind of text." This is a kind of reading through which a reader can learn not just the content of a text, not just the details of a text, but also more about their own perspectives and assumptions through recognizing how a text challenges or affirms them – forms of "reflexivities of discomfort," if you will.

Close reading, even as applied to non-literary texts, roots my method at least in part in literary studies. But my method also borrows from social sciences. I am not, after all, reading and analyzing literary texts. Instead, I am reading scholarly works that pull data from, and draw conclusions about, actual students, classroom practices, historical artifacts, and other data. The scholars whose texts I analyze in these pages represented their data in their own texts, and I in turn represent their texts here. In some ways, then, this project is a "qualitative close read" of reading in first-year college composition. As with all qualitative studies, my data set is not comprehensive and is not trying to be comprehensive, Rather, my aim it to take a deep dive into a small sample size to analyze how reading is conceptualized, when it is and isn't emphasized, and what topics or underlying notions it is connected with.

2.5 Representation in Research with "No Human Subjects"

Given the focus, in this project, on published scholarly texts, my research perhaps does not seem to lend itself to a discussion of the thorny issue of representation that is the cause of crisis in qualitative research. However, given that my desire is to better understand how the field

of composition—that is, the scholars who are in the field of composition—perceive or understand reading and reading instruction, I am reading their nonfiction, scholarly, published texts with the assumption that such texts can reveal something of the writers' perspectives. Sometimes, in my close-reading analyses, I am making interpretations about topics, such as reading, that are not explicitly addressed by the authors. In a very real sense, then, I think that I am attempting to "represent" these authors, and that some of the concerns of qualitative research are very relevant to my project as well.

Consider the biologist in VanderMeer's *Annihilation*, and her concern with the map. For her, I think, this was a crisis of representation. In her case, not the direct representation of the human subject, but of the representation of the biological data of Area X, collected by a biological creature (the biologist, a human) who was immersed in and contaminated by the area she was studying. Area X presented unknown dangers to the people within as well as to the world without. The biologist, knowing she was immersed in and contaminated by the area, could not trust herself, but neither could she trust the other researchers. In Area X, there is a constant sense of foreboding, of danger, but as the reader, experiencing this world only through the journal entries of the wildly unreliable—by her own accounts—biologist, it is impossible to know if the danger is outside of the biologist or part of her, or if it is more or less real for being internal or external.

These questions about perspective, about reality, about who makes meaning and how, are asked within the pages of *Annihilation*, but they extend out beyond its fictional walls, as well. Who created the biologist? Was it me, as the reader, conjuring her face, her expressions, her voice, or was it VanderMeer? If he and I were to sit down and discuss the biologist's personality, her motivations, or her character flaws, would we agree? If we didn't, what then? Would either

of us be more correct than the other? Again, these are questions of interpretation, representation, and meaning that are relevant in my role as a researcher in this project *and* to the subject I am researching—reading in writing classes.

Consider the following passage from Louise Rosenblatt's *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*:

> The tendency is to speak of interpretation as the construing of the meaning of a text. This conceals the nature of the reader's activity. Transacting with the signs, he transforms them into verbal symbols, with their sensed auras, and organizes an experienced meaning which is for him "the work." (69)

For Rosenblatt, interpretation was not a process of *finding* meaning (and certainly not of finding a "right" meaning). Rather, meaning, the "poem" itself, is located is in the transaction *between* the reader and the text, in the experience of reading it, and that experience is both deeply contextual and ephemeral:

> The successive readings of a text by an individual reader (even the author himself) will also usually differ, since the first organized experience will influence the expectation and sensitivities which the reader brings to the second reading, and so on. (123)

and

> True, the ephemeral personal evocation which is the literary work cannot be held static for later inspection. It cannot be shared directly with anyone else; it cannot be directly evaluated by others. Its transitory and inward character undeniably presents problems. Yes, in talking about the literary work we must have recourse to introspection and memory—anathema though they may be to those who seek the objectivity of the scientist. We must face these difficulties, not wishfully deny their existence. (132-133)

Whether data—the texts—are literary works, essays, textbooks, or academic journals, the reader/researcher/observer neither mines crystalized gems of meaning from within, nor freely invents meaning from without. Rather, the researcher observes, examines, and analyzes the text closely and carefully, while doing so from the primary context of her self: her eyes perceive the words on the page, her brain processes these words through the lens of her histories and contexts and prior knowledge and beliefs and biases—those she is aware of and those of which she is unaware.

When I think of the balance between "making meaning" and the notion that there is no static, fixed, or objective reality of "the text," but also that this does not mean that everything means just anything, I think of the distinction between honesty and truth. What Pillow, VanderMeer, Berlin, and, Rosenblatt are saying, albeit with differing emphases, is that the researcher and reader can observe, experience, and try to share those observations and experiences with others, even knowing that all of one's observations will vary, are incomplete, and can only be imperfectly communicated. But if the researcher/reader does this thoughtfully, with as much awareness and simultaneously questionings of her situatedness, and her habitual ways of seeing as she can manage, there may be something in what she shares that another researcher/reader might appreciate as well as make useful in her particular research inquiries.

2.6 Locations on This/My Map

In this section, I will try to sketch out the "locations" on my research map. These are the buildings or natural features—I'm not sure which—that feel, in a sense, pre-populated on my mental landscape. They might be called my biases, premises, or assumptions.

The first building—I'll call it a building, since it's a manmade "thing"—on the map is "English," meaning the discipline, the department, the area of study. I am a member of an

English department and I teach composition, and I like it like this. The combination of literary studies and writing studies into one integrated department feels right. I don't remember, as a high school student or undergraduate, ever feeling that it was strange to write nonfiction papers in classes that assigned literary texts. Granted, as a student, I was almost completely unaware of any hierarchy in hiring practices or compensation for writing instructors and literature professors, and I don't mean to belittle them here. But from the perspective of a learner, I always found such richness in all of the kinds of reading and writing we did in English classes, and I still see so much potential in the integration of the two. This is certainly not to say that status quo inequities and hierarchies in institutions of higher education should remain unchanged. Rather, that my inclination would be to move toward greater integration of the two and a removal, if possible, of the hierarchy, rather than to separate them, or keep them separated, in different departments or disciplines.

Another feature on my map is "access." I believe that higher education—and not just vocational training or career-focused degrees, but also liberal arts, studio and performing arts, and humanities degree—should be accessible to everyone who is interested in them. I have nothing against vocational training or degrees that are career-focused, nor do I think that degrees in English, fine arts, or history are inherently better. I certainly don't think a liberal arts degree is the only path to a life rich in ideas or meaning. However, I do think that everyone who wants to take the path of a liberal arts degree, including a degree in English, should have access to one and should be supported—financially, educationally, and emotionally—throughout the process. But, perhaps more to the point, I think that designing programs around the idea that there are some that are practical and some that are intellectual runs the great risk of teaching us all that what is practical cannot be intellectual, and vice versa.

With my students, I often feel there is a palpable anxiety around making sure their investment of time and money is worth it. This seems to skew their interests toward the pragmatic and practical, and away from ways of thinking and learning that aren't presented or framed as being immediately applicable, particularly for getting a job or earning money. This is not a critique of students, but of the larger economic, political, and social systems that benefit from tenuous, contingent employment and underpaid workers. This seems to nurture a situation in which students, institutions, and even scholars think about the purpose and value of areas of study courses through a seemingly pragmatic, outcomes-based lens, and that, in turn, has led to more categorizing and pigeon-holing of different texts and different skills.

I see what feels like evidence of this situation in FYC. Consider, for example, the following notion of text selection as described by Ellen Carillo:

> While it may be tempting to assign only complex selections that students wouldn't otherwise read, a more realistic approach to choosing readings…involves 'accommodat[ing] the fact that college students read lots of textbooks, and productive, working adults read lots of reports, manuals, and memoranda' (Jolliffe 579). ("Preparing" 193)

Notice the concern with employment or working that permeates the description. It is in the call for a "realistic approach" that is set in opposition to "complex selections." I also see it in the Jolliffe quote that suggests FYC should prepare students to be "'productive, working adults,'" and particularly in the notion that such adults read "reports, manuals, and memoranda," which paints a picture of a certain kind of "work." It isn't that I think it is a problem to articulate what makes a course valuable or meaningful. But I think the above description of FYC somehow flattens the academic experience. Why are "complex selections that students wouldn't otherwise

read" an unrealistic choice? What makes anyone think that, if read critically, "'textbooks… reports, manuals, and memoranda'" are any less complex or more straight-forward? If we, college faculty, reinforce these bifurcations and divisions, who will be left to argue that complexity does not fail to be "realistic," or that "productivity" is not the high-water mark for achievement, happiness, or success?

I don't think designing college around all students should mean flattening the academic experience into something so purely pragmatic that it is stripped of its intellectual possibility—in fact, I think the opposite is true. To encourage the same depth and breadth of education for all students, I think it is imperative that we recognize the value and complexity of all kinds of texts, and encourage every student to work through difficulty wherever they encounter it, rather than preemptively making assumptions about what their lives will be when they are "'productive working adults.'"

And finally, on my research map, the third building—perhaps this one is a monument—is "reading." Perhaps this is not surprising, in a study *about* reading that *utilizes* close reading as its primary analytical "tool." This brings me back to what I like about being part of an English department. I think that the reading that is valued, taught, nurtured, and loved in English literature, when incorporated into a program that also values, teaches, and nurtures writing as a process of meaning-making, is well-situated to expand and broaden students' educational experiences while also acknowledging that students deserve to get something back for the investment of time and money they are making when they go to college. This was an idea I already had when I started this dissertation, and it's a thought that only grew stronger as I worked, using the very kinds of reading and analyses in my own study as I most hope to nurture in my classroom.

Consider what Maxine Greene has to say, in *Landscapes of Learning*, about what can be gained from reading literature:

> …[E]ncounters with literary works of art make it possible for us to come in contact with ourselves, to recover a lost spontaneity. This is because, in order to enter into the illusioned world of the novel (or the short story or the poem), we must break with the mundane and taken-for-granted. We must, as it were, bracket out the ordinary world. By allowing ourselves to enter the imaginary mode of awareness, we must submit ourselves to the guidance of an author as we lend a book some of our life." (2)

Some may argue that this sounds romantic, impractical, and far from relevant in the context of a course that began life in connection with an entrance exam, as FYC did. However, what I see here is a desire to educate students in such a way that their worlds become bigger. Whatever their "ordinary world" when they enter the classroom, reading literature breaks with it. It is reading as awareness—of other people, other perspectives, other ways of being.

The only thing I would add to Green's claims here is that I don't think it's limited to literature. In *The New Rhetoric*, Chaim Perelman claims that, "By listening to someone we display a willingness to eventually accept his point of view" (17). I think this suggests that we "enter the imaginary mode of awareness" whenever we are open to someone else's story or ideas, whether fictional or non-fictional, narrative or expository or persuasive.

English, access, and reading. These are the features on the map, that I'm aware of, that were "here"—that is, already in my mind—when I started this project. They were the things that I saw before walking down any paths or turning over any rocks. I don't know if I've made perfect renderings of the features on my map. I'm sure there are other things on the map that should be represented here but that I've rendered invisible. As I continue to add features to the

map throughout this dissertation, I won't be working my way toward a complete or finished map. But I have hoped, throughout my dissertation researching and writing, that it would be—that it is—at the very least more populated with renderings when I come to the end of this project, and that it will either emphasize the most important features, or at least leave space for someone to come along after me to see the map, ask "why" or even "what," and then revise my map to suit their own purposes and contexts.

Chapter 3: "Reading" and "Literacy" in Three U.S.-Based Histories of "English"

Ellen Carillo's concern that compositionists are "leav(ing) the work of defining reading to other fields" (*Securing* 11) raises the question: what do those other fields think of reading? And how do compositionists translate those ideas into composition, if at all? These questions are the subject of this chapter, in which I look closely at how reading is theorized and understood in three monographs from different areas of English studies.

According to Kathleen McCormick in *The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English*, different areas of education and of English studies understand reading differently, and they are not actively informing each other:

> [T]he diverse disciplines that contribute to reading research and pedagogy have not yet engaged in the dialogue that is necessary to interrogate critically the implications of their very different definitions of readers and texts. They are, in one sense, not 'reading' each other. (5)

In order to critically interrogate the implications of the different definitions, a first step is to understand the definitions. I think that is crucial work that could be the subject of an entire project in its own right. Here, I gesture toward that work with a narrow focus on three specific texts.

To do this, I analyze three historical accounts that focus on different areas of English studies for their specific discussions of and relationship to reading. The analysis looks, a bit, into the history of English studies itself, but is really more focused on how the particular scholars perceive that history, especially as it pertains to reading. Based on my close-reading analysis of three foundational historical accounts of different areas of English studies, I argue that "reading"

and “literacy”— the words themselves—are used in connection with literature and remediation to such an extent that they seem to become almost irrelevant to, or even in conflict with, college writing.

3.1 Resistance to Reading in Composition Studies

Some might argue that if reading compositionists haven’t had more success in centering reading, it must be that their arguments aren’t strong. Perhaps, one might think, reading just shouldn’t be a pedagogical or scholarly focus in FYC or composition studies. But I see evidence to suggest that the arguments reading compositionists are making are meeting resistance for a different reason. Rather than being met with robust counter-arguments, they are met with something more like disciplinary inertia or lack of engagement. This chapter grew, in part, out of my questions about the nature of that resistance. Here, I share a few examples to illustrate what I mean, and why I turned to scholars who are not reading compositionists to try to better understand what they mean when they talk about reading.

Ellen Carillo’s book *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition: The Importance of Teaching to Transfer,* published in 2015, includes her account of her difficulty in finding a publisher. In the book, she makes a strong case for understanding the word “composition” as incorporating reading and writing: “both practices of reading and writing involve the construction—or *composition*—of meaning” (5). The book also presents data on a national survey of FYC instructors she conducted. Per her interpretation, although ninety percent of those surveyed referenced “the practice of reading” and eighty-six percent “noted that their syllabi language actually describe reading and writing as connected practices,” over fifty-one percent “were not secure in their abilities to teach reading” (32). She also provides a chapter focused on the composition research that was done between 1980 and 1993 when, in composition studies,

"textbooks, collections of essays, and conferences on the subject of reading (on its own) and connections between reading and writing were plentiful" (74).

Taken together, these arguments and data points, along with numerous other examples from the book, speak to her overall claim that the relative invisibility of reading in composition is problematic. It is also contradictory: the majority of composition courses assign and assess reading in some way, and the majority of people teaching composition recognize reading and writing as "connected practices," and yet there's a lack of disciplinary focus on reading. Yet, even though her argument is explicitly that the discipline should focus more on reading, the discipline's lack of precedence in focusing on reading was the very reason she struggled to find a publisher. Here is Carillo's account of some of responses from some of the manuscript's reviewers:

> Reviewers and the editor at a well-known composition publishing house concluded that this project was not relevant to their book series in composition. One reviewer wrote: "Since most of reading research is done at K-12 and [our] series usually publishes about adult writing, I'm wondering how that fits into the project." The other reviewer agreed, "If students reaching us in college cannot 'read' as in decipher writing, then maybe they shouldn't be there." (10)

The disconnect between these reviewers' understanding of Carillo's project, and Carillo's own definition of reading, her data, and her review of "plentiful" (if now old) writing about reading in composition is staggering to me. In spite of the fact that Carillo's explicit argument is that reading should "secure a place" in composition, one reviewer thinks the project does not belong because reading has not typically had a place in composition. And the other relies on a definition of reading that is reductionist and not representative of Carillo's project at all. And while these

are not necessarily "representative responses" (10), they employ a logic that bears scrutiny: reading does not belong in FYC because it has not been in FYC, so texts on why it might belong in FYC have no place in the literature of FYC.

I have heard Carillo discuss another instance of this problem. It was during the yearly meeting of The Role of Reading in Composition Studies Special Interest Group at the 2017 CCCC. Carillo, who co-led the meeting with Michael Bunn and Debrah Huffman, said that a major stumbling block to robust research on reading in composition was the difficulty of getting grant money to conduct the research. She said that a reason she'd been turned down for funding was that there is so little research in reading in composition—which, as she pointed out, is a problem that is hard to fix if compositionists cannot get funding to do research in reading in composition.

Another way in which the "resistance" to reading in composition appears is less explicit and potentially less intentional. It has to do with a tendency for "reading" to be used synonymously with "literature." For example, not long ago, I purchased a book based on its title: *Writing and Reading Differently: Deconstruction and the Teaching of Composition and Literature*. When I bought it, I took the title and subtitle to mean that the volume would address deconstruction in writing and reading practices in both composition and literature. Instead, the book is organized around three parts: Deconstruction and Teaching, Deconstruction and the Teaching of Composition, and Deconstruction and the Teaching of Literature. The "writing and reading" in the book's title didn't, after all, indicate an understanding of the two as connected practices, but instead used "writing" as synonymous with composition" and "reading" as synonymous with "literature." Because "reading" is considered only in connection with

"literature," the book does not address the topic of deconstruction in connection with reading practices in connection with composition at all.

The common thread that I see in these three examples is that reading is dis-included in composition not as a result of active arguments against it, but as a result of ideas and perceptions about reading, and about composition, that are mostly unexamined—but perhaps all the stronger for it.

3.2 Perceptions of Reading in English Studies

To gain more understanding of the ideas and perceptions about reading and composition that are part of the context in which reading compositionists are working, I began by looking outside the context of reading compositionists. All three monographs analyzed in this chapter provide a historical account of some aspect of English studies. Further, they are themselves works from more than twenty years ago. Like all historical accounts, each of these reveals something of the historian and the historian's context—the prevailing ideas and frameworks of the time and place *in* which they were written, as much as the time and place *about which* they were written. Robert Scholes says, "About the past we can tell stories and write histories. Our own time, however, is a foreign country, whose customs are never clear to us" (1). What these scholars wrote about reading, FYC, composition, K-12 English education, and other aspects of the history of English in the United States reveals a lot about the assumptions, beliefs, and ideas they themselves had at the time they were writing.

In this way, historical accounts not only provide information about the eras and events they examine, but also provide insight as to the priorities, perspectives, and biases of the authors who wrote them—to the extent, at least, that the information they provide can be separated from the priorities, perspectives, and biases through which they interpret them. My goals were situated

and specific as well. My close reading analyses of the authors' accounts of the material, institutional, and pedagogical circumstances under which ideas about reading developed in the discipline of English did not aim to draw conclusions about the entire field of English. Nor did I aim to use these three texts as representatives of how reading has been understood in specific contexts within English. Rather, I undertook to learn more about how reading was written about and understood—the contexts in which it was raised, the ideas and terms it was aligned with or set in opposition—in these particular texts written by these particular authors.

I suppose, to use the metaphor of the map in *Annihilation*, I could say that each of these scholars drew a map of English and/or composition studies. Each of their maps "emphasiz[ed] some things" while "making other things invisible" (VanderMeer 66). Rather than attempting to draw my own map on top of theirs, I merely aimed to analyze what it was they emphasized, and to make my own observations about those emphases. The monographs I chose are as follows:

- Arthur Applebee's 1974 *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English: a History*, which is a highly influential and foundational text in English Education in the United States, in particular. It is widely understood to provide a comprehensive history of the teaching of English, though its primary focus is literary studies.
- Susan Crowley's 1998 *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*, which examines specifically the U.S.-situated history of composition, especially first-year composition, through the lens of "its situation in the university" (IX).
- Miles Myers' 1996 *Changing Our Minds: Negotiating English and Literacy*, which traces changing notions of literacy in American public schools.

The reasons behind my choice of these three particular texts include that each offer historical accounts of a specific area of English studies. While I would not argue that they could be said to

be fully representative of the ideas or perspectives of scholars in their corresponding areas of study, they do offer some insight into those areas. Taken together, it is especially the similarities amongst them that suggest some sense of commonality regarding ideas and perspectives about reading, and in turn the context into which reading compositionists' arguments may be landing.

I also chose them because I first read all three as a graduate student in a program called "Teaching of English." As I said in Chapter 1, many, if not most, composition instructors and scholars have degrees in something other than composition. This indicates that both individual compositionists and composition studies as a whole **are** deeply influenced by other areas of English, such as those explored by Applebee and Myers.

3.3 What is "English?": Interrogating my Assumptions

In terms of my own context and assumptions, it is important to acknowledge that, for a variety of reasons I will briefly sketch below, I came to this project with an understanding of English Studies as a large umbrella under which literary studies, composition studies, and even K-12 English education were housed. However, this assumption was challenged by the strong disciplinary lenses with which Applebee, Crowley, and Myers identified with the specific area of the specific discipline in which they worked. In fact, in *Composition in the University* Sharon Crowley argued that composition should be entirely removed from English departments.

I think it cannot be overstated how much an individual's assumptions about "English"—as a university department, a field of study, or a type of course—inform their views on "reading" and "writing." My own understanding was very much informed by the fact that, as a student, I was never aware of a disconnect between reading and writing. In high school, regardless of what any given class was actually called, I called them "English." In college, I majored in "English." Graduate school is, I think, where the distinctions between literary studies and composition or

writing studies would have become more obvious to me if I had studied literature or composition. But instead, I got a teaching degree—a Master of Arts in Teaching Secondary English—which was specifically designed for people with an undergraduate degree in English but no teaching certificate. It was a good program, and I learned a lot from it, but one thing I did not learn was that literature and composition are separate disciplines—because, in secondary English classes, they aren't. And then again at CJCC, I work in the "English" department, which houses both composition and literature courses.

I mention all of this partly because it deeply informed my initial readings of all three of the texts presented here, and part of my process of coming to understand the disciplinary bifurcations in English studies involved each of these texts. That process, in turn, informs my assumption that composition studies is deeply informed by other areas of English—even if some compositionists do not think that composition studies should fall under the umbrella of "English."

Such deeply held and often unquestioned assumptions about "English" are, I think, one of the mechanisms by which scholars in the field misunderstand one another. At the very least, it was one of the mechanisms by which I had to learn how to read certain scholars whose assumptions were different from my own. Even the words "reading" and "writing" are weighted with different, and sometimes contradictory, assumptions for different scholars. Often, I have read past them. Yet, once I began to see them, they were so obvious I couldn't believe it had taken me so long.

What follows is my written analysis of each monograph, which focuses in particular on how each author uses "reading" and "literacy"—with what definition, in connection to what topics, and with what connotations. The chapter ends with some of my "early thoughts"

regarding the disconnects and bifurcations I see between/among the texts. While I do not claim that these three authors fully represent their respective "areas" of English, what I do show is that "reading" and "literacy" are used in different, and sometimes contradictory, ways among different scholars. Further, I show that "reading" is, in some cases, defined by and connected with practices and ideas that are not conducive to inclusion in writing classrooms, but that these definitions and connections seem inadvertent rather than intentional.

3.4 "Reading" in Applebee's Foundational *Tradition and Reform*

Applebee's *Tradition and Reform* has been called "the only comprehensive history of the subject as it developed in the United States" (Caughlan 243). Yet, Applebee himself claimed that his focus was on "the teaching of literature," which he called "the aspect of the teaching of English that has, since the beginning, taken up the largest portion of the teacher's time, energy, and enthusiasm" (x). Applebee, in focusing his project around the teaching of literature, did several things in regard to how he situated reading and reading instruction. First, he presented "English" as an advanced subject. By this, I mean that he set the work of learning to read (as in learning to decode language) outside of the definition of "English." Second, he defined English, meaning the teaching of literature, as somewhat in opposition to composition. I say "somewhat" because he did not indicate that composition *should not* be part of English departments—just that it *was not* part of that which he claimed accounted for "the largest portion of the teacher's time, energy, and enthusiasm."

Applebee wrote about "reading" and, somewhat separately, about "the teaching of reading." When he used the phrase "the teaching of reading," he meant "elementary reading instruction," or the teaching of (mostly) children how to decode written language (1). And, although he said such instruction was "the earliest form of systematic instruction in the

vernacular," he also placed it in "Chapter 1: Early Traditions," literally prior to "Chapter II: The Birth of a Subject." In other words, "the teaching of reading" was both "elementary" and not part of English studies.

In Applebee's account of the birth of English, two moments stood out to me as particularly relevant to the understanding of what, for him, "English" and "reading" (distinct from "the teaching of reading") meant. The first was the moment Applebee called "the real milestone," which was "the Harvard requirement for 1873-74: literature was to be studied, not for itself or even for philology, but as a subject for composition" (30). The "milestone" was literature being required in college, with the qualifier that it wasn't yet studied "for itself." The second moment is one Applebee called "a clear victory:"

> Rather than as a subject for composition, literature would be studied in its own right: examination texts were to be selected "as well for their probably attractiveness to the preparatory student as for their intrinsic importance." (32)

Applebee called this "the final separation of the requirements in literature from those in composition" (31). In this, Applebee defined the "birth" of English around literature's addition to the college curriculum and its separation from composition. This dual bifurcation—college from earlier education and literature from composition—is consistent throughout *Tradition and Reform*.

These premises—the value and centrality of "the teaching of literature" and the literature/composition and college/elementary bifurcations—informed Applebee's interpretations of later shifts and debates in English. Consider, for example, his section on Reading in the chapter "Narrowed Goals." It begins:

> During the 1940s, teachers of English as well as of reading began to take a new interest in the problems of the relatively mature reader. Propelled in part by the new evidence of how difficult accurate reading could be, this concern led eventually to the inclusion of "developmental reading programs" in many secondary schools. (160)

This calls up the term he had earlier used to describe teaching children how to read in their native language: "the teaching of reading." Applebee included in his consideration teachers of English and of reading, but in doing so, defined them as distinct from one another. That the above passages is not about young children learning to read for the first time, but about older readers who encounter reading "problems" is consistent with his earlier linking of "the teaching of reading" to elementary school. Yet, these reading problems, seemingly the result of "how difficult accurate reading could be," were apparently not problems for all students—only some, who needed "'developmental reading programs'" (he did not elaborate on the specific nature of the reading problems or programs).

What is so interesting about this to me is that the "new evidence of how difficult accurate reading could be" came from literary studies. According to Applebee, it was I.A. Richards' "illustrations of the usefulness of close and rigorous scrutiny of the semantics of a text," such as his "exaggerated" analysis in *How to Read a Page*, that convinced "teachers of literature" that "reading is hard work, full of obstacles to be overcome on the way to appreciation and enjoyment" (158-159). This rising concern with student reading problems, which he says was also influenced by "illiteracy rates in the armed forces" leading up to World War II, led to the turn toward "competency" (159).

The word "literacy" isn't one that Applebee used much. He did not focus much attention on children or adults learning to read, as in decoding written language. But it did come up, in the

form of "illiteracy," when Applebee explained the post-World War II turn toward reading concerns focused on reading accuracy and competence in adult or "more mature" readers. As Applebee described it:

> This emphasis on the unity of the language arts was furthered by programs set up in some colleges to meet the problem of illiteracy in the armed services. These programs usually united departments of speech and of English under the blanket term "communications." (159)

What I see in Applebee's description of what was happening in English in the mid-twentieth century is a split between what might be considered a pure study of literature (my term, not Applebee's) and a study of language that was more associated with practicality—and, indeed, was not necessarily part of "English" but instead was "communications". These are not, in Applebee's description of the issues and concerns of the time, formally or even entirely separated from each other. Rather, his description indicates that there was (in the mid-century and perhaps also in Applebee's own mind as he was writing in the 1970s) an informal but persistent connection between reading *problems*—Applebee's mention of "illiteracy rates" in the armed forces being one example of these, and struggling high school students being another—and ideas about reading instruction that emphasized mechanics, the content of assigned readings, and important life skills.

The study of reading as it pertained to this more practical or applied idea of education—education that "sought to ensure that the general student would have the 'competence' necessary to meet the varied demands of life" (156)—appears to consistently be linked, for Applebee, to non-literary concerns. For instance, Applebee wrote:

> The twenties and thirties…also saw the beginnings of a new body of scholarship concerned with language as a vehicle for conveying meaning. Originally prompted by the use of propaganda during World War I, the work of I.A. Richards, C.K. Ogden, and Alfred Korzybski sought to explicate how systems of meaning operate and, as a corollary, how meaning can be distorted….Americans became especially interested in such studies, especially as they related to newspapers, radio, and film. (157)

All of this speaks to a tendency to think of "teaching reading" as fundamentally different from "teaching literature." And yet, reading in this passage is not connected to early literacy or teaching children to read. Rather, it is focused on remediating reading problems that plagued "the relatively mature reader." That is, adolescent and older people who could read, but who, it was feared, weren't reading with enough "accuracy" and "competence." According to Applebee, this kind of teaching reading used texts like Reader's Digest "'simplified' editions" and was focused on issues such as "'sentence comprehension,' 'reading speed,' 'phonics,' and 'vocabulary'" (161).

What I find relevant here is that, while it is implied rather than stated explicitly, reading instruction and the study of literature are divided from each other, and reading instruction (again, outside of early literacy, which Applebee didn't really see as part of "English as a major school subject") is consistently linked with remediation or reading problems, and with nonfiction/nonliterary texts. Additionally, where Applebee clearly favored literary instruction in which the literature is studied "for its own sake," non-literary reading instruction was linked for him with civic importance and life skills.

The above passages are consistent with Applebee's perspectives on, connotations of, and connections with reading throughout *Tradition and Reform*. Writing before composition studies

was a robust field unto itself, and without a personal or professional investment in composition, he is not at all engaged with arguments about reading in composition. What I see in his writing, though, is a perception of reading, and particularly the teaching of reading, that is strongly connected to early literacy, reading problems, or literary study. That, combined with his perception of composition that is strongly disconnected from literature, lays the groundwork for a perception of reading as being incompatible with, or at least disassociated from, writing instruction.

3.5 Literature, Composition, and Humanism in *Composition in the University*

Published more than twenty years after *Tradition and Reform*, *Composition in the University* came out of a very different context—one in which composition studies had developed into a discipline in its own right (North 9). Crowley writes as both an advocate for and an adversary of composition. Crowley's primary argument throughout the book was that the historical purpose of FYC was to create "educated persons" in the tradition of Arnoldian humanism (9) and that, because of the elitist and otherwise problematic nature of this purpose, FYC should not continue to be universally required (18). Instead, she argued, composition studies should be divorced from literary studies and from the humanities/humanism, reconnected with its rhetorical roots, and re-oriented around pragmatist approaches. She described pragmatism as an "action-oriented and forward-looking philosophical orientation" associated with John Dewey, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Stanley Fish, and others, that is "interested in the questions 'what shall we do?' and 'what are the consequences of our actions?'" (16). Reading is not an explicit focus in her book, but her ideas and perspectives on reading permeate and, I think, shape her argument.

Crowley, like Applebee, acknowledged the intertwined history of composition and literary studies, writing that "it is not possible to fully understand the history of literary studies without considering its relation to composition" (2). Thus, like Applebee, she included the history of both areas of study in order to focus on one of them, but for her, that focus is college composition. It is, perhaps, partly because her focus is composition that she expresses real frustration with not only the humanism in literary studies, which she saw as unethical, but also with literary studies itself, especially as it influenced FYC instructors and, therefore, courses. This impacted how she wrote about reading. Consider the following passage, with my emphases:

> The problems that confront a humanist agenda for composition instruction are formidable. First of all, *modern humanists privilege reading over writing*…. My review of the historical arguments put forth to justify the *reading of literary texts* in the first-year composition course…suggests that *reading and discussion of literature* receive far more attention in humanist curricula than does actual instruction in composition…. To assert, as I do, that *the act of composing differs appreciably from the act of reading* is to challenge two fundamental premises of modern humanist pedagogy, namely, that the point of composition is to express oneself and that the point of writing is to represent or reflect upon the quality of one's reading experience. While *teachers of composition do analyze completed texts*, they do so in order to gain a better *understanding* of how texts are composed. People who study and teach composition are also interested in *understanding* how human events are affected by oral and written texts, and they *investigate* the ways in which texts put cultural values into circulation among various publics. (13-14)

Upon first reading this passage, I had no idea what to make of Crowley's claim that "the act of composing differs appreciably from the act of reading" because, as I saw it, she went on to describe a variety of ways that teachers of composition read: they "analyze" and "investigate" texts to gain "better understanding." It was only when I realized that Crowley hadn't used the word "read" to describe these practices that I started to understand that, for her, "reading" is very closely associated with the study of literature and, therefore, the humanist agenda. I don't mean to suggest that she would actively argue that analyzing and investigating a text do not include reading it (or the reverse, that "reading" does not mean analyzing and investigating). Rather, I'm saying that, in the passage above, the word "reading" is associated with "literature.' And, since Crowley saw literary studies and composition studies as being in conflict with each other, the association of reading with literature amounted to *dis*associating reading from composition.

The literature/composition bifurcation in *Composition in the University* is not unlike that in *Tradition and Reform*. For reading to be "privileged over writing," there has to be not only a split, but a conflict between the two—not a sense that they are integrated processes. Yet, I think it's important to note that, when Crowley argued that "the act of composing differs appreciably from the act of reading," she was speaking from within the context of the institutional privileging of reading (literature) over writing (composition). She was pushing back on the idea that "the point of composition is to express oneself," which she believed was a prevailing belief in English departments—meaning, in her view, departments of literary studies.

What is also happening in the above passage is a very strong link from "reading" to "literature." When Crowley uses the word "reading," it is in the context of humanists, whose interest is literature. So reading in composition is, for Crowley, a matter of assigning and teaching literature from a humanist perspective. In a way, "reading" in the above passage is less

about a process in which students (and others) engage, and more about a thing which students are assigned. When Crowley writes, "reading and discussion of literature receive far more attention in humanist curricula than does actual instruction in composition," the situation she is critiquing isn't the teaching of reading as part of teaching writing, which isn't in her mind, but the teaching of literature that happens instead of teaching writing.

In addition to seeing literature and composition in conflict or opposition with each other, Crowley understood literary studies in particular, and English studies overall, to be "humanist" in nature. And, having already defined humanism as anti-democratic and inappropriate for composition, she effectively positions composition (writing) in opposition not just to humanism, but also to *reading*.

I take all of this to mean that, for Crowley, "reading" not only defaulted to "reading literature," but to "reading literature from the humanist perspective"— reading that is "meant to produce an educated person" (9) by exposing students to "values" and "the best that has been thought and said" (13). Reading in this context is for exposure and appreciation, to build taste and refinement among certain classes of people. If she associated "reading" with exposure and appreciation, then it's hardly surprising that she did not see reading instruction as part of the purpose of composition.

Like Applebee, Crowley had little to say about "literacy," but where she did include it, it was in connection with student deficiency and a need for remediation—again, like Applebee. For example:

> Academics' desire that students master the so-called "basic" principles of composition in Freshman English is understandable, given their own lack of interest in attending to student literacy. Freshman English is supposed to "fix" students' supposed lack of literate

mastery once and for all, so that teachers of more advanced courses do not have to bother with such things (8).

Crowley resisted the notion that students need "fixing," and expressed skepticism regarding students' "supposed lack of literate mastery," but even more strongly, in my view, resisted the idea that Freshman English, or FYC, should be defined as the place to deal with "literate mastery." A way of viewing this is to say that, in arguing that composition courses could and should do more than remediate students' supposed problems, she also argued against "attending to student literacy" in any form, because she associated it with remediation.

Crowley's use of both "reading" and "literacy" all but defined reading and reading instruction out of composition altogether. If "reading" indicates humanist literary traditions and "literacy" indicates student deficiency, and Crowley does not think composition should be humanist, literary-focused, or a project of fixing students' "supposed lack," then there's simply no place for reading in her idea of what composition can and should be.

That said, though her argument posits reading almost in opposition to composition, the meaning of "reading" is so exclusively connected to literature and humanism that it has little in common with, for example, Carillo's argument in *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition*. That said, I'm left with the sense that Crowley was having a different conversation than that of the reading compositionists who advocate for the integration of reading and writing in FYC. Thus, I'm not convinced that Crowley's argument necessitates that reading be disassociated from composition—I think that happened almost inadvertently because of Crowley's deep association between "reading" and literature.

For example, in *Intertexts*, Marguerite Helmers argued that "'attentive' re-reading or 'in-depth' readings are terms applied to reading practices that are ideal" (Preface ix). I don't see any

of the emphasis, in Helmers' idea of reading, on either literary appreciation or the perceived need to "'fix' students" that Crowley found so troubling. The problems Crowley had with reading were elitism, (the humanist project of exposure to the right sorts of texts) and remediation (a course that "fixes" students "lack of literate mastery").

3.6 Reading, Literacy, and School in *Changing Our Minds*

Changing Our Minds: Negotiating English and Literacy, by Miles Myers, was published in 1996. Myers traced shifting social needs for literacy in the United States from 1660 (at that time, the colonies) to 1983, focusing the bulk of his attention on early education through high school, or "K-12," with little emphasis on college. Another difference between Myers and either Applebee or Crowley, who were more focused on college, is that he was much more focused on the *cultural* history of literacy than on the *institutional* history of English as a subject or discipline, though naturally there is overlap in the two topics. When he did touch on institutional issues—the schooling of literacy—his emphasis was different. Where Crowley and Applebee focused on institutional histories such as the connection—and conflict—between composition and literature, Myers' institutional focus had more to do with state guidelines, standardized tests, and other official definitions of literacy and reading. The disciplinary conflicts that shape so much about Applebee and Crowley's accounts of the history of English and composition in higher education do not appear to be a factor in K-12, at least in Myers' account. What is a factor is the pressure and influence of evaluating students and schools via standardized tests and other assessments.

On the surface, any differences between Myers' use of "reading" and "literacy" and Crowley and Applebee's offers limited insight—Myers' project is different, and is specifically focused on literacy, so naturally, he uses the word far more and is more deliberate about defining

and describing it. So in some ways, it's actually the similarities that are telling. That said, the differences do indicate the extent to which different people in "English" may mean very different things when they use these words, perhaps depending largely in which "parts" of English they are rooted: K-12 education, literary studies, or college composition.

Regarding the word "reading," Myers expressed a definition or idea of reading different from either Applebee or Crowley, and one that I see as connected to his different context of K-12 education. "Reading," for Myers, was a skill with which one can have varied levels of proficiency. For example in the following:

> In 1984, NAEP [National Assessment of Educational Progress] decided to say that the different score levels for reading—rudimentary, basic, intermediate, adept, and advanced—were qualitatively different acts and that basic reading was the old, decoding level, which is essentially bit-by-bit reading, and that adept reading is interpretive, which is close to the new standard which society now desires. (107)

Unlike anything in either Applebee or Crowley, this comes close to the kind of "reading" that reading compositionists like Jolliffe and Carillo, whom I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, seem to be talking about when they advocate for the inclusion of reading instruction in FYC: advanced and interpretive, rather than remedial or literary.

Another difference from Crowley or Applebee is that, for Myers, the word "literacy" was not always connected with a discussion of student deficiency. Because his project was to trace changing definitions of literacy in the United States over time, he used it descriptively, to identify and name different ways of thinking about and of practicing reading and writing (and speaking and listening). For example, he said:

> This book argues that this historical moment [the mid-1990s] is a transition from decoding/analytic literacy to translation/critical literacy. During decoding/analytic literacy, cognition was defined as a hierarchy of isolated, universal skills which are acquired through school drills, exercises, and sequenced assignments. In translation/critical literacy, cognition is defined as a skill which is acquired and shaped by participation in socially organized practices. (157)

With the focus on defining or explaining the different meanings of "literacy" as they developed over time, Myers' uses the word to indicate that everyone's literacy can be described or categorized. This contrasts with Applebee and Crowley, who only used it in the context of literary problems. However, Myers' project was also invested in understanding how, when, and why different literacies have developed over time, and how such changes are connected to—impacting and being impacted by—schooling. In this, Myers did indicate that the issue of literacy is always, in educational settings, linked with evaluation: students' literacy is tested, and those tests are used to evaluate individual students, individual schools, and also public schooling as a whole.

By contrast, for Crowley and Applebee, the use of the word "literacy" was more associated with evaluation than with description, and the assumption was that a person's literacy levels exist on a continuum of less literate to more literate—and that "more literate" is better. Neither Applebee nor Crowley argued that this *should* be the case, but they used the word "literacy" with the assumption that it has these meanings. Again, Applebee mentioned the concerns about "illiteracy" among soldiers in the armed forces (159), and Crowley derided professors in non-English departments for wanting FYC to "'fix' students' supposed lack of

literate mastery" (8). The idea being, in both, that literacy is something one either has or has not "mastered."

Myers complicates that view of literacy significantly by focusing on not only the differences between different periods of literacy, but also on the particular strengths of previous forms of literacy that are not strengths of other forms. For example, when describing oral literacy (or oracy—for Myers, "literacy" indicated listening and speaking as well as print-based communication), Myers emphasized the significance of physical movements and vocal inflections, as well as the importance of memory and of group identity (23-26). These elements of oral culture do not exist in print-based forms of literacy, or aren't as emphasized or effective. Myers also argued that previously-dominant forms of literacy do not disappear when a new form takes dominance. Instead, students in classrooms may exhibit any of the forms of literacy, and competence or skill in any of them should be recognized as such:

> [O]ral cultures use a conversational logic in which things are connected through a large number of shared inferences, through memories devices like *and* or *then*, and through gestures based on the special rules of face-to-face events, and through fragments and hesitations, which help the speaker avoid looking unnecessarily authoritative and, thus, anti-social. It is easy to see these oral traditions at work in classrooms when students turn to personal stories to answer questions about larger generalities. (28)

and

> English teachers should understand that the resistance to literacy in our English classrooms is not a simple matter of individual deviancy or irritability. Resistance to literacy has a long and honorable history. (28)

In other words, students who may appear to a teacher to be lacking in literacy may instead be highly competent in a different form of literacy, and may be actively resistant to learning a different form of literacy.

Myers did not use the word “literacy” in the context of deficiency, but he indicated that it is very often is used in such contexts. In fact, a large part of his argument was that schools and students can be incorrectly deemed deficient due to conflicting notions of literacy and changes in the cultural landscape leading to a shift in the dominant literacy: “[D]espite gains in decoding/analytic literacy, our country, at the national, state, and local levels, was moving toward new definitions of what it means to be literate…” (1). Far from failing at their task, “public schools in the U.S. have succeeded in attaining the goals of decoding/analytic literacy, which were adopted in 1916, but that today they are being asked to adopt a new standard of literacy, one which is not well understood by either the public or the profession” (xi). In arguing that schools and students should not be deemed deficient when what has actually happened is that the goal of “literacy” had changed, Myers shows how closely the topic of literacy is to the topic of student/school evaluation and the potential for being labeled as deficient.

But Myers’ use of “literacy” was not entirely free from his own thoughts of deficiency. It took the form of concerns for students who were deficient in the dominant form at any given time. In expressing these concerns, he also revealed a proclivity or bias toward literature as a tool for developing literacy:

> The *importance of literacy* for the workplace, for enrichment of cultural resources, and for citizenship does not eliminate the need for *literacy for personal growth*. Increasingly, society has found that problems of drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and gang violence are not only problems of personal growth, but also problems of civics and of the workplace.

> The questions of "What is difference," "What is love," "What is personal responsibility," "Who am I"—*all crucial questions in the literature of English classes*—are foundational issues for problems of personal growth and, at the same time, foundational problems for civics and the workplace. (7; emphasis mine)

Here, Myers listed multiple reasons and ways that literacy is important, including the notion of personal growth that suggests a link with Arnoldian humanism and the early "ethical tradition" in the teaching of English, in which, Applebee said, texts were chosen because they were thought to shape the morals and behaviors of the students (Applebee 2).

These sentences do not accuse students of being deficient, but they do link "literacy" (or lack thereof) to "foundational problems." What Myers expressed was concern for students whose English classes may not recognize the continued need for "literacy of personal growth" as the dominant literacy changed to one that emphasized "literacy for the workplace…and for citizenship." But I cannot help but note that such connections go both ways. If it is understood or believed that "problems of drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and gang violence" can increase if students lack a certain kind of literacy ("literacy for personal growth"), that can too easily become an assumption that students who are seen to be "lacking" in certain kinds of literacy are also abusing drugs, getting pregnant, and participating in gang violence. Or, at least, that they are more likely to do so. This could, I think, contribute to a deficiency model of education, wherein students—or the culture they are presumed to be part of—might be blamed for their own "lack" of skills as well as dominant versions of "appropriate and/or approved" cultural values and behaviors.

Myers' inclusion of literature in these sentences is also telling. He seems to be arguing that literacy for personal growth can be achieved not just in English classes or through the

reading of any kind of text, but specifically through reading (and writing and talking about) literature in English classes. This, to me, is very similar to Applebee's notions of "reading" and their connection to the reading of literature, even though the two projects have such different emphases. Given that Crowley also had strong associations between reading and literature, I cannot help but wonder how strong and/or prevalent this association is in the context of English studies, writ large.

Of course, "literacy," which is the word Myers uses in the above passage, is not the same as "reading," so it's important not to conflate Myers' connections to literature with Applebee's. But in a way, the fact that Myers linked literacy and literature, where Applebee's link was between literature and "reading," is a telling difference. Again, Applebee was focused on "the teaching of literature" and also mostly on college, in the sense of English as a field of study that had an institutional presence on college campuses. For him, literacy was not linked with literature at all—in fact, in his account, when a program's focus was to remediate problems of illiteracy, that program was less likely to assign literary texts. Instead, such programs might use "carefully graded films, comics, and basic texts" or "simplified editions of popular novels" (160-161). Perhaps Myers was responding to this tendency of programs to move away from literature when teaching "developmental reading" and explains why he felt compelled to remark on literature's relevance to literacy in his passage. Still, even if Myers and Applebee were responding to a similar observation about the tendency to use non-literary materials when teaching developmental reading, Applebee's inclination was to respond by distancing "the teaching of literature" or even "English" from "the teaching of reading." Myers, by contrast, was compelled to make a case for the value of literature when teaching literacy.

3.7 Reading, Literature, and Literacy in Composition: Some Early Thoughts

When I started this analysis, I wasn't sure whether a deep dive into how reading was understood or used in three different books, from three different areas of "English," would translate to a better understanding of the theories of reading inform the field of composition studies. I'm still not "sure" about this, but I have some thoughts that are informed by what I've observed in the three texts.

One is that not all ideas about reading rise to the level of "theory." I think it would be a misrepresentation of Crowley, for example, to say that her "theory of reading" is based in humanist literary studies. I think that would suggest that Crowley's ideas about the *act and process* of reading that it amounts to exposure to great texts that develop one's taste and changes them into "an educated person." She clearly does not believe this. Instead, I think my analysis is really about the *word* "reading" and how it gets used, and when it is avoided, because of particular connotations and connections the speaker/writer has attached to it.

I am by no means the first person to observe that the word "reading" means different things to different people. Myers said as much—he said, when talking about "reading," one needs to ask, "Do you mean "reading-as-memorized-oration" or oral catechism, a dominant form of literacy during recitation literacy, or do you mean "reading-as-silent-decoding," a dominant form of reading during decoding/analytic literacy?" (282). McCormick made a similar observation: "What does it mean to read? People read all the time, yet their reasons for reading—and what they understand by 'read' and 'reading'… are as diverse as the texts they read and the ways they explain what it is to read" (1).

I'm also not the first to notice disciplinary and institutional conflicts and bifurcations between composition and literary studies. Crowley thought the division so entrenched that

composition should be removed from English altogether, arguing that "Within English departments, where composition is usually housed, the center of intellectual interest is not composition but literary studies" (1-2). And in *Intertexts*, Helmers recognized the division even as she argued for a change in perspective: "[T]he intent of this book is not to 'bridge the gap' between the teaching of writing and the teaching of literature, but to argue that any 'gap' between reading and writing is a construct" (Preface x).

But along with reinforcing that there are different meanings of "reading" and that there are deep disciplinary divides between composition and literature, my systematic analyses of the three texts in this chapter have enabled me to interpret additional (dis)connections as well. For instance, while I had previously recognized a division between K-12 education and higher education, I had not yet fully appreciated that "reading" might have different connotations and emphases in those two spaces. Further, I had never before noticed that scholars in composition and literary studies may actually share ideas, associations, and notions of "reading." Ironically, those similar definitions—both groups associating "reading" with "literature"—may serve to increase compositionists' resistance to integration reading into composition studies.

Similarly, I had not even anticipated having any focus or insights on "literacy" in this chapter. It was only when I noticed that, while Crowley and Applebee discussed it infrequently, when they did, it was always in the context of student deficiency and remediation. This, too, could be a factor in why "reading" may be an unwelcome addition to composition studies, which, according to Crowley, already struggles to be seen as something other than a site of remediation.

Taken together, the texts of Applebee, Crowley, and Myers suggest definitions of reading that, while varied, expansive, and shifting, somehow never "fit" with anything that would be

likely to be included in FYC, for both institutional and pedagogical reasons. When reading was understood to be the work of advanced study, as in Applebee and Crowley, it was also seen to be connected with literary texts. When it was used in non-literary connotations, both authors limited that use to reading problems and remediation. In the case of Applebee, non-literary reading instruction was seen as synonymous with the project of teaching young children. Only in *Changing our Minds* was reading was recognized as encompassing all "levels" from "rudimentary, basic, intermediate, adept, and advanced," and understood as "qualitatively different acts." Unfortunately for reading compositionists, Myers was working primarily in the context of K-12 assessment.

In the story Ellen Carillo told about some reviewers' reactions to the manuscript for her book on reading in composition, I'm struck anew by Carillo's title: *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition*. Given the definitions of reading as literary-focused and literacy-focused as well as the institutional divides between K-12 and college and between literature and composition studies, it really does feel as if there is currently no *place* for reading in composition. It has been effectively excised from writing studies by virtue of how it has been defined by prominent scholars as well as by the institutional locations of the different definitions.

Chapter 4. Layered Bifurcations: Reading, Literacy, Remediation, Literature

In her 2000 essay “English Education in-the-Making,” Janet L. Miller examined implications of the fact that, when teachers teach reading and writing, we do so within the institution called school. Working from within Toni Morrison’s arguments regarding the “’polluted visions’” that have “’sabotaged various American writers’ imaginations’” in regard to race (34), Miller argued, “Morrison's powerful work compels us, as teachers of writing and reading, to work with our students to identify what Morrison calls a ‘willful critical blindness’…” (35). Institutionalized versions of curriculum, according to Miller, often result in elements of English education being positioned as pre-determined, pre-packaged, decontextualized versions of what those in power deem as what “counts” as school knowledge or “official” knowledge. Such versions can lead to “conflicts, bifurcated emphases, and external pressures for standardization and accountability” that, for many teachers and students, have “fragmented, over-loaded, constrained, and ‘normalized’ pedagogical imaginations” (35). Again working from within Morrison’s claims about “polluted vision,” Miller said that such imposed constraints “indeed might pollute our visions as English educators” (35).

This argument acknowledges that reading, writing, teaching, and learning can exist outside of or apart from institutional contexts, and that the institutional context, especially within contemporary education policies that demand standardization, high stakes testing and measurable-only versions of accountability in the U.S., limits rather than expands. Contexts that are limiting can help to focus one’s vision, but they can also “pollute” or “constrain” one’s vision. When applied to composition as a discipline, field of study, or sequence of courses, the question of institutional constraints on pedagogical vision offers a clarifying lens through which

to understand specific ways in which reading, as it has been defined and understood, has been separated from composition.

The goal of this chapter is to more thoroughly explore the bifurcations and divides that I observed in my analysis in Chapter 3. Specifically, the overlaps and layers of K-12 ideas of reading and literacy, and literary ideas of reading that come out of higher education, and how (and whether) they interact with FYC, this time not in the context of historical accounts of the field of English, as in Chapter 3, but in texts that explicitly theorize about reading.

4.1 Exploring the Institutional Divides

First, some context for the institutional divisions that can lead to theoretical and pedagogical fragmentation across disciplines that theorize about reading. Applebee's account of the "birth" of English is again illuminating on this point. Applebee said that, in the early days of English, there existed intense pressure for English to justify its existence in higher education, in large part because reading and writing in the English language (what Applebee called "the vernacular" to indicate that it was first-language instruction) was taught at the youngest school levels. Therefore, Applebee said, teaching or learning "English" in college (rather than classical languages) required that English studies establish a methodology and prove itself rigorous. According to Applebee, English found these in philology and, in a different way, composition (21-26).

Philology, in Applebee's description, was, broadly speaking, an attempt to systematically "study a national spirit" through its "attention to grammar, criticism, geography, political history, customs, mythology, literature, art, and ideas of a people" (25-26). When simplified, it was often considered a "study of language" (26). Unlike reading literature for "the goal of 'appreciation'" as "a number of influential teachers" at Yale and Cornell tried to offer, philology was understood

to be both systematic and difficult—that is, rigorous (26). In fact it was so difficult, according to Applebee, that it "asked more than most men could manage, requiring a systematic, analytic scholarship on the one hand and a creative, synthetic mind on the other" (26). It was this rigorous methodology, with a focus on language and culture, that helped bring English literature into the realm of things that might be studied, as "philology became more confident in its modern studies" (25). So, from the beginning, literary studies had to justify its existence in part based on the argument that it was rigorous—that is, both difficult and systematic—and this was in part due to the fact that it had to distinguish itself from the kinds of reading and writing that happened in elementary schools.

Composition was the other vehicle by which, according to Applebee, literature "gained its foothold" (28). From his perspective, where philology gave English a methodology, composition was the driving force behind the "institutionalization" of English literature in the curriculum. The composition requirement meant that incoming students needed something to write about—some content for their compositions—and literature was the choice. As I read it, for Applebee, who thought of the teaching of literature as the primary purpose and pleasure of the English teacher, this was a problem to be overcome, and Applebee used words like "final separation," "emergence," and "victory" to describe the development of the elective courses that included English literature, in which "English would be studied in its own right" rather than "a subject for composition" (31-32). For Applebee, literary studies not only had to prove itself rigorous as compared to the elementary school subjects, but also as distinct from writing and composition studies. Both of these issues, it seems to me, are less about what the study of literature or of composition actually *is*, and more about how systems or institutions—in this case, schools or colleges—can put pressure on disciplines to draw lines around themselves, defining

some questions, topics, materials, and methodologies as "theirs" and other questions, topics, materials, and methodologies as "someone else's."

4.2 Situating FYC: A hinge point between high school and (the rest of) college

I claimed, in my analyses of historical accounts of the teaching of English in Chapter 3, that there is a tendency to think of K-12 reading in literacy-based ways, including the teaching of reading to young children and reading remediation in high school. And that reading, when thought of in the context of college courses, tends to be more about literary texts and theories of reading that come from literary studies. This division is particularly interesting in the context of FYC because, as a first-year course that is almost universally required of all matriculated students in the United States (Crowley 1), first-year composition is situated as a hinge point between K-12 and higher education. Technically, FYC, as a credit-bearing degree requirement. is *in* college, not situated *between* it and high school. But there are numerous links between high school and FYC that blur the line and show that in many ways FYC is, institutionally speaking, seen as a course that sits between high school and college.

From the beginning, FYC developed as a college course only after college entrance exam results convinced Harvard and other influential colleges to require it for students whom, they judged, could not demonstrate proficiency in composition (Applebee 30, Crowley 9). Even today, students at CJCC, for example, have to demonstrate such proficiency, via standardized test scores or high school transcripts, before they can sign up for credit-bearing FYC. If they can't, at open enrollment institutions like CJCC, they may have to take one or more semesters of developmental English (at 4-year colleges and institutions, of course, they may simply be denied entrance). Further, the number of high school students who earn FYC college credits while still in high school, through concurrent enrollment programs or Advanced Placement (AP) classes, is

high and growing higher. In 2020, 24.4% of high school students earned college credit through AP tests, which was up from 16.2% in 2010 ("AP Cohort" 24). The bestselling FYC textbook, *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, is available in hardcover "high school" editions ("'They Say/I Say'"). All of this suggests that FYC is a both an entryway into college and a gateway that bars such entry, depending on a particular students' test scores or skills.

As a hinge-point between high school and college, FYC may be uniquely situated to influence, and be influenced by, both high school and college pedagogies, curricula, assessment, and state mandates. This is especially true given that Composition is one of two disciplines—Math being the other—in which "developmental" courses exist. As pre-college college courses, their existence strengthens the K-12 influence. At the same time, in many (though by no means all) colleges, the "English department" includes both faculty who teach composition and faculty who teach literature—and, often, faculty who teach both (I'm thinking especially of community colleges). This strengthens the literary studies connection.

I have always seen this dual influence of K-12 and literature as a strength for composition, so I was surprised to see such division between/among them in Applebee, Crowley, and Myers (the subjects of Chapter 3). The division in Applebee and Myers was mostly in their choices to place their focus in one area much more than another—literature for Applebee, and K-12 for Myers. In Crowley, the division was more clearly a source of frustration—she was explicit about not only the division, but also the power and hierarchy that favors literature. However, where I have become used to reading compositionists *bemoaning* the division, for Crowley, her frustration about the division was that it wasn't *more* official and permanent. She did not want

FYC to be understood as adjacent to K-12 or remediation, or to be understood as “part” of literary studies, or even of English departments.

Reading compositionists tend, as I said, to be not only aware of but frustrated by both the split between literature and composition and the K-12/higher education divide that gets wrapped up in notions of reading instruction as remedial or pre-college. The following from *Intertexts* offer an example of each:

> What does it mean to teach reading? The question may seem surprising when it is raised in the context of the first-year college writing course. For many years, the issue of reading in composition has been framed in terms of an argument for or against assigning literary fiction to students enrolled in college writing classes. The argument has as much to do with battles over the proper subject of the discipline of composition as the best reading selection for students. (Helmers, Introduction 4)

And

> Reading research, largely empirical in nature, has taken place under the auspices of the International Reading Association (IRA), an organization to which most college professors in English do not belong. Furthermore, the publishers who address the teaching of reading as a process tend to focus on the market for Grades K-12, and primarily the elementary grades, thereby giving discussions of reading in college its “remedial” connotation. (Helmers, Introduction 4)

This echoes other arguments and observations made by reading compositionists, such as Ellen Carillo, that I shared in Chapters 1 and 3, and it fits with the observations of the uses of the word “reading” in connection primarily with the reading of literature, and “literacy” in connection primarily with remediation in Chapter 3.

4.3 Reading Instruction and Theory: Literary-based and Literacy-based

In Chapter 3, what I interpreted from my readings and analyses is that, when it comes to discussions of reading instruction, there are several different ways of thinking about what it means "to read" that can contradict each other, or at least have very little overlap. The different meanings behind the verb "to read" can be unclear or unacknowledged, however, especially when the work of a given reading theorist makes its way, directly or indirectly, into composition.

Here, I explore these definitions and perspectives further, this time by exploring the work of scholars who have theorized about reading from different disciplines and contexts: Maryanne Wolf, Paolo Freire, Cleanth Brooks, and Louise Rosenblatt. Maryanne Wolf is a cognitive neuroscientist who primarily studies literacy in young children, especially issues of dyslexia. She has written several books for "popular" audiences, including *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*. Another is Paolo Freire, whose work *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is highly influential in all of education, including English Education. While his work was not *limited* to reading or literacy, many of his ideas and advocacies have that as a focus. The other two, Cleanth Brooks and Louise Rosenblatt, are the most directly connected to English Education, though their work originated in literary studies. Brooks remained a literary scholar while Rosenblatt moved into English Education. She is often considered to be more of a practitioner than a theorist (though this is the subject of frustration among many reading specialists). Brooks was, by contrast, seen primarily as a theorist and specifically as a New Critic, in spite of his claims that "New Critics" is a false category.

I chose these four partly because they are such clear examples of the different ways that the simple verb "to read" can be used, and partly because they, and/or their areas of study, influence composition and/or the teaching of first-year college students in various ways. None of

them is in the field of composition at all, and, for the most part, the texts I've analyzed are not about writing. These scholars are also not attempting to make arguments about English as a field of study or as a discipline. This positions them very differently from the historical accounts of the teaching of English I first examined.

Freire and Wolf's works are not situated within English departments at all, and they have a different relationship with the reading/writing bifurcation than do Rosenblatt and Brooks. Rosenblatt and Brooks benefitted from the reading-over-writing hierarchy (though another hierarchy, that of theory over practice, arguably places the two on different planes, with Brooks "above" Rosenblatt… depending, of course, on who you ask). But this clear "reading side" situatedness is what makes these scholars interesting to me when thinking about how, when, and with what impact they each influence compositionists.

A primary contention of reading compositionists is that the field of composition does not focus enough on reading within writing classrooms. For them, this is a problem in part because reading, and ideas about reading, still make their way into writing classrooms. As Helmers has said:

> If we examine our practices as composition instructors, we will realize that teachers of writing daily bring reading into their instruction and make assumptions about the value of reading. We teach reading to establish processes and practices; we select readings to develop habits of selection; we encourage students to reread and revise their written work; and we read their journals and essays. (Introduction 4)

In other words, ideas about reading—how it happens, why it's important, what counts as "good" reading—are embedded in every writing program, scholarly work, and every individual writing classroom. The problem (or *a* problem) is that when it is not made an explicit part of what it

means to teach writing, these ideas about reading, which impact classroom practice, assessment, equity, and outcomes, exert influence in ways that are not well understood, and which are certainly not clear to students. These are examples of "conflicts, bifurcated emphases, and external pressures for standardization and accountability" which Miller described in "English Education In-The-Making" (35). The relative lack of clarity and explicitness around reading theory and pedagogy in composition studies may hinder its ability, as a field, to become more clear, explicit, or intentional as regards reading in writing classrooms. That is, the problem is self-propelling. Because we don't often talk about reading, we lack clear language to talk about reading, which makes it difficult to talk about reading.

My goal with this chapter was to begin to unravel, or make explicit, some of the "lenses" on reading that do, implicitly, make their way into writing classrooms. In making this analysis, I wanted to attach some meaningful language to these different lenses to help anchor further conversations about reading in writing classrooms in a framework that provides some clarity. My intention was not to present every possible reading theory that has ever influenced composition studies, or even to claim that these four scholars have had the greatest or biggest influence. Rather, I think these four have all written about reading in ways that make it particularly clear where they are coming from, and, as a result, make it relatively easy to tease out the differences in their perspectives.

One last point before I dive into the analysis itself is that I want to emphasize that the differences in their perspectives are not comparisons they themselves have made. On the contrary, my point is that these four perspectives, represented here with these four scholars—to the somewhat limited degree that a single scholar can be said to "represent" a perspective—do not generally occur in the same spaces. I mean "spaces" quite literally, because, indeed, they

were not in the same departments, didn't do the same "kind" of research, and at least in the case of Wolf, would not attend the same conferences or publish in the same journals. (If there is overlap with Freire, it is due to the fact that he is the most cross-disciplinary scholar on the list, and if there is overlap with Brooks and Rosenblatt, it is because they both started in English departments, though she later moved to English Education). Brooks and Rosenblatt have at times been compared, and more commonly the theories with which they are connected—New Criticism and Reader-Response, respectively—have been compared, but they nevertheless do come from different academic "places," with the result being that they were embedded in different academic traditions. A question for all of the authors, for all scholars in any field, might be whether or to what extend these academic contexts have limited or "polluted" their visions (J. L. Miller 35).

Analysis of the writing of these four shows that the phrases "learning to read" or "knowing how to read" have widely varying meanings. In fact, their meanings are so varied they are almost worse than meaningless. On their own, without more context, these phrases aren't just vague or unclear. Instead, they have very specific, very *different* meanings depending on who is writing or saying them… and who is reading or hearing them. Yet, because the phrases seem so straightforward, and are so common, the varying meanings can go unacknowledged, and everyone who says them can go about thinking that everyone else who says them is saying the same things. Consider the meaning of the phrase "learn to read" in the following passages. The first is from Cleanth Brooks' "What Are English Teacher's Teaching," and the second is from Maryanne Wolf's *Proust and the Squid*:

> I submit simply that most of them [students] have never *learned to read*. The use of rather simple symbolism completely stumps them—not freshmen, but graduate students

> with B.A.'s from some of our more distinguished universities. (Brooks 129; emphasis mine)

and

> The pediatric neurologist Martha Bridge Denckla of Johns Hopkins University tested this and found that readers with dyslexia can name colors perfectly well, but they cannot name them rapidly. The time it takes for the brain to connect visual and linguistic processes to name colors (or letters and numbers) was the predictor of who would be unable to *learn to read*. (Wolf 178; emphasis mine)

In the first of these passages, Brooks claims that graduate students in literature have "never learned to read" and supports it with the example that "simple symbolism completely stumps them" and that, when reading poems that lack titles and identification, students are at a loss. The phrase "learning to read" is connected to issues of interpretation and analysis – understanding symbolism, form, and meaning, and how they interrelate in literature. In contrast, for Wolf, the cognitive neuroscientist, the phrase "learn to read" means the ability to literally decode written symbols—comprehension at its most fundamental level. The concern is with issues of rapidity, "visual and linguistic processes" (that is, in the brain), naming, and repetition.

For Brooks, the focus is interpretation—making meaning from the reading—and the cognitive and mechanical processes of reading are entirely absent from that conversation. For Wolf, the reverse is true: the only focus is cognitive and mechanical processes—speed and decoding—to the extent that meaning is absent from the conversation. This is not to say that Brooks would deny that reading includes decoding and comprehension. Nor does it mean that Wolf is unaware that symbolism and meaning are essential to matters of interpretation. The differences between the two passages don't *preclude* the definition of "reading" from

incorporating all of these factors. But, importantly, they also do not demand that the definition be so comprehensive, or make explicit that they are narrowing their particular focus intentionally. Even with such different meanings, both use the phrase "learn to read."

The work of Louise Rosenblatt, which in many contexts is set in contrast with Brooks and that of other New Critics, has a focus that is strikingly similar to Brooks when set against the backdrop of someone like Wolf. Although Rosenblatt, more so than Brooks, has had a significant impact on middle- and high-school English teaching practices (or at least a more explicit one), her reading focus *is* a very literary one. Upon giving her graduate students a Robert Frost poem and asking them to "start writing as soon as possible after beginning to read," she says of their commentaries:

> These notes reflect, one might say, a rudimentary literary response, yet they already represent a very high level of organization. There had clearly been added a groping toward a framework into which fit the meanings of the individual words and sentences. Who is speaking? Under what circumstances? To whom? are questions already assumed in these first tentative comments. (*Reader* 6-7)

So, for Rosenblatt, a first reading that includes a "groping toward a framework into which fit the meanings of the individual words and sentences" is a "literary response." That framework includes and almost rhetorical set of questions: "Who is speaking? Under what circumstances? To whom?"—and knowing to ask these questions ("already assumed") is what makes the response "literary," even if the lack of answers also makes it "rudimentary."

And if Rosenblatt's graduate students could have a "rudimentary literary response," her conception of early literacy was one of relative sophistication. In *Literature as Exploration*, she claimed, "It is easy to observe how the beginning reader draws on past experience of life and

language to elicit meaning from the printed words, and it is possible to see how through these words he recognizes past experience to attain new understanding" (25). What I mean by relative sophistication is that her ideas about "the beginning reader" call on so many cognitive moves that would be in addition to the cognitive work of decoding—"draw[ing] on past experience" and connecting that experience to the "printed word" to "elicit meaning" and not just attain understanding (of the words on the page), but "attain new understanding" (in the beginning reader's own mind).

One thing I find fascinating is that, when describing graduate students reading a poem, Rosenblatt actually paid more attention to the "individual words and sentences" than she did when describing the "beginning reader." Granted, these are just two passages out of a significant body of work, but it fits with a tendency I've noticed: scholars who have a more literary basis for thinking about reading tend to think in more granular terms when considering the reading of literature—"individual words and sentences"—and more global or big-picture terms when considering beginning readers—"draws on past experience of life and language to elicit meaning from printed words." This is quite a stark contrast from literacy-based ideas of reading like Maryanne Wolf's, with their very granular focus on elements like identification and rapidity.

Again, this is not to say that one reading "base"—literary or literacy—is better than the other, or even that the two categories are mutually exclusive. Wolf, for example, writes often about experiential and emotional elements of reading that recognize or signal a shift in reading that happens after a reader becomes literate, where meaning, interpretation, and eventual response become more relevant concerns than decoding. The argument that I am building toward, though, is that decoding, or at least comprehension at the word and sentence level, does not cease to be of some relevance to all readers who read texts that are difficult for them.

Scholars who write about college and graduate students' *literary* readings think about comprehension often. Yet, composition, and I suspect college English more generally, struggles to take both aspects—the literacy and the literary—into account at once. And this, I think, has to do with the fact that literacy and literary reading are so wholly divided in the writing of various scholars and researchers who study and theorize about reading and reading pedagogy.

Consider Paolo Freire, who offers yet a different way of understanding "reading," which he used in an expansive way that included a metaphorical use of the word. He used "reading" even when he was not referring to words on a page:

> If we think of education as an act of knowing, then *reading has to do with knowing*. The act of reading cannot be explained as *merely* reading words since every act of reading words implies a previous reading of the world and a subsequent rereading of the world. There is a permanent movement back and forth between "reading" reality and reading words—the spoken word too is our reading of the world. We can go further, however, and say that reading the word is not only preceded by reading the world, but also by a certain form of writing it or rewriting it. In other words, of transforming it by means of conscious practical action. For me, this dynamic movement is central to literacy. ("Reading the World" 18; emphasis mine)

A few elements stand out to me here. Like Rosenblatt, Freire wrote about what might be called prior knowledge—the "past experiences" or "previous reading of the world"—readers bring to the text—"reading words." For Freire as for Rosenblatt, "reading the world" comes first chronologically (it "precedes" it). "Reading the world" continues throughout the reading of the text, as they shape each other ("a certain form of writing it or rewriting it"). And, perhaps, in

some ways, "Reading the world" comes first in importance as well: he says that reading is not "merely reading words."

In attempting to understand Freire's perspective on "reading," it is crucial to interpret his work within its own context. Freire was not operating within an "English Education" framework—and, as obvious as that sounds, I think the difference in his context as compared to Rosenblatt, Brooks, and Wolf cannot be overstated. Freire was explicitly situated in the political and in the "world" outside of any university setting. He was also working toward a politically liberatory education. And whereas I, for example, chose to limit my understanding of reading, intentionally, in this dissertation, to be focused on text on the page, Freire was intentional about legitimizing non-text-based ways of being, including ways of "reading the world" that to not require print literacy.

For Freire, then, there is a difference between "'reading' reality and reading words." The difference is not always firm—they are linked, one informs the other in a "permanent movement back and forth"—but they are distinct. This of course informs what he means by the word "reading," but it also matters in terms of how his theories are applied in the context of the field of composition studies in the United States, which is by definition a field that exists within and is centered around the institution of higher education. In fact, the influence Freire has had, and continues to have, in composition studies may indicate yet another split or division in issues of reading and literacy in composition: the way in which "literacy" can be understood primarily from a political perspective, which is very different (and I'd say contradictory) from the remedial connotations it can also have.

A question for me, then, is this: In the context of a college writing course, such as first-year composition, what does it mean to adopt a Freirian perspective on "reading?" I think this is

a question that deserves further study, but for my purposes here, I'll simply say that here is yet another definition of "reading" that really stands in fairly stark contrast with Wolf's and Brooks', which are so print-based, though in different ways. Rosenblatt's emphasis on the interpretive work the reader brings to a text can more readily be connected with the Freirian notion of "reading the world," but still her theories came out of an idea of reading that was text-based. And, of course, Freire too was thinking and theorizing about print literacy, but not through the literary-based lens that Rosenblatt brought to her work.

4.4 Contradictory Influences in Composition

Clearly, but perhaps not surprisingly, reading does not have a single, stable meaning. Definitions, theories, and emphases are deeply contextual and different to the point of contradicting one another. Where this becomes an important insight is in the spaces in which these differing meanings come together in a new field—that is, composition—without retaining their original context. The field of composition does not have a strong history of developing its own theories of and perspectives on reading, and yet, per Helmers, all composition courses include reading. Thus, different theories of reading, different perspectives and theories on reading come into composition from all variety of other places in academia: literary studies, political/Marxist studies, and literacy studies.

And I think that the disciplinary bifurcations and conflicts I explored previously, which show up differently, and with different degrees of severity, in different institutions, contribute greatly—and not without conflict—to the variety of reading ideas and theories that may influence composition studies and composition courses in ways that are not well understood or often discussed. A problem is that both literary-based theories of reading and literacy-based theories of reading have been effectively defined out of the realm of composition studies, thanks

to the institutional and disciplinary bifurcations associated with each. These bifurcations can operate differently at the level of the broad fields of study than they do within specific institutions. Similarly (yet very differently!), literacy-based ideas of reading have contradictory and inconsistent influences on composition studies and FYC instructors/courses. Because of the connection to remediation or deficiency that with which "literacy" can be associated, there can be institutional or disciplinary pressure—and/or individual instructors' resistance—to teaching anything that does not feel to them to be "college level."

I said earlier that Wolf, Freire, Brooks, and Rosenblatt did/do not occupy the same "space" in academia. Interestingly, one place, perhaps *the* one place, where all four scholars, and the lenses and ways of seeing reading they represent, co-exist is within the field of composition. In fact, all four are cited in the 2017 NCTE book *Deep Reading: Teaching Reading in the Writing Classroom*—something I did not realize until *after* I had chosen these four scholars to analyze for this chapter. The book is dedicated to Rosenblatt, features Wolf in the Epigraph, and includes Freire in the index. Brooks, the least prominent in the book, is cited in only one of the chapters, but his fellow New Critic, I.A. Richards, has more entries in the Index than does Freire. Even here, though, the co-existence is incomplete, almost happenstance. The editors chose to dedicate the book to Rosenblatt and to include an epigraph from Wolf, but different writers of individual chapters included Freire, Brooks, and Richards. If I am using Rosenblatt, Wolf, Freire, and Brooks in part as stand-ins for common lenses on reading that I am claiming they represent, their varied and various representations within *Deep Reading* feels like fitting symbolism in turn—they are in the same book, but not on the same pages.

And how do they "show up" in composition studies? Of course in numerous ways among the multitude of composition scholars and practitioners. But using *Deep Reading* as a guide, I

can trace at least a few places and ways that these four reading/literacy scholars influence FYC. I will start with Maryanne Wolf, who is the person I was most surprised to find in Deep Reading because her work seems the most disassociated from English studies, being, as it is, so focused on early childhood literacy and cognitive research. In addition to including a long passage from Proust and the Squid in the book's epigraph, the editors of *Deep Reading* mention Wolf's research in their Introduction:

> We would like to suggest…that reading must be theorized as foundationally linked to any understanding of college-level writing. As Maryanne Wolf notes in her book on reading and the science of the brain, the invention of writing and reading some 10,000 years ago required us to restructure the physical properties of our brains, creating new neural pathways and the development of important new cognitive functions. This process "rearranged the very organization of our brain, which in turn expanded the ways we were able to think, which altered the intellectual evolution of our species" (3; Kandel, Schwartz, Jessell, Siegelbaum, and Hudspeth). A great deal is at stake, therefore, as we seek to deepen our understanding of the vital role that reading plays in teaching and learning in the writing classroom. (Sullivan et al. xix-xx)

This is very interesting to me, as it suggests that brain/cognitive studies have at least some influence on how Sullivan et al. think about why and how reading and writing are integrated. This particular passage, with its focus on how the brain changed when reading/writing were invented, serves to emphasize the difference between talking/listening and reading/writing. What it does not emphasize, or even engage, is Wolf's work on decoding and what I think of as the "mechanics" of reading—the eye movements, the speed with which the brain takes in a printed word and connects it to meaning—or other elements of Wolf's work that are so tied to early

literacy. This particular quote side-steps the "literacy" piece of Wolf's work, and, in doing so, argues that reading and writing are fundamentally integrated while also avoiding language that can be linked with or seen as remedial.

It was much less surprising to me that Rosenblatt figures prominently in *Deep Reading*—according to the Index, on a total of 18 pages, including in several of the articles and thrice in the editors' introduction, and, as I said, in the dedication. Rosenblatt was, after all, in English Education, and wrote much about reading. Here are the two passages from the introduction that reference or quote her:

> We also seek in this book to affirm the value of reading for pleasure and the importance of developing pedagogies and classroom practices that communicate to students the many aesthetic and affective joys found in reading. This is an approach to reading perhaps best captured by the title of one of Louise Rosenblatt's most widely known essays: "What Facts Does This Poem Teach You?" (xx)

And

> We dedicate this book to Louise Rosenblatt, one of our heroes. Like Rosenblatt, we believe that a great deal is at stake when students read—for individual development and growth, for the health of our communities, and for the strength of our democracy…. Rosenblatt's belief that "the teaching of literature could especially contribute to such democratic education" (*Literature* xv) was the inspiration for her landmark book on reading, *Literature as Exploration*. (xxiii-xxiv)

I see multiple emphases in these, with the focus on literature being the one that most immediately jumps out. For example, when Sullivan et al. raise the idea of aesthetic and affective pleasure in reading, it is linked to poetry, as in the title of her essay "What Facts Does This Poem

Teach You?" And when they raise the idea of reading for individual growth and strengthening democracy, they specifically quote Rosenblatt as saying that "the teaching of literature" especially contributes to such.

This is an interesting set of ideas to raise in the context of teaching college writing because FYC textbooks typically do not include, or at least do not primarily include, literary texts and passages. Instead, the FYC textbooks and readers currently listed as bestsellers on amazon.com, including *They Say/I Say* by Graff et al., *Everyone's an Author with Readings*, by Lunsford et al., and *The Norton Field Guide to Writing with Readings* by Bullock et al., solely include short nonfiction texts. It isn't that Sullivan et al. are saying that reading nonfiction cannot bring aesthetic or affective pleasure or that it is disconnected from personal growth or strengthening democracy, but I do think it is telling that *Deep Reading* leans into Rosenblatt's connection with literature specifically, when in the context of college writing, that is not the primary kind of reading that students are assigned. Yet, while it interests me, I cannot say I find it surprising, as I have not come across many texts from any location within English education that engage with nonfiction texts as aesthetic or pleasurable. It reminds me that, as Marguerite Helmers said, reading is undertheorized in composition (Introduction 4).

Brooks and Freire appear in the book in a different way than Wolf or Rosenblatt—they are not included in the editors' introduction. Instead, they are cited within the chapters written by other scholars. Freire appears twice—in a chapter called "Unleashing Students' Capacity through Acceleration," by Katie Hern, and in a chapter by one of the book's editors, Howard Tinberg, called "When Writers Encounter Reading in a Community College First-Year Composition Course." In both cases, he is mentioned in the context of having been an assigned text for the students in the course. Hern specifies that she had her students read a passage from *Pedagogy of*

the Oppressed about the banking model of education (212). Tinberg does not mention assigning Freire himself, but says, "[Ann] Berthoff introduced a new generation of scholar-teachers to the challenging works of I.A. Richards and Paolo Freire, among others, as teachable texts" (245). Both Hern and Tinberg mention that Freire is difficult for students to read, and indicate that this difficulty is part of the value of assigning it to students. This leaves as an open question whether Friere's ideas about literacy and reading are part of Hern or Tinberg's classroom pedagogies, but does establish that Freire is incorporated in some way in their courses. Hern's focus on the content of Freire's theories on education and both scholars' emphasis of the difficulty of Freire, suggest to me that, while they are interested in and no doubt influenced by Freire, they are less engaged with his theories about literacy than with other aspects of his work—at least in these two articles.

Unlike Freire, whose theories of reading/literacy were not addressed in the chapters in which he was mentioned, Cleanth Brooks' theories are not only addressed but incorporated into reading pedagogy in Maria Salvatori and Patricia Donahue's "Unruly Reading." In it, Salvatori and Donahue do something that is relatively rare in composition studies: they directly engage with and posit theories and perspectives on reading nonfiction texts. About working with such texts, they say, for example:

> [W]e want to call into question what seems to be a commonplace in composition studies—the idea that paraphrase and summary are essentially acts of translation whose differences are negligible….In contrast, our work with student readers and writers suggests that summary and paraphrase are both interpretive practices that draw on a reader's repertoire and function a priori. (325)

Discussion about interpretation, outside of the realm of literature and literary studies, is not common in composition studies, at least in published disciplinary writing. And it is this idea of interpretation that bring Salvatori and Donahue to Brooks:

> Like summary, in our discipline paraphrase is conceptualized and taught in simplistic terms. It is defined as a specific act of translation…usually performed on smaller passages whereby an author's ideas are retold in terms so synonymous as to be equivalent. This definition obscures the difficulty of paraphrase (and translation), argued years ago by the New Critic Cleanth Brooks in a chapter titled "The Heresy of Paraphrase" in his book *The Well-Wrought Urn*. Brooks argued that a paraphrase of a poem, in part due to the figurative, connotative, and condensed power of poetic language, always represents a distortion of the original. We would argue that prose, while less compact than verse, poses its own challenges. (330)

Here, though Salvatori and Donahue use the word "prose" to shift from Brooks' focus on poetry, they are discussing students' interpretations of John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* and Madelaine Hron's *Translating Pain: Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture*—two pieces that are specifically *nonfiction* prose.

Salvatori and Donahue are long-time reading compositionists. They have been arguing for the integration of reading into writing studies for decades—at the beginning of their chapter, they write, "It is puzzling to us that reading has not yet been given quite the same attention as writing" (313). When they bring Brooks, a literary scholar, into their conversation, they make the switch from literature to composition studies by applying his ideas to student interpretation of nonfiction prose in the context of writing courses and reading instruction. By contrast, Rosenblatt's literary-based ideas are brought into the *Deep Reading* Introduction without

shedding their literary context. But in both cases, in their search for ideas about reading, the compositionists turned to scholars whose work was primarily *literary*. Wolf and Freire, who in different ways can be seen to have a more literacy-based context, are brought into *Deep Reading* in ways that de-emphasize that literary base.

4.5 Thinking Through the Layers

To me, this is all evidence of what I've long noticed but, until following these breadcrumbs from the four scholars (Wolfe, Freire, Brooks, and Rosenblatt) to a "space" all four are discussed, couldn't explain or even articulate: the bifurcations of reading and writing are, in FYC, layered with bifurcations of literary-based and literacy-based theories of reading. And, because reading is undertheorized in FYC, there are no proposed ideas about how, or whether, to bring them all together—or even that the layers of bifurcations exist in the first place.

Because reading and writing have, since the inception of English departments in higher education, been not only divided but institutionalized into a hierarchy, bringing a meaningful focus on and study of reading into the realm of composition has been the exception rather than the default. This is a relatively a well-documented situation in composition, at least among reading compositionists. But I think the reading/writing bifurcation is not the only problem that reading compositionists face in (re)connecting reading and writing in the field. I also think the less well-documented, and perhaps less well-understood bifurcation of literary-based and literacy-based ideas about reading have much to do with the fact that reading has not (yet) "secured a place" in FYC.

The two splits are not fully distinct from each other. Specifically, when compositionists write about reading, the ways they talk about reading reveal them to be coming from either a literary or a literacy-based focus. The embedded hierarchy, in college English departments, of

literature over writing also operates, in a way, to prioritize literary-based reading over literacy-based reading. Or, perhaps literary-based ideas about reading abound because, after all, college students are assumed to know "how to read."

Thus, as Helmers put it, "'Reading' becomes an elliptical form of 'reading literature'" (Introduction 7) But then, even Helmers elides "reading" and "literature" when she says, "…the intent of this book is not to 'bridge the gap' between the teaching of writing and the teaching of literature, but to argue that any 'gap' between reading and writing is a construct" (Preface x). The bifurcations are so embedded that even reading compositionists, at times, use "teaching of literature" as synonymous with "reading,"

This tendency to elide "literature" and "reading"—that is, to have an unexamined or un-self-aware literary-based view of reading—can lead to confusing or muddled arguments. For example, in an article called "College Anthologies of Readings and Assumptions about Literacy," published in 1986, Christopher Gould and Kathleen Gould wrote:

> A proliferation of books, academic conferences, and thematic issues of scholarly journals bespeaks renewed interest in literacy (specifically, reading processes) as a prominent concern of English study. While cynics may dismiss this interest either as a delayed response to the barrage of criticism emanating from the popular press or as a self-interested effort to legitimize the continued presence of literary readings in the composition course (by merging reading and writing skills beneath a single rubric), serious attention to literacy is provoking healthy self-appraisal within our profession. We no longer can afford to disregard the non-reader in the English classroom. (204)

Here, both the reading/writing split and the literary/literacy split are on fully display. But Gould and Gould know that they are dealing with the reading/writing split. They understand that

reading and writing skills would need to be “merged” under a “single rubric” because the default is to treat them as separate. By contrast, the literary/literacy divide that is operating here to confuse their point is, I think, unexamined and unintentional.

For example, the terms “literacy” and “literary readings” are linked—the “renewed interest in literacy” has something to do with the “continued presence of literary readings.” This suggests, as the above examples also have done, an inability or unwillingness (or disinterest in) teaching or even thinking about reading outside of the context or parameters of a literary-based understanding of reading. Thus, although Gould and Gould use the term “literacy,” which might suggest they mean to tackle assumptions about reading ability, this conflation of “literacy” with “reading” with “reading processes” with “literary readings” muddies the paragraph, so that when they make the claim “We no longer can afford to disregard the non-reader in the English classroom,” it is unclear whether they mean they can no longer afford to disregard the students who do not read (literary texts), or the students who cannot read (at all, or well, or well enough).

4.6 Implications… However Situated, Qualified, and Tentative

Because literature and literary studies enjoy a higher status than do first-year composition courses, literary reading tends to have a high status as well. Further, literacy-based ideas of reading make their way into first-year composition via high school and developmental English influences, and those are even lower in the pecking order than FYC. Yet, classroom instructors who may want to emphasize literary reading in their classes may not find that reading theory that comes out of a literary-based background is of much use with the actual students in their classrooms. And, again, because all of this is more or less unacknowledged or not well understood in the discipline, it is not a stretch to say that confusion and misunderstandings are common, if not endemic to the discipline.

When, in composition or in literature courses, faculty make the assumption or observation that students "can read," or when they come to the conclusion that students "cannot read," what do they mean by "read?" The answer to this question is, presumably, going to have a major impact on what faculty do with their observations about students and the reading they do.

In making a distinction between "literacy-based" and "literary-based" reading I've indicated that, in the context of higher education, the strong tendency is to default to a "literary-based" sense of reading, possibly without considering that there is another way to think about reading that would be more "literacy-based." This, I think, is due to the nature of the reading/writing bifurcation that is, perhaps, more properly called a "literature/writing" bifurcation. Or, as James Berlin called it in *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, "the rhetoric-poetic binary" (xiv).

I think, in short, that different ways of thinking about reading are occluded by the fact that talking about any kind of reading in the context of composition is already such a heavy lift. And if, as I have indicated, a literacy-based perspective is typically found in earlier education or in studies of children, then bringing it into the arena of college teaching, in a field (composition) that is already lower in status than its near-neighbor, literary studies, and arguing for the inclusion of anything like the teaching of literacy is going to be that much more difficult.

These are institutional constraints that limit our "pedagogical imaginations," as Miller put it, and even limit our imaginations regarding the very nature of our subject. It isn't that I think there are an enormous number of college students who do not know how to decode words on a page. Rather, it's that I think there are an enormous number of college students who struggle with reading in some form, and to varying degrees. I think this includes problems like fluency, vocabulary, and grammatical knowledge that faculty assume are "dealt with" in K-12. I also

think this includes problems of understanding symbolism, form, and other topics that faculty assume are the purview of "higher level" literature courses.

But, in my view, both literacy-based and literary-based conceptions of reading should be informing pedagogy in composition classrooms. Perhaps not literal decoding, but comprehension issues that are closer to decoding—like fluency, vocabulary, and grammatical knowledge—than they are to the questions of interpretation we typically think of as important when reading Faulkner, but perhaps do not consider when reading the latest issue of *The Atlantic*.

It comes to this: I contend, based on my researching and interpretive analyses thus far, that it is essential, pedagogically, in all English classrooms including in college writing classes, to make a distinction (though not a *separation*) between comprehension (literacy-based) and interpretation (literary-based) reading instruction. But until we can acknowledge, and have language for, the different things we mean when we say "learn to read," we cannot be as intentional as our students deserve.

Chapter 5: Exploring Disciplinary and Pedagogical Implications of a Reading/Writing Divide

Triangulation, in what now is regarded as more "traditional" forms of qualitative research, has the researcher employ at least three forms of "data collection"—for example, interviews, observations, and gathering of pertinent artifacts—supposedly as a way of avoiding, or at least reducing the risk of, overly biased research. If the biologist in *Annihilation* had been told to triangulate her data, it might have taken the form of ten maps drawn by multiple mapmakers, or even ten maps drawn by the same mapmaker at different times of year, or using different mapmaking methods or tools. Or, to really stretch the metaphor, the biologist might have a map, a written description, and a photograph of the area. The hope would be that additional researchers or additional perspectives by the same researcher would lead to more robust, nuanced data—possibly even more "valid" data. While triangulation has been rejected by post-qualitative researchers as a "new-positivist…reworking of objectivity" (Lather 367), I think the idea that more types of data means "better" or "more valid" data is a common one, even outside of qualitative research.

A problem with triangulation, though, is that, even when multiple researchers share multiple perspectives, they may all have the same lacuna—the same accidental gap or patchy area of knowledge or insight. And, if everyone adding to the research has expertise in the same field, that likelihood is significantly increased. For example, if all of the people drawing the map are trained map-makers, it may not occur to any of them to include data that are not typically found in maps—the shape of the leaves on the trees, for example. And more to the point, it may not occur to them that something hasn't occurred to them.

Sometimes, I think disciplinary debates operate this way: all of the multiple perspectives and voices, which absolutely add to the richness and depth of the conversations and arguments, are nevertheless not a guarantee against perception gaps and missed observations. The tendency is for us to share certain perspectives, premises, and ideas with others who are also in our discipline. It's part of being a community. But it can also be a limiter. If you have ten mapmakers and no artists, even if all ten maps are different from each other, they'll all still be maps.

In addition to considering how reading instruction may be impacted by a reading/writing bifurcation in composition studies and FYC, it is worth asking how such a bifurcation might impact *writing* instruction. Thus far in this dissertation, I have tried to hone in on specific places and contexts within composition studies and its larger umbrella, English studies, to conduct close-reads and analyses of specific texts as a way to understand what theories of or perspectives on reading are at work in scholars' writing about college composition. In this chapter, I aim to explore how theories or ideas of reading in college composition may influence disciplinary debates on writing pedagogy (how they may already, and how they might in the future). As in previous chapters, the map I will draw here will be particular to me and to my decision to stake out this patch of land instead of that. But my hope is that the landmarks here will be sketched clearly enough, and familiar enough to landmarks in other parts of the landscape, that my insights and interpretations may be useful to other mapmakers or those who may simply want to pass through this area.

5.1 Form vs. Content

To return to Berlin's notion that history "is the product of complex interactions of people, political and social institutions, ideologies, technological conditions, and material modes of

production" ("Literacy" 251) here I might say that the development of a discipline or field of study is likewise "without any inherent plan or process." But still, the complex interactions can be studied and interpreted, and it is possible to gain insight into some of the "why or even *what*" of the various debates and conversations that take place within the context of that discipline.

One such debate can be summarized as "form vs. content." Outside of composition or writing, artistic arguments about form and content, or form and function, are also common. In the context of composition, it primarily centers on questions of whether students should be taught and assessed on the *form* of their writing—their grammar, the structure of their paragraphs, the placement of certain types of sentences—or the *content* of their writing—their ideas, analyses, and reflections. In "Setting the Table: Composition in the Last Half of the Twentieth Century," their introduction to *First-Year Composition: From Theory to Practice*, Deborah Coxwell-Teague and Ronald F. Lunsford link the debate to the entire "history of composition in the U.S." They say:

> Our view of this history is that, from the beginning, it represents something of a tug of war between those who would reduce writing to form and formulas—e.g., those who instituted the first "writing" courses at Harvard—and those who see writing instruction as something more—e.g., those who founded CCCC. (xxv)

This is, of course, only one summary and surely does not include all of the elements of the debate as it exists in composition, but as I'll show with specific examples of texts that engage with the issue, that is the gist of it. This debate is not only theoretical, but also practical and pedagogical. That is, it is not limited to how writing happens or works in the abstract, but specifically how writing should be taught in classrooms—what should be emphasized and what should be deemphasized for the sake of the students and their learning.

The debate is not merely about form and content, though. It is deeply entwined with the question of the purpose of FYC, of writing instruction more generally, even of education writ large. Is the goal of a writing course to help students conform more effectively to specific academic writing standards? Or is the goal of a writing course something else? Can it be both, and even have additional goals as well?

These are questions not only of pedagogical importance, but of equity as well. Two National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) resolutions, one recent (2020) and one less so (1974), drive at the heart of the harm that can be done when English teachers insist on language conformity. "Students' Right to their Own Language," the 1974 resolution, states:

> Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. (4)

The 2020 Resolution "This Ain't Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice" says, "We DEMAND that…teachers stop using academic language and standard English as the accepted communicative norm, which reflects White Mainstream English!" While neither resolution names the form vs. content debate explicitly, the idea of a "standard American dialect" or "academic language and standard English" is about the form of a student's words and sentences, rather than (or at least more than) their content.

While form-focused instructors and pedagogies can be given different labels, or can exist without explicit labeling, they are sometimes called "formalist." In "Four Philosophies of Composition," Richard Fulkerson defines "formalist" philosophy as "emphasizing traits internal to the work" (4). He then goes on to say that:

> Some [formalist] teachers, for example, judge a paper a failure if it contains one comma splice or five spelling errors…. Indeed, the most common type of formalist value theory is a grammatical one: good writing is "correct" writing at the sentence level. In the classroom, one studies errors of form—in order to avoid them. (Fulkerson 344)

He adds that form can be defined by "'spelling, punctuation, penmanship, and length,'" and says, finally, that "Few major writers accept formalist values" (4). This description of formalism as error-based, grammar-focused, and inflexible is reinforced in Mike Rose's rather more poetic description of Grammatica, the goddess of grammar:

> …She is depicted as severe, with a scalpel and a large pair of pincers. Her right hand…grasps a bird by its neck…All of this was emblematic, meant as a memory aid for the budding grammarian. But, Lord, how fitting the choices of emblem were—the living thing being strangled…. And the scalpel, the pincers, are reminders to the teacher to be vigilant for error, to cut it out with the coldest tool." (1,2)

In these, as in the NCTE resolutions, it is clear that formalism is associated with ideas of "correctness" and grammar that is presented in a decontextualized way, as if there is one inherently correct, universal grammar or dialect that exists separately from power or politics. More, the idea is that, in formalist classrooms, students whose words/sentences do not conform to this "inherently correct" or "better" language have their ideas de-emphasized or ignored.

Formal instruction can also be focused on paragraph structure or essay structure. The most common paragraph or essay structure connected to formal instruction is known as "the five-paragraph essay." Concerns about the five-paragraph essay, which are the focus of the anti-formalist arguments I analyzed for this chapter, are not necessarily framed as explicitly an issue

of racism or classism, but some of the concerns are similar: decontextualization, conformity, and a false idea of inherent correctness or universal application.

I decided to dig into this form vs. content debate and to approach it through the lens of reading instruction for several reasons, but the main one is that it has persisted for so long without changing substantively. As the authors of one of the texts analyzed in this chapter say, the five-paragraph essay form "persists… even after scholars in composition have documented the irrationality of [its] use for over 30 years" (Brannon et al. 16). They use language like "persist," "enshrined," and "always" to describe the five-paragraph form, which they see as "indoctrination" (16-20). This passionate anti-five-paragraph-essay argument is similar to arguments I've encountered many times, from other academic articles (some of which are also analyzed in this chapter) and from graduate school professors.

Yet, passionate anti-five-paragraph-essay arguments have not been the norm among my teaching colleagues, either when I was a student teacher in a high school in North Carolina or more recently as a full-time, tenured faculty member at CJCC. Rather, the common practice is to teach the five-paragraph essay, or a version of it. And my colleagues and friends who teach it are dedicated educators. I do not, for example, recognize them in Brannon et al.'s description of such teachers as people who believe that "students' problems with writing are the teacher's fault for not doing something so simply as having students write five sentences per paragraph or have three reasons" (17). I also think my colleagues would argue vehemently against the charge that their writing assignments and assessments "require little individual thinking" and simply "train students to be obedient citizens" (18).

I know that teachers can engage in harmful practices that they do not realize, due to their own privileges and situations, are harmful. Still, as someone who sees both usefulness and space

for creativity in assignments that ask students to write five paragraphs, I have read a number of essays on both "sides" of the debate over the years. Further, because I see the link between formal structure in paragraphing and in grammar—the very kind that is called out in "Students' Rights" and "This Ain't Another Statement!,"—I wanted to gain more insight about why the debate is so entrenched, and why it has seemingly remained primarily unchanged for thirty (or more!) years.

5.2 The Debate through the Lens of Reading Instruction

I keep coming back to the idea of the questions we ask and the questions we don't ask, and how they shape the answers and possibilities we see. I've struggled for years to make sense of my resistance to the anti-form arguments as they manifest in anti-five-paragraph-essay arguments. Where my inclination is to embrace "Students Rights" and "This Ain't Another Statement!" arguments, even though I am uncertain how to enact "Black linguistic justice" in my classes, I am much more resistant to the paragraph- and essay-level anti-form arguments. Part of the reason for this, I think, is that when the anti-form arguments are made, they describe the so-called "formalist" arguments in ways that do not feel accurate to me as someone who uses the five-paragraph form as a tool in my writing classes.

Thinking through the debate, and more specifically, reading through the scholarly texts that engage with the debate, I've realized, in reading through the lens of reading theory and reading instruction, that this is the first time I've ever felt some clarity or insight about the topic. It occurred to me that, while formalism has been an active and explicit debate, reading theory and instruction in FYC and composition studies, has been less actively debated. I wondered—how might it change or influence the nature of the form/content debate to explicitly recognize reading as an integral part of the writing process? Might my, and my colleagues', instruction in

and ideas about reading be, in part, responsible for differences between our ideas about form and those stated in anti-formalist arguments?

In this chapter, I analyze five texts that engage with this particular disciplinary debate. All were written by practicing composition instructors/professors, and all are all aimed at an audience of other composition scholars and practitioners. In other words, they are all part of an active and ongoing disciplinary conversation around what composition is or could/should be. The debate engages not just with writing theory—how writing happens—but with writing pedagogy—how writing can/should happen in classrooms. None of the texts make direct arguments about reading or reading pedagogy, though several indirectly engage with reading instruction. Based on this analysis, I contend that discussions of and debates about writing instruction that do not engage with reading and reading instruction distort our very understanding of the act of composing and, in turn, that such discussions and debates distort our pedagogies and our discipline. In short, I contend that the disciplinary conversations and debates are incomplete, which in turn limits our understanding of our own discipline, limits the nature of the questions we can or think to ask, and limits the types of answers we can articulate. Through detailing my analyses of these texts, I hopefully demonstrate that the arguments on either side of these debates have a fundamental flaw that impedes our discipline's collective ability to gain traction and genuinely build knowledge. My primary method of inquiry regarding these arguments consists of my close readings and analyses of various academic texts that take a position on these debates.

5.3 "Form-First" and Anti-Formalist arguments: The "Sides" of the Debate

Three of the texts are against what one calls "form-first instruction." These are Kathleen Dudden Rowlands' "Slay the Monster! Replacing Form-first Pedagogy with Effective Writing Instruction," John Warner's *Why They Can't Write: Killing the Five-Paragraph Essay and Other*

Necessities, and Brannon et al.'s "The Five-Paragraphs Essay and the Deficit Model of Education," which is a direct response to the two pro-form texts I also include in this chapter. In spite of coming to me from different sources, and in spite of significant differences in the authors' backgrounds—Warner is a novelist and adjunct writing instructor, Rowlands' work is in teacher training, and Brannon et al. are part of a Writing Project Collaborative—their arguments are quite similar. All three remark on the five-paragraph structure specifically, all three see "form-first" instruction as dominating English writing classes (though only Rowlands uses the term "form-first"), and all three see it as ineffective and even damaging for similar reasons, including that it is not "real" writing. The similarities among them shows some of the basic premises on which the anti-formalist argument is built. Among these are the arguments that writing is contextual, that it is a "complex process of meaning-making" (Brannon et al. 16), and that it "must be open and exploratory" (Warner 16)

When talking about the pro-form or pro-five-paragraph-essay practices, Rowlands labels it "form-first instruction" (1), while Brannon et al. call it "'forming'" or "teaching formats" (which they contrast with "teaching writing") (16). Warner simply calls it "the five-paragraph essay" (3), which he uses as the primary example of an instructional focus on form. These writers are not suggesting that structure or form is not important in writing. Rather, they argue that it should not be the first concern, either in chronology or importance, in writing instruction. Instead, they say, form or structure should come after content—form should follow function.

Another element all three have in common is the notion that there is "real" writing and there is school writing, which is not real. "Real" writing, an idea all three of these writers reference explicitly, is contextual and intentional—it has a purpose, it has an audience—and all of these things, they argue, should inform the structure of a given text, as well as be informed by

the structure. Therefore, they say, student writing should follow the same path. But, they argue, form-first emphases, like the five-paragraph-essay, do not allow for that.

On the other "side" of the debate are scholar-practitioners who argue that form is helpful in student writing. Two such texts, "In Defense of the Five-Paragraph Essay" by Kerri Smith, and "Defending the Five-Paragraph Essay," by Byung-In Seo, were published one year apart in the *English Journal*. "The Five-Paragraph Essay and the Deficit Model of Education," by Brannon et al., which I'm also including in my analysis, was written directly and explicitly in response to these "defenses" of the five-paragraph essay. In Seo and Smith's perspective, the purpose of writing classes is less about teaching students to do "real" writing and more about teaching students to do "college-level writing" (Smith 16) of the kind that is required "in academia" (Seo 15).

Though the anti-formalist arguments claim that the five-paragraph essay is "a monster in which form dominates, and content is considered only marginally" (Rowlands 52), these "defenders" of the five-paragraph essay claim that student ideas can flourish in this form. Seo says, "Since I followed a standard format, once that format was established, students were able to add their creative touches to the piece" and that "forcing students to use a formulaic template gave them a way to organize their thoughts and ideas" (15-16). Similarly, Smith describes the five-paragraph essay as "a way of organizing ideas" and argues that one thing students must learn is how to "develop multifaceted ideas" (16-17). Reading these, it seems clear that Seo and Smith are interested in student ideas. Rather than caring only about the form of student essays, they believe that the form they give students encourages students to express their ideas with clarity and organization. Interestingly, though, the anti-formalist arguments are less about how

effective the five-paragraph form is or isn't in organizing students' ideas, and more about claiming that teachers who use it aren't *interested* in student ideas.

In analyzing texts from the two "sides" of this debate, I want to stress that my interest is not in arguing that one side is right and the other is wrong, but trying to better understand why the argument remains entrenched. If, as Rowlands and Brannon et al. claim, all of the research shows that the five-paragraph essay is bad for students, then why does it persist? Branon et al. argue that it is because it has been "enshrined in textbooks and tested by the testing establishment" (16) and I can certainly appreciate that as a possibility. However, they also claim that teachers only like the five-paragraph form because it is "efficient to have students follow orders and not think for themselves" (16), which seems to contrast starkly with what Smith and Seo say about their motivations and interests in teaching the five-paragraph form.

This leads me to wonder: What may be causing what I perceive as a miscommunication between the pro-form and anti-formalist arguments? How can scholars on each side have such different perceptions of the impact the form has on student writing and student writers? As I said earlier in this chapter, these are questions I have wondered about for a long time, but it was only when reading each of these texts for how they understood or theorized reading and reading instruction that I felt I gained some insight about the nature of this debate, and why it is so entrenched and seemingly immovable.

5.4 The Content Problem

If writing instruction should not be form-first, what should it be? Rowlands, Warner, and Brannon et al. are, to varying degrees, advocating for content to have a more central place in the curriculum, if only in the sense that one of their complaints is that the "dominance" of form causes "content" to be "considered only marginally (Rowlands 52). But just what is the content

they prefer to form? They indicate that student *ideas*—the content of student writing, or what the students are writing about—is what should be more central, and that a given student's particular subject matter, as well as intended audience and purpose, should be the driving force behind any structure their writing might take.

As part of his argument that students should be taught to do what real writers do, Warner indicates that knowledge of a topic is a vital piece of what "real writers" consider. He advocates for writing to be taught as a "practice," similar to the way a "doctor or lawyer" is thought of having a "practice" (19). He says that a practice "consists of four primary dimensions:"

1. Knowledge (What do doctors know?)
2. Skills (What can doctors do?)
3. Habits of mind (How do doctors think?)
4. Attitudes (What do doctors believe and value about being a doctor?) (20).

On the dimension of "knowledge," he says that "writing knowledge has two components: knowledge of writing [and] knowledge of the subject being written about" (26). That is, the content of student essays should be things they know.

Rowlands and Brannon et al. do not really discuss or advise about the content of student writing, except to say that students' ideas should be valued. Rowlands advocates for "invention strategies" like "invention heuristics [that] offer writers systematic ways to explore a subject, thereby expanding the material they have available for their projects" (55). Brannon et al. argue that students should be "constructed as knowledgeable" and that "their ideas matter" (18, 21). In all of these anti-formalist arguments, the premise is that students arrive in classrooms already possessing ideas and knowledge, such as their lived experiences, and with the idea that this knowledge should be uplifted and treated as valuable in the writing classroom.

However, none of the anti-formalist texts analyzed for this chapter go into detail about how students might *build* on their knowledge or how they come to or *develop* their ideas. When Warner uses the metaphor of a doctor's practice to work through what it means for a writer to have a practice, he neglects to say how the doctor came to have knowledge of medicine. Neither does he mention how student writers have or build "knowledge of the subject being written about." Rowlands mentions "invention strategies," but does not go into any detail about how teachers can help students build their knowledge. But at least Rowlands acknowledges that expanding knowledge and developing ideas are part of the writing process; Brannon et al. almost imply that students already have all of the knowledge they'll need.

Such lack of engagement with where student ideas come from or what kinds of content or subjects they might write about makes it seem as though this is not an issue that writing instructors have to worry about. But it's frustrating to me that this is unaddressed because I am left to genuinely wonder, if having knowledge of a topic is part of the writers' practice, how do writers, whether students or not, build on and add to that knowledge? And, perhaps more to the point, what is the writing instructors' role in that process?

My concern with what I see as a missing piece of these anti-formalists arguments is that, in practice, it is limiting in a way that may not be immediately obvious. I agree with much that they say. Students do enter college, or any classroom, with their own knowledge and ideas, and that knowledge and those ideas matter. And they can absolutely incorporate that knowledge and those ideas into the writing they do for composition courses—and that writing can be situated, contextualized, and purposeful. But what happens in these classrooms when the students are given a writing assignment on a topic about which they do not have a lot of knowledge? Should they be encouraged to simply write their ideas about that topic, regardless of how little

knowledge they have? Or should they only be given assignments about which they already have a lot of knowledge? Within the specific texts analyzed here, these questions are not readily answered.

For me, the problem with "content-first" writing instruction is most fully on display in E.D. Hirsch's idea of "cultural literacy," which is said to have been highly influential in the development of the Common Core State Standards and the corresponding standardized tests, curricula, and course contents (Tyre). In his bestselling 1987 *book Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know*, he argued that all students (in the United States) should learn the same information in school, so that they can all pick up on the same cultural references in their reading. Hirsch's argument hinges on the connection between "the decline of literacy and the decline of shared knowledge," which he says are "closely related, interdependent facts" (7). Rather than being, as it may initially seem, an argument for incorporating more reading into the curriculum, it is actually an argument for incorporating more facts—he simply argues that students should *know* more of the "shared knowledge." Needless to say, he feels authorized to define and determine what should be included in this "shared knowledge."

Though it maintains outsized influence, Hirsch's argument has logistical as well as ethical problems. In terms of ethics, his notion of what information counts as culturally literate is objectively elitist and deeply problematic, arguing as it does that all students, regardless of background, are culturally illiterate if they "lack" certain "shared information" (Hirsch's "list" is infamously heavy on white, middle-class, western/European references). Logistically, the idea does not help classroom instructors in high school or college because, by then, students are supposed to have become culturally literate, and he offers no advice or ideas for how to educate students who simply do not have the kind of cultural literacy he claims is a necessary foundation

for further learning. Yet, his work remains influential, and I think it's because it's tempting to believe it. If only young children could be imbued with all the "cultural literacy" that is relevant in higher education, then writing instructors in high school and college could focus on making space for authentic writing experiences, like encouraging students to "make choices" (Warner 5), "envision a specific audience" (Rowlands 54), and "play with language" (Brannon et al. 20). But if students continue to arrive in writing courses with incomplete "knowledge of writing [and] knowledge of the subject being written about" (Warner 26), and if anti-formalists continue to talk about centering students' ideas and knowledge without talking about how to build on what students already know, then I think Hirsch and the concept of "cultural literacy" will continue to be influential.

5.5 Including Reading Changes the Conversation

What does my critique of the anti-formalist arguments have to do with the "defense" of the five-paragraph form by Seo and Smith? For me, there are two insights or connections: one is that, while I think "form vs. content" is actually a false binary, I do think that there's a genuine question of emphasis in writing classrooms. I also think that there are legitimate concerns regarding formalism. However, I also think that Seo and Smiths' arguments are misconstrued—directly, in the case of Brannon et al., who respond directly to Seo and Smith, and indirectly by Warner and Rowlands who make assumptions about what it means to utilize a five-paragraph form in the classroom. It seems to me that the particular way in which Smith and Seo, and the five-paragraph form in general, are misconstrued is a symptom of a larger problem: The specific thing that is misunderstood about their arguments is that they are using reading instruction to develop, emphasize, and make space for the content of student ideas. In treating writing as

disconnected from reading, the anti-formalists create a "content problem" that their own arguments cannot overcome.

As I said earlier, the anti-formalist arguments do not claim that form is unimportant in writing, only that an overemphasis on form leads to deemphasizing student ideas and overvaluing conformity. For example, Rowland's says that the problem with this focus on form is that it comes first in both primacy and in chronology—students are taught the form "before attending to the interplay among purpose, audience, and content" (Rowlands 1) and to the exclusion of content. In doing so, Rowlands says, "Form-first instruction severely misrepresents composing's complex, messy, recursive nature" (1). Brannon et al. include class concerns in their argument, saying that, when taught the five-paragraph for:

> Students learn that writing means following a set of instructions, filing in the blanks. Such writing mirrors working-class life, which required little individual thinking and creativity combined with lots of monotony and following orders. (18)

And according to Warner, the five-paragraph essay, along with other prescriptive form-based rules, such as "No fewer than three and not more than five sentences per paragraph" (4), are training wheels that allow for an imitation of writing without actually teaching writing's fundamental skill, which he says is "choice": "To write is to make choices, word by word, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph. Writers choose what they want to write about, whom they want to write to, and why they're writing" (5). Because of its focus on form, the five-paragraph essay, according to Warner, does not allow for students to make choices.

But do these critiques align with what Seo and Smith say about their teaching practices? I argue that they do not. Where the anti-formalist arguments claim that the five-paragraph form "severely" oversimplifies the writing process, Smith says that, in writing courses, students "must

learn to engage critically with challenging texts, revise their work, and develop multifaceted ideas" (17). She also emphasizes that "the three body paragraphs are just a guideline…it's that introduce-develop-conclude structure that gives the form its integrity" (16). In other words, the form does not necessarily demand the kind of conformity or limit student choice to the degree that the anti-formalist arguments contend.

As for Seo, she describes a classroom that makes space for exploratory, creative, and even "messy" work, as well as the five-paragraph form. For example, she says:

> When teaching literature, I employ a wide variety of techniques to examine and explore literature. It is common to have organized chaos…Students may engage in arts and crafts to illustrate poetic themes, or they may produce a television program to portray characters in a novel, engaging in creative pursuits as they make sense of literary analysis (15).

She then goes on to say that she teaches students to communicate the ideas they've developed through this exploratory process using the five-paragraph form because it aids in "organizing their thoughts" (16). If reading and writing are understood as disconnected processes, then Seo's writing instruction, which she labels as less "creative," does seem to fit the critiques made by the anti-formalists. However, if reading is understood to be integrated in the writing process, then the "organized chaos" during which students "examine and explore" literature that Seo encourages isn't putting "form first" at all. Instead, she is describing a pedagogy in which student ideas come first. Through the process of engaging with reading in the classroom, students not only have space to think through their ideas, but also to *develop* them through reading and analysis of that reading.

Seo does not seem to actively consider reading to be the beginning of the writing process, so in her defense of the five-paragraph essay, she does not make the connection between reading

and writing explicit—and, perhaps, she and other pro-form instructors separate the two processes from each other. But what her work does show is that including certain writing structures or forms does not inherently sideline students' ideas, if reading and writing are both seen as part of the composing process.

There is something else that Seo describes that Brannon et al., who critique her directly, do not engage with, which is that the five-paragraph form also operates as a *reading* tool in Seo's class. This is another way in which her use of the five-paragraph form differs from Fulkerson's description of formalism as "judg[ing] a paper a failure if it contains one comma splice or five spelling errors" (344). Seo says:

> Most expository texts are organized similarly: there is an introduction of the topic with a thesis statement, identifying the main idea of the text; then, paragraphs provide details and support to the thesis statement; finally, a conclusion provides closure to the topic of that text. These are all elongated versions of the five-paragraph essay. This format can be seen in newspaper and magazine articles, textbooks, and narrative essays, all texts that high school students commonly encounter during their educational lives. Having students learn and apply the paragraph format helped them identify the topic sentences in paragraphs, understand which sentences supplied support or additional details to the topic sentence, and acknowledge which sentences provided a conclusion and transition to the next paragraph (Seo 16).

This idea of using structure or form as a reading tool is not supported or critiqued by the anti-formalist writers—it is simply outside the scope of their arguments, which are solely focused on writing instruction. But I think Seo's inclusion of reading in discussions about writing is crucial in demonstrating how her use of the five-paragraph form impacts her students. And while her

description of the "wide variety of techniques" she uses to teach reading is focused on literature, and reading instruction in the context of literary texts is not unusual, her description of the five-paragraph form as a writing tool is applied to nonfiction texts that students read. Seo includes in this list magazine articles and narrative essays—both of which are the kind of text commonly assigned to students in FYC.

The reason this distinction matters is not just that I think Seo and Smith are being unfairly critiqued for teaching methods they are not actually using or advocating. I also think it matters because the concerns that Warner, Rowlands, and Brannon et al. have about "form-first" instruction are issues that I do think we need to carefully consider as writing instructors. To me, a deficit model of education that values conformity above all else, particularly language conformity, is as damaging, and as inequitable, as the writers of "Students' Right" and "This Ain't Another Statement!" insist. However, I think that the anti-formalist arguments I focus on in this chapter have misdiagnosed the problem, and that the pro-form arguments have missed an opportunity to make more explicit their strategies. I think the pro-form arguments use the five-paragraph essay as the stand-in for extreme formalism, even though there is plenty of evidence in Smith and Seo's essays to suggest that the form itself is not responsible for the harmful teaching practices Warner, Rowlands, and Brannon et al. describe. And, in linking the harmful teaching practices to the five-paragraph essay, they run the risk of advocating for writing instruction that does not solve the problems of exclusion and conformity they hope to eradicate.

For example, in "Slay the Monster," Rowlands makes no distinction between writing instruction that includes the five-paragraph essay and instruction "in which form dominates, and content is considered only marginally" (2). But such an argument rests on the assumption that the five-paragraph essay is synonymous with a specific teaching method—one that "focus[es] on

form before attending to the interplay among purpose, audience, and content" (1). As I see it, Rowlands is conflating a structure with a teaching method. I would argue that Rowlands' concerns about marginalizing content, focusing on "form" first or to the exclusion of other considerations, and oversimplifying the writing process—which I absolutely agree are concerning—are examples of problematic *teaching methods*. And while it may be common for instructors to use of the five-paragraph structure in conjunction with such methods, "slaying" the specific structure will do nothing to change these methods, or to prevent what she is calling "form first" from being replaced with something different but equally "oversimplified."

And, in fact, what she advocates instead of the five-paragraph form seems to me to be just as likely to be taught with problematic teaching methods as the five-paragraph essay. For instance, she advocates for teaching "text structures." She defines "text structure" as "the ways in which chunks of meaning are logically organized and linked together" (9). She provides a chart with each structure, and for each, she lists its purpose and "organizing principle." For example, the purpose of the text structure "narration" is listed as "to relate an event" and the organizing principle is "chronology (time)" (9). But she does not explain why or how the *structure* of chronology would result in different *teaching methods* than that of the five-paragraph form. In fact, Rowlands includes the text structure "argument and persuasion," with the organizing principle "claim (and sometimes counterclaims) and evidence" (10). Reading it, I genuinely do not understand how this would not include a five-paragraph essay, particularly given that she wants to "slay" not just strict adherence to exactly five paragraphs (which does, by definition, limit content), but also "closely related forms advocating for a thesis in the first paragraph" (4). Isn't a thesis a "claim" that would be followed by evidence? Couldn't both of these "text

structures" be taught well or badly? Couldn't both be presented with an exclusive, oversimplified focus on "form?"

This is not to say that I think Rowlands' concerns with the five-paragraph structure are entirely unfounded. She mentions that five-paragraph essays are "so embedded in instructional practice that English department colleagues…describe receiving 8-10 page papers with only five paragraphs from writers who don't understand paragraphing as punctuation" (4). Having been the recipient of more than a few such eight-to-ten page papers, I agree with Rowland that it is indeed a problem. However, again, Rowland assumes that the problem is the five-paragraph essay itself, rather than the fact that students do not understand that paragraphing is "a tool to help readers anticipate shifts and developments in an unfolding line of thought." Ultimately, there comes a point in Rowlands' argument where it is clear what she thinks instructors should not do, but it is unclear exactly she thinks they should do—or, at least, it is unclear how her advice is less "form-first" than the five-paragraph essay. It's just trading one structure for another, and assuming that each structure automatically brings with it different teaching methods.

Brannon et al. equate the five-paragraph form with training students for "working-class life" of "monotony and following orders" (Brannon et al. 18), which again does not fit with Seo's description of "organized chaos" or with Smith's emphasis on "engag[ing] critically with challenging texts." Brannon et al. say the five-paragraph essay does these things, but I would argue that it would be specific teaching methods, not the form itself, that would be guilty of such "training." Warner, too, conflates the five-paragraph form with specific teaching methods, including assessment, when he says, "The writing need not be accurate or well argued, and it

definitely doesn't need to be interesting; it merely needs to seem like something that *could be* accurate and well-argued if we actually cared enough to read it closely (6).

The problem with this conflation isn't just that misdiagnosing the problem (in this case, mistaking the tool for the method) makes it harder to find the solution. It also means that the anti-formalist scholars are arguing, on some level at least, that composition instructors should teach and assess content. This is particularly problematic in Warner's interest in writing that is "interesting." What, exactly, qualifies a writing instructor to define a students' writing as "interesting," and how is grading student writing on how interesting it is any better than grading it on how much it conforms to a form? Aren't both equally likely to privilege some students over others, albeit in a potentially more idiosyncratic (and mysterious) way if the focus is writing that is "interesting?" Aren't both equally likely to be more relevant in some classrooms or writing contexts than others?

I also notice Warner's use of the word "accurate." In critiquing the five-paragraph essay for allowing writing that "need not be accurate," Warner actually reinforces the notion of "accuracy" in writing. Yet, according to Fulkerson, the problem with formalism is the focus on error: "good writing is 'correct' writing at the sentence level." And though it's unclear whether Warner means accuracy at the sentence level, the very concept that writing could be "accurate" or "inaccurate" suggests the kind of inflexible, deficiency model of education that Brannon et al., and to a degree all the anti-formalists, aim to resist. This, again, suggests to me that, in naming the five-paragraph essay as the problem, and assuming the form equates to specific teaching methods, the anti-formalists have mischaracterized the five-paragraph form as synonymous with "form-first" or formalist instruction. In so doing, they have suggested solutions that don't

actually guarantee, or even support, genuinely contextualized, authentic, student-centered writing instruction.

5.6 The "Form Vs. Content" Debate…Now, with Reading!

A question I had while reading the anti-formalist arguments, particularly while trying to understand what they advocated for in terms of writing instruction, is how they understood or described the role of reading in writing classrooms. How do they perceive reading in connection with writing, and when they think of reading instruction, what do they think of?

In the particular text analyzed here, Brannon et al. mention reading only in passing, and only in the context of remediation. They say, "Children who 'lack reading skills' are taught phonics…. The deficit model does not allow students to participate as writers and language users—as readers and writers in the world" (18). Having seen the tendency of compositionists to link reading either to literature or to remediation, my take on Brannon et al.'s inclusion of "children who 'lack reading skills'" in the context of an article on the five-paragraph essay is that Brannon et al. link reading instruction with remediation. They do not explicitly claim that reading instruction is always remedial or a sign of a deficit model of education, but neither do they counter the implication created by its being the only mention of reading in the article.

Rowlands and Warner both indicate that reading is part of the writing process and that the reading students are assigned in class is connected to the writing they are assigned, but both imply that this can be done without much reading instruction. For example, Rowlands says, "Use student reading to teach genres and their characteristics" (56), while Warner says:

> Reading closely, seeking to understand the impact of different authorial choices and making inferences from the texts to prove comprehension of not just the piece in general,

> but some of its component parts, is essentially what happens as we read, as long as we're reading carefully. (64)

In both of these, there is the sense that students can do this as long as they are trying hard or paying attention.

To be clear, none of the anti-formalist arguments—or, for that matter, the pro-form arguments—I analyzed for this project are explicitly saying that reading is or is not integral to the writing process. They, like so many compositionists and other writing instructors, refer to reading off-handedly, as in "Anyone can read about delicate brain surgery. Many fewer of us have the dexterity to be brain surgeons" (Warner 21). Or, they refer to reading as an obvious, but unproblematic, step in the writing process: "In one example, third graders read two articles about astronauts and then write a magazine article about life in space" (Rowlands 53). Or, they refer to reading primarily in the context of reading literature, and as if the process of reading is significantly distinct from the process of writing: "When teaching literature, I employ a wide variety of techniques to examine and explore literature….this creativity does not apply to my methods of teaching expository writing" (Seo 15).

I also want to be clear, and hope I have already been clear, that I am not advocating for formalist or what Rowlands calls "form-first instruction." I do not think Seo and Smith's arguments are above critique, or that everything Rowlands, Warner, and Brannon et al. have to say is wrong. Rather, my focus is on how the lack of explicit attention to reading—which includes a disciplinary lack of knowledge and theory about reading—forces the question of how to teach writing into debates that are not fruitful. I think that the conflation of a form, such as the five-paragraph essay, with teaching methods that may or may not use that form is somewhat related to the fact that we, as a discipline, don't have well-developed conversations and language

for teaching writing as a process *that includes reading*. And certainly, particularly when it comes to non-fiction texts, we do not have robust, well-developed, or well-researched reading pedagogies to incorporate into our thinking about composition courses.

When I consider what Byung-In Seo has to say about how she incorporates the five-paragraph essay into her courses, even with her own claim that her "methods of teaching expository writing" are not "creative," what I see is instruction that has the possibility of genuinely helping students to communicate their ideas. That is, it has that possibility *if* we understand her reading instruction—both her "creative methods" for "literary analysis" and her use of nonfiction paragraph structure to teach students to "understand which sentences" in nonfiction texts "supplied support…to the topic sentence" (15-16) —-to be where and how students learn to engage with written texts in order to develop their responses. This is not to say that these pedagogies are fully realized in Seo's classes or that the five-paragraph form is the best addition to them. Rather, I here am positing that further discussion of, research on, and debate about such pedagogies and their relationship to formal instruction would, I think, add fruitful new dimensions to an argument that has become so entrenched that new additions to it seem to do little other than retread old ground.

It was 1979 when Fulkerson wrote that "Few major writers seem to accept formalist values," and yet al.l five of the anti-formalist and pro-form texts I analyzed in this chapter were published since 2006, and the most recent NCTE/CCCCs statement on students' language, "This Ain't Another Statement…" was published as recently as 2020. Clearly, the issue is not settled. This is true on the "content side" as well as on what I've called the "pro-form" side. E.D. Hirsh's ideas about cultural literacy, while much-maligned in many areas of English education, experienced a resurgence in popularity in connection with the Common Core State Standards. A

2014 article called "'I've Been a Pariah For So Long,'" which included an interview with Hirsch, said this:

> The liberals of America's educational establishment…responded to *Cultural Literacy* as if it were a manifesto for what one called 'a new cultural offensive' aimed at writing the common man out of history…. But the progressives, while dominant, have been unable to improve outcomes for low-income students, particularly African-Americans and Latinos, and today, liberal educators and politicians are giving Hirsch's ideas a second, much more admiring look. (Tyre)

All of this back-and-forth, to me, suggests that an answer cannot be found because we are looking in the wrong places.

5.7 Practitioner Thoughts

More than any other chapter in this dissertation, this is the one I have been, in one way or another, trying to write for twenty years. As an undergraduate, I completed a tutoring internship with the college Writing Center. That writing center taught a method of "minimalist tutoring," in which we were supposed to encourage and emphasize "'connective thinking,'" which "links disparate realms of learning in new and unexpected patterns," rather than "'mimetic thinking,'" which is "designed to demonstrate mastering of a pre-established realm of knowledge" (Lioi 1). The five-paragraph essay outline was an example, I thought, of "pre-established… knowledge." But teaching it, or reviewing it, with tutees and encouraging them to use it as a tool also seemed effective. In my final paper for the internship, I argued that writers who had no mimetic knowledge of essay structure were limited in the connective work they could do. I wrote, "I…think the distinction should be made between the mimetic information needed for structure and the connective work of content" ("Connective" 9).

Years later, I wrote a paper for a graduate course in composition in which I argued that writing instructors or compositionists could change the definition of "formalism" to one that fit better with "form" as it is understood in the visual arts. I quoted from a book, *The Natural Way to Draw*, which encouraged students to learn "form" first through the completion of many, many exercises that are distinct from the art they will eventually make. Its author, Kimon Nicolaïdes, wrote:

> What you are trying to learn is not the *exercise*…. You are trying to learn *to draw*. The exercise is merely a constructive way for you to look at people and objects so that you may acquire the most knowledge from your efforts. (2)

In a presentation to the class, I showed images of student exercises—sketches and still life images of wine bottles—and contrasted them with Picasso's *Les Demoiselle D'Avignon*. I was trying to show that there's a difference between an exercise in rendering the three-dimensional world accurately on two-dimensional paper—and art, which is not about accuracy but may perhaps be about intentionality. And intentionality in art, I argued, required an artist to have learned rendering via a series of exercises that were not "real art."

This argument went down like a lead balloon with my professor, who, I think, could not look past my seemingly friendly attitude toward "formalism." It's also quite possible that I was not making a lot of sense, because my ideas were confused in my own mind. I had an idea of "mimetic thinking" or pre-established knowledge as having something in common with artistic rendering. I thought of both as being, in a way, able to be understood as "right or wrong," and also as being a means to an end rather than an end in-and-of-itself.

I think, as I look at the anti-formalist arguments I analyzed in this chapter, that both of my prior arguments made the mistake of over-simplifying the anti-formalists, who were not

suggesting that any attention to form is bad, but rather were asking instructors to think beyond form. But I also think that what the anti-formalists miss, as well as what I missed in those prior arguments, is hidden in plain sight in Nicoalaïdes: learning to draw is a process of learning to *see*. What the hand is doing as it makes the drawing is important, but the brain's interpretation of what it's looking at is the piece that Nicolaïdes exercises with his students. That is why the drawings they produces are not the point, and why the drawings do not have to be "real art" in order to be pedagogically meaningful.

When I started writing the version of this argument—and my interrogations of such—that became this chapter, what I was adding, for the first time, were my still-developing ideas about the value and importance of reading as integral to the writing process. I kept thinking of a lyric from one of my favorite songs: "If you don't ask the right questions/every answer feels wrong," and how the reverse is also true: if every answer feels wrong, you're probably asking the wrong questions. And if the same argument, relatively unchanged, remains a two-dimensional "tug of war" that just goes back and forth again and again, that, to me, suggests that the argument itself is part of the problem. Something in its premise or supposition must be faulty, or the conversation would develop and change in fruitful ways as more voices and more ideas were added.

For me, as a practitioner, what jostled the old argument out of its rut was to think first *not* about student writing—its form or its content, or its style, purpose, or any other product-focused emphasis—*but instead* about my assignments and whether were encouraged students to "see" writing. We often think that better writing skills will open opportunities for students. But "better" is so contextually specific. Skills that are essential in one field to one person simply don't work in others. Clarity, length, specificity, directness: these are all incredibly specific to many, but not

all, cultures and contexts of writing, and it is simply hubris for instructors to think we can predict, or should try to predict, all of the writing contexts our students might encounter in the future. But if we emphasize helping students understand and interpret written text—their own and other people's—we can, within that framework, consider with them questions of how sentences and paragraphs might be put together; the possible connections between form and content; the different ways people can express their arguments and share their observations; and any number of other "constructive way[s] to look at" texts—all so that they can more intentionally engage with any texts they encounter in their future endeavors.

Chapter 6: Reading, Writing… and Rhetoric?

In Chapter 1, I said that I would be using the term "composition studies," instead of "rhetoric and composition" to describe the field of study under consideration. I prefer "composition studies" in the context of this dissertation to emphasize its connection to contemporary FYC, and also because rhetoric, a field unto itself, is not a primary focus for me. That said, the word "rhetoric" is used often in the context of FYC and composition studies, and in ways that I think inform compositionists' ideas about reading. Ideas that have grown out of rhetorical studies—or that at least use some of the same language used in rhetorical studies—are common in FYC and in composition studies. Their impact on ideas about reading and teaching reading in FYC and composition studies is the focus of this chapter.

Like the words reading, literacy, and composition, the word rhetoric has different meanings for different people. According to Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu, in "Working Rhetoric and Composition," both rhetoric and composition are used "interchangeably with one another and with *writing*, *English*, and *literacy*," and there is a further tendency to treat the definitions as "stable and self-evident" (471). In other words, different writers use the terms differently from each other but also as if everyone uses them the same way. For my part, I make no argument in this chapter about what rhetoric properly *is*. Instead, the focus here is on what *compositionists* have had to say about rhetoric, and how those ideas might impact the discipline of composition studies as well as the teaching of FYC.

Thus, this chapter is less about making a map and more about interpreting the maps that have been left behind by others, and to explore, to any extent possible, whether or how the older maps were used to make newer maps. What was emphasized in the older maps? How might those emphases have been further emphasized or perhaps deemphasized in later maps? Such an

analysis does not reveal much about the actual land the maps are meant to depict. It might suggest a bit about how the maps were likely to have been used, but even that is only implied by the map itself—it may be that some maps were never used "as intended." But the effort does reveal something about the perspectives and notions of the mapmakers and if—and if so, how—they influenced other mapmakers to see the landscape.

6.1 Rhetoric Through the Lens of Composition

One idea of rhetoric that has and continues to influence composition studies is rhetoric as "prescriptive" and "filled with rules" (Applebee 9). In *Tradition and Reform*, Applebee equated "rhetoric" with an area of study in Britain and the United States starting in the early 18th century and going into the late 19th century. According to Applebee, its texts, like those of the grammarians, were "filled with rules to be followed, and with examples of errors of expression as well as of the successes of the best writers" (9). Rhetoric emphasized "'expression,' both written and oral…[and] diction, style, figurative language…" (8).

But rhetoric as prescriptive and focused on correctness—so much like Fulkerson's description of formalism in composition studies—is almost antithetical to some other modern descriptions and definitions of rhetoric. In "Composition Is Not Rhetoric," Sharon Crowley argued that:

> [A]ny theoretical discourse that is entitled to be called 'rhetoric' must at a minimum conceive of rhetoric as an art of invention, that is, it must give a central place to the systematic discovery and investigation of the available arguments in a given situation. Furthermore, it must conceive of the arguments generated by rhetorical invention as both produced and circulated within a network of social and civic discourse, images, and events.

This notion of rhetoric has nothing to do with "correctness" and instead emphasizes invention and social/civic engagement and discourses. There is also, in Crowley's definition, a sense of agonism in rhetoric—the emphasis on argument or conflict as an aspect of this "social and civic discourse."

James Berlin presented yet a different use of the term "rhetoric" in *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American College, 1900-1985.* In it, he used the term to mean "the production of spoken and written texts.' He contrasted it with, "poetic, the interpretation of texts" (1). He did not present a single "rhetoric," but instead said that "rhetoric is no more a monolithic field than is poetic" and spoke of "*rhetorics*," plural (3).

Like Applebee, Berlin was *describing* what he saw as how others had defined and taught rhetoric, whereas Crowley was arguing for a particular way in which she thought rhetoric *should* be understood and taught. This accounts for some of the differences in their emphases, but there is no doubt that the three still use the word to mean quite different things, especially in how they see "rhetoric" connected to "composition." Writing in 2003, Crowley saw no connection between her definition of rhetoric and the structure or history of FYC. Instead, she argued, modern compositionists only started "yoking" composition to rhetoric as "a means of securing status for composition teachers" ("Rhetoric is Not"). She, at the time at least, saw FYC as a course that could, but usually did not, include rhetoric, and was more often focused on students' "personal qualities or experiences" than on civic or social discourse.

Traces of all of these ideas about the word "rhetoric" can be seen in FYC as it is taught and understood today. In fact, the inclusion of the word rhetoric is so common that I did not expect to find that there was so much difference of opinion on what rhetoric is or has been, and how or whether it is similar to or different from composition. But what I had already sensed was

that rhetoric, which in nearly all definitions is associated with speaking and/or writing more than listening and/or reading, does not provide composition with much in the way of reading theory—at least, not in the way that rhetoric has been perceived and applied in the context of composition studies. For example, Berlin's definition of rhetoric as *producing* texts and poetic as *interpreting* texts (*Rhetorics* xvi) indicates a binary split between writing/producing and reading/interpreting not just as distinct processes, but also distinct areas of study.

6.2 Rhetorically Speaking…

A common elision throughout composition studies, and indeed in many other contexts, is that of speaker and writer. The common "joining the conversation" metaphor, which is typically used, as in *They Say/I Say*, to provide students with a sense of context and purpose for their writing, intentionally elides orality with textuality for pedagogical purposes.

In 1941, Kenneth Burke introduced the concept of "the unending conversation," which is now known as the "Burkean Parlor." In this metaphor, there is a parlor at which "you" arrive late:

> When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is

interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (110-111)

Here, in the "Burkean Parlor," ideas are shared back and forth and among different people in an atmosphere that suggests a kind of equity: there is a frictionless flow of participants—anyone can wander in when they choose, and wander back out at will, and while there can converse with anyone and find allies.

The Burkean Parlor is a democratic place, where anyone can arrive and anyone can speak and be heard, and "embarrassment or gratification" (that is, winning or losing a debate) is dependent upon "the quality" of what is said. This very much aligns with "the open debate of all issues that impinged upon the community," as Berlin says was the goal of democracy as understood in ancient Athens (Berlin, *Rhetoric* xii). The Parlor is also a public place, where speakers engage in "public performance"—so many people, in fact, that the discussion begins before "you" arrive and continues after "you" depart. It is also clearly oral—"you listen," you catch "the tenor," "you answer," and eventually you leave "with the discussion still vigorously in progress."

The Burkean Parlor is a common metaphor in composition. Peter Elbow has said, "I should try to enact and live out in my classroom the Burkean metaphor of intellectual life as an unending conversation" (381), and multiple popular FYC textbooks employ it as a central theme (Walsh et al. 102). Some compositionists focus on what they see as the collaborative nature of the metaphor. For example, in 1991, Andrea Lunsford advocated for a writing center approach that she called "Burkean Parlor Centers." For her, collaboration is the heart of the Burkean Parlor, and she advocated for writing centers that "teach, model, and learn about careful

listening, leadership, goal setting, and negotiation - all of which are necessary to effective collaboration" (7).

Others focus on what I think of as the "double-dutch" aspect of entering the conversation—the idea that, not only is the conversation ongoing, but that new arrivals require no invitation to participate, just to "listen for a while" to "catch the tenor" before adding their own thoughts to the mix. *They Say/I Say* even includes a section called "Putting in Your Oar," which instructs students to learn through doing—that is, to listen to others, understand how the "conversation" is constructed and framed, and then "respond" with one of three options—"agree, disagree, or agree/disagree simultaneously."

As with all metaphors, the Burkean Parlor has its limitations. Burke describes the dialectical aspect of rhetoric by leaning into an orality-based tradition. Again, he uses words like "discussion," "tenor," "listen." In *They Say/I Say*, Graff and Birkenstein use the metaphor of conversation to emphasize, for students, that academic writing is not "a process of saying 'true' or 'smart' things in a vacuum," and because "in the real world, we don't make arguments without being provoked" (3). The benefit of the metaphor is that it contextualizes writing as communication—responding to what someone said with your own ideas, to which someone else might also respond.

But as I said, the metaphor has limitations, specifically when it comes to the differences between orality and textuality. Reading and listening have a lot in common, but text has features that verbal communication does not have, and vice versa. That goes for writing and speaking as well, of course, but I see more problems, pedagogically, with the reading/listening elision. Consider the title of the following article by the journalist Jenna Wortham, which I have assigned in my FYC classes: "On Instagram, Seeing Between the (Gender) Lines." The use of punctuation

here is a particularly strong, though by no means rare, example of punctuation that does not fully translate to speech—the parentheses around "Gender." How is that said out loud? And what is the "tenor" of it? There's nothing in the "conversation" metaphor that helps a reader understand what Wortham is doing with that title. And even with punctuation that is more directly associated with certain verbal sounds or tones, like question marks, the concept of the Burkean parlor or "joining the conversation" does not help readers learn how those specific elements of texts indicate different "tenors" or even altogether different meanings.

6.3 Rhetoric, Speaker-as-Subject, and FYC

One element that comes through in many composition-focused views of rhetoric is the idea of the speaker-as-subject and the listener-as-object. By this, I mean that the pedagogical and theoretical focus is on what a student can or should produce rather than on what a student can or should consume. It could be argued that FYC is a writing course and by definition must properly focus on the speaker-as-subject. Yet, as numerous reading compositionists argue, writing typically includes reading, if only the reading of one's own text, and FYC almost always assigns reading. Thus, in FYC, students operate as both readers and as writers in the class. They are not tasked only with thinking about the reader of their texts, but also with being readers of texts themselves. That is relevant within the context of the FYC class, but also outside of it as well, where readers may never produce text in response to that which they have consumed. Given all of this, I think it is important to think about the idea of "speaker-as-subject" in rhetoric, and how and whether that influences FYC and ideas of reading.

When the speaker is the subject—the doer—and the reader is the object, the onus is on the speaker to be persuasive more than it is on the audience to be persuaded. But the power and control also lies with the speaker. The assumption seems to be that if the speaker is doing his job

(and in classical rhetoric, of course, it would have been "his" job), the audience—defined as a monolith—will react accordingly—will be persuaded or transported. And when the reader responds to what she has read, she becomes the writer, working to persuade the audience in turn. Consider again the popular metaphor of helping students become "part of the conversation." In this metaphor, the student is not fully engaged in the conversation until she becomes a writer, as evidenced by the very title of *They Say/ I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, the bestselling FYC textbook now in its fifth edition. In the introduction, its authors, Gerald Graff and Cathy Berkenstein write:

> At the core of this book is the premise that good argumentative writing begins not with an act of assertion but an act of listening, of putting ourselves in the shoes of those who think differently from us. As a result, we advise writers to begin not with what they themselves think about their subject ("I say") but with what others think ("they say"). (xiii)

What I see here is an overlap with the definitions of rhetoric above. Although this *seems* to be more about listening (by which they actually mean "reading," which is an interesting conflation in its own right) than speaking/writing, the focus is still on the student-as-writer as the ultimate goal of listening. Further, the assumption is that all a student needs to conduct a successful "act of listening" is simply to decide to do it. There is no acknowledgement that "putting ourselves in the shoes" of others is hard to do. There is no sense that it requires not only a willingness but also a process of comprehending what the text says and interpreting what it (might) mean before approaching a response (an "I say"). It is as if, for Graff and Birkenstein, simply choosing to listen equates to understanding. Furthermore, in their description, the reason to listen is not to understand for the sake of understanding, but for the sake of positioning one's response more

effectively. All of this suggests the power of the speaker-as-subject, even when the "speaker" is reading in order to prepare for writing.

Consider the above examples of speaker-as-subject and listener-as-implied-object alongside Bosley's claim that, "Although colleges believe that students need to develop academic writing skills, they assume that students have the reading skills necessary to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate complex academic texts" (286). Or Helmers' claim that "by the time the students arrive in college, they are assumed to 'know how to read'" (Introduction 4). Or Jolliffe's concern that, even though reading is assigned and studies show students struggle to do it, "critical reading almost never takes center stage in composition studies" ("Who is Teaching" 127). If speaker-as-subject and listener-as-object is a dominating idea in composition studies, it stands to reason that there is no "map" or framework for talking about reading from the perspective of "reader-as-subject."

And again, speaker-as-subject is such a common way to think of the composition course or writing instruction in general that it may be difficult to imagine it any other way. But think again of Carillo's argument that "both practices of reading and writing involve the construction—or *composition*—of meaning" (*Securing* 5). In order for students, or any readers, to compose meaning as readers, they need to inhabit a space of reader-as-subject. And that exists, commonly, in other areas of English studies—just not in composition studies. Consider the subject-positioning in Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*:

> A novel or poem or play remains merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings. (24)

A reader transforms; a reader infuses—here, the reader is doing the work, while the text (written by a writer) is worked on. Here, the reader is not the object of the text, but is an active part of the "live circuit." But Rosenblatt here is speaking of novels and poetry—this is a book about literature. And whether or not this theory *could* be applied to the reading of non-fiction texts in the context of college writing courses, the literature/composition bifurcation does not lend itself to such a setup.

One way to understand the assumption that college students "know how to read" is to think of the age and assumed skill-level of college students. But, of course, in literature courses, students are not "assumed to 'know how to read'" literary texts without instruction, guidance, and support for that reading. But it may be that one reason students, in the context of nonfiction texts, are assumed to "know how to read" is that, in rhetorical studies, reading or listening was never theorized as difficult, or as part of a dialectical process of meaning-making.

Granted, the conversation metaphor is not intended to teach reading. But the conversation and speech/text elision are so common that I think they impact our collective awareness of just how different text-based and oral communication can be. I think this is particularly true in the case of academic writing, where sentences can be longer and use more punctuation. These differences are not acknowledged in FYC textbooks like *They Say/I Say*, which—per the title—relies heavily so on the metaphor of conversation that they've collapsed the reader/writer distinction.

6.4 "Sensible of a Beauty in Discourse"

In the Burkean parlor, the idea is that anyone who wants to can wander into the party, listen for a while, and then begin to speak. In this democratic utopia, the best ideas, or perhaps the most engaging speakers—Burke uses "quality"—will find allies and support. But whether we

imagine a literal cocktail party or a text-based academic conversation, the reality is that not all people are allowed to enter the space. And, when they do, not all ideas or ways of communicating them are treated equally.

In fact, a major area in concern in composition studies involves the problem of assessing, and correcting, student writing. The NCTE/CCCC's "Students' Right" and "This Ain't Another Statement!" statements are two examples of how this concern is expressed at the disciplinary-level. And while the statements are different, the fact that "This Ain't Another Statement!" published in 2020, even exists shows that the concerns of the 1974 "Students' Right" have not been fully addressed. "Students' Right" unequivocally states that, "We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style." Yet, according to "This Ain't Another Statement!," there were at least seventeen additional statements and resolutions "in relation to language rights" since 1974. While on the one hand this suggests that the organizations have remained committed to the ideas in "Students' Right," it also indicates that there has been an ongoing need for such statements. That, in other words, the issue has yet to be resolved. The systemic racism addressed in both statements is, by nature of its being systemic, buttressed by numerous institutions, histories, and traditions. I want to think, here, about how rhetoric, as understood in the context of composition, might be one of them.

For much of its existence, rhetorical thinking and studies was highly rarified. In the United States, for example, the time during which rhetoric "served as the very core of the college curriculum" was also the time during which college enrollment was most restricted to white male property holders (Berlin, *Rhetorics* xiv). The men who studied rhetoric, theorized it, defined it, and taught it were not merely privileged, but quite literally authorized to articulate the ideas that

shaped the very definition of knowledge and reality for many years. If we go back as far as Aristotle, it's not just many years but thousands of years of influence.

What might some of the legacies of that tradition look like? In 1783, the famous rhetorician Hugh Blair published *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, which remained popular for decades (Applebee 9). Consider Blair's thoughts about language, culture, and discourse in the following passage from *Lectures*:

> Accordingly we find, that in almost every nation, as soon as language had extended itself beyond that scanty communication which was required for the supply of men's necessities, the improvement of discourse began to attract regard. In the language even of rude uncultivated tribes, we can trace some attention to the grace and force of those expressions which they used, when they sought to persuade or to affect. They were early sensible of a beauty in discourse, and endeavoured [sic] to give it certain decorations which experience had taught them it was capable of receiving, long before the study of those decorations was formed into regular art." (2)

Some of what is happening here—namely, Blair's reference to "rude uncultivated tribes," which is both racialized and dehumanizing—would not be acceptable today. But a lot of the ideas in this passage are less obviously harmful, and might well make their way into FYC classrooms in some form.

One of these is that Blair links artistry or style with intelligence or higher civilization. It's a hierarchical view of language use. The idea is that the more the "study" of "beauty in discourse" is "formed into regular art," the more cultivated that society or nation is. Communication that is pragmatic—"required for the supply of men's necessities"—is "scanty." And what kind of language is valued? It is specifically language that is used "to persuade or to

affect." And again, he's not just saying that this is one good kind of language use, but literally that this is more intelligent or more civilized—"nations" use "improved" discourse, while "tribes" do not.

Another aspect of Blair's writing is that he writes about what kind of language is good or better as if there is no question, and as if it is clear and appropriate that he should be measuring or determining the value of other people's language. For example, he said, "…we can trace some attention to the grace and force of those expressions which they used." The "we" and the "they" is a stark divide. "We" includes Blair and people like him—people who use beautiful language to persuade and affect. "They" are the rude, uncultivated tribes. "They" might use "certain decorations" of language, but certainly could never study it or be as intentional as the "we" in Blair's sentence. Blair placed himself, and by extension white, male, educated, English-speaking people who care about and understand this "regular art" of persuasive and affective language, at the top of the ladder that he created.

Blair uses three synonyms with "language." One is "scanty communication," which merely "suppl[ies] men's necessities" and is not the kind of language in which he is interested. The other two are "discourse" and "expressions," which, in contrast to supplying necessities, is used when one seeks "to persuade or to affect." This kind of language—discourse/expressions—can be "improved" when attention is given to their "grace," "force," "beauty," and "decorations." This idea of focusing on or caring primarily about the style of langauge and how it successfully or unsuccessfully persuades or affects the reader/listener continues to be the prevailing understanding of language as it is presented, studied, taught, and assessed in FYC.

Consider this excerpt from the Introduction in *They Say/I Say: the Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. They write:

> Often without consciously realizing it, accomplished writers routinely rely on a stock of established moves that are crucial for communicating sophisticated ideas. What makes writers masters of their trade is not only their ability to express interesting thoughts but their mastery of an inventory of basic moves that they probably picked up by reading a wide range of other accomplished writers. Less experienced writers, by contrast, are often unfamiliar with these basic moves and unsure how to make them in their own writing. This book is intended as a short, user-friendly guide to the basic moves of academic writing. (1)

They later add that some students may have been taught to "play it safe" and "avoid controversy" by "making statements that nobody can possibly disagree with" (8). They say:

> Though this view of writing may appear logical, it is actually a recipe for flat, lifeless writing… "William Shakespeare wrote many famous plays and sonnets" may be a perfectly true statement, but precisely because nobody is likely to disagree with it, it goes without saying and thus would seem pointless if said. (8)

To be sure, there are *many* differences between Graff/Birkenstein and Blair. To me, the differences are more obvious than the similarities, and not just because Graff and Birkenstein say nothing of "uncultivated tribes." For example, where Blair suggests that different cultures have higher or lower innate abilities to understand the art of discourse, Graff and Birkenstein contrast "accomplished writers" not with uncultivated people, but with "inexperienced writers." Their language is both more individualized—about individual writers, not entire nations or tribes—and more based on the experiences, not the innate abilities, a person has. In their way of writing about language, a person can start out "inexperienced' but then gain experience. In fact, their

project is actively to help inexperienced writers become more accomplished. So that's quite different from what Blair suggests with his "we" and "they."

There is a significant similarity between the two texts, though, in the particular kinds of language they are focused on. Although Graff and Birkenstein use the term "academic writing" where Blair uses "language," what both are really interested in is the same: argumentation and persuasion. Writing to inform—to "supply…men's necessities" is so far from the point for Graff and Birkenstein that they make the claim that a statement which is "perfectly true" but which "nobody is likely to disagree with" is a statement that "would seem pointless if said" (8). It is this aspect of Blaire and Graff/Birkenstein—this focus on or interest in persuasion—that most obviously draws a line from composition studies today to the "rhetoric" of the past, but I do not think it is the only one.

When it comes to style, what Graff and Birkenstein value initially sounds quite different from what Blair valued, but upon reflection, I'm not sure how different they really are. Blair wrote about "beauty" and "decoration," which sounds much more flowery than Graff and Birkenstein's relatively pragmatic-sounding praise of writing that is "clear" and "organized." Graff and Birkenstein also remark upon "sophisticated ideas" and "interesting thoughts," which seems to give more weight to the content of the writing than Blair does. But while the preferred style may have changed, what is clear is that there is still a preference. "Clarity" and "organization" in academic writing are such commonly articulated preferences that it's easy to not think of them as a particular style, but they are. And they are not innate qualities of good writing—as evidenced by the fact that they were not Blair's preferred style.

And while Graff and Birkenstein do remark upon content to the extent that they refer to "sophisticated ideas" and "interesting thoughts," they imply that what is "sophisticated" and

"interesting" to them is similar to that which interest's Blair: namely, ideas and thoughts that are persuasive. Ideas and thoughts with which "nobody is likely to disagree" are "pointless" and a recipe for flat, lifeless writing"—perhaps similar to the "scanty communication" that is "required for the supply of men's necessities. They even, in spite of writing about "inexperienced writers" who can become experienced, refer to "mastery" of the "basic moves" of academic writing. Though much less overt and unapologetic as compared to Blair, this does still indicate that there exists a kind of communication that is innately better, and that they are in a position to recognize it, while others are not.

I cannot pretend that I have been less "guilty" of what I am pointing out in Graff and Birkenstein's language. Nor am I suggesting that *They Say/I Say* is the only textbook to have these similarities and links back to Hugh Blair. On the contrary, I am saying that Blair's ideas—either literally his, or the tradition he came out of—is still deeply embedded in the teaching of writing today. That "This Ain't Another Statement" is still relevant and needing to be said decades after "Students Right" is powerful evidence of this.

6.5 "A Frankly Male Tradition"

Issues of elitism in writing instruction or rhetorical studies run very deep. It isn't just that, for most of Western history, white men of a certain class were the only people regularly allowed to "join the conversation." It's also that language use is one of vehicles by which non-white, non-male, non-wealthy people were and continue to be barred from entry or full participation. In other words, it isn't merely that many groups of people simply been barred from the Burkean parlor, significant as that is. It is also that one of the methods of exclusion was always the claim that individual members of those groups, or, thinking back to Blair, wholesale groups, did not use language "correctly" and therefore should not be part of the conversation. In composition

studies, a thorny question we all must grapple with is whether or when to teach all students the "basic moves" of pre-existing academic styles that were born out of a racist, classist, and misogynistic history, and whether or when (to say nothing of how) to resist, or teach students to resist, that narrative.

One of those narratives has to do with correctness of grammar and/or of style. Another is *agonism*, or the emphasis on conflict, as the driving force of the conversation. This notion of academic writing is not simply the idea that scholars write in response to one another, but specifically that such responses are in the form of agreement or disagreement. Burke's description of the "conversation" includes the words "argument," "defense," "opponent," and "ally." These words are presented in the context of a friendly social gathering, but the language around the actual "conversation" is more pugnacious. I think this goes in hand with Blair's view of language that "suppl[ies] men's necessities" as "scanty," and even Graff and Birkenstein's view that it is "pointless" to say something that "nobody is likely to disagree with" or that "avoid[ing] controversy" leads to "flat, lifeless writing."

Of course, there are many conversations and written texts that have nothing to do with controversy, and there are many reasons to say things that nobody is likely to disagree with. Even within the specific context of academic writing, there is space for sharing information, expressing admiration, and telling stories. And all of these can, and are, done in the context of responding to what others have said and expressing one's own views.

If the common or dominant way of talking about and teaching academic writing is narrow and limited, why might that be? Perhaps it is because it comes out of a culture that is equally narrow and limited in terms of who has been allowed entry, and who has been barred. In talking about teaching rhetoric and composition, Sharon Crowley said, "I analyze a frankly male

educational tradition" (*Composition* x). In *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*, Robert J. Connors said that "…the discipline of rhetoric, as it had evolved from the classical period through the eighteenth century, was almost absolutely male. It categorically refused entry to women" (27). This, of course, is in addition to its overwhelmingly Western/white history.

Connors argued that the agonism of composition is connected to the fact that it is a Western male tradition. He said, "[M]asculine consciousness tacitly perceives most of life from the perspective of a contest. From day to day, the agonist wins or loses in the constant struggle for power, physical comfort, ego-satisfaction, territory" (25). He argued that, because rhetoric had for so long been "absolutely male" that it was also limited in being almost absolutely agonistic, and that when "higher education was opened… to women," rhetoric changed—for the better—as a result.

I do have a few issues with Connors' argument. I think that, while it's true that higher education is not as definitively or as consistently closed to women as it used to be, there are plenty of signs that women do not occupy prestigious academic or intellectual spaces as often, or with as much security, as men do. For just one example, in doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition in 1993—several years *before* Connors' book was published—fewer than 44% of all faculty were female, which was up from 33.5% in 1986 (Brown et al. 242). However, female faculty were less likely to be tenured or even tenure-track than male faculty in the same programs, and made up only 24% of full professors (Brown et al. 243). In 2006, only 34% of all faculty in doctoral programs in the United States were female (West and Curtis 6). Such numbers do not show equity in gender in rhetoric and composition or in higher education writ large, and

even though Connors admits that the inclusion of women was “partial,” he also concludes that rhetoric was no longer “male-dominated” (25), and that I cannot quite agree with.

Part of the problem, from my perspective, is that Connors’ argument leans essentialist on issues of gender—he argued that rhetoric was agonistic because it was male-dominated, not because masculinity in the West had been *constructed* as competitive. As a result, he believed that simply including more women inherently meant that new kinds or styles of rhetoric were also included. He said that rhetoric became more “irenic,” or aimed at peace, “at that same time” that higher education “was opened…to women” (24). This suggests that women are or were inherently less agonistic than men, which indicates that the only work a discipline has to do to be less “male-dominated” is to simply have more women in it. In addition to being an overly simplistic notion of “domination,” Connors’ view leaves little to no room for an intersectional view of the whiteness and maleness that did, and still does, dominate in higher education. Because “gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities (Butler 3), simply adding more women to academia will not undo inequities, particularly to racial and class inequalities which are as socially constructed as gender. It is only in recognizing “women” as “a troublesome term, a site of contest” (Butler 3), that we can question or explore ways in which increased diversity in higher education does, and does not, change the larger systems and dominant ideologies therein.

That said, the linking of (socially constructed) masculinity with the agonism of rhetoric does open the door to thinking about the ways that notions of “good writing” are embedded in larger cultural norms and structures. As Berlin wrote, “Rhetoric is a social invention” (*Writing Instruction* 1). Recognizing the ways that we are all influenced by the cultures in which we live,

in ways we both can and cannot actively "see," because we are in it, is a step toward understanding how writing instruction can either be complicit or resistant to reproducing harmful inequities. Not surprisingly, given everything I have analyzed, reflected on, and argued in this dissertation so far, I continue to think that one way to develop a pedagogy that is more resistant to reproducing social inequity is to incorporate reading instruction more fully into writing instruction.

6.6 Reading, Writing, Rhetoric

In this chapter, I've tried to work through some of the implications and impacts of "rhetoric" on composition studies without over-prescribing a sense of direct "cause and effect." I think of this as a project that is "paired" with the previous chapter, in which I worked through some ideas about the entrenched "form vs. content" debate in composition studies. In that chapter, I showed that a number of scholars, whom I called "anti-formalists," argued for writing instruction that is more "real-world," by which they meant more closely modeling the kind of writing that people do outside of school—writing in which they "choose what they want to write about, whom they want to write to, and why they're writing" (Warner 5). Warner links such writing with subject knowledge, as did E.D. Hirsch in *Cultural Literacy*. But the problem with that, as I showed, is that building an FYC course around the knowledge students already possess would either limit students to writing about what they already know, or requiring somehow that all students know certain things. Both projects have always felt logistically impossible and educationally limiting to me.

More than that, though, I don't believe that asking students, or any writers, to "make choices, word by word, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph" (Warner 5) is automatically liberatory or progressive, or even closer to "real" writing than to school writing.

The absence of rules is not the same as the presence of choice. In order to truly offer students the opportunity to make choices in their writing, particularly "word by word, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph," we have to offer instruction on the nature of those choices. As Warner says, "Writing knowledge has two components: Knowledge of writing [and] knowledge of the subject being written about" (26). How do we teach subject knowledge in the context of an English or composition course? How do we teach knowledge of writing without giving students restrictive, decontextualized, hegemonic rules?

I won't claim that integrating reading instruction into writing instruction is *the* answer to these questions, but I do think it is an elegant answer. How can students learn more about their subject matter? Through reading about it. How can students learn more about writing? By reading things people have written. And not just through exposure, but through active instruction. Graff and Birkenstein say that "accomplished writers" have a "mastery of…basic moves that they probably picked up by reading a wide range of other accomplished writers" (1). I think that phrase "picked up" is so telling—it really suggests the extent to which writing instructors aren't encouraged to think of reading as something that can be taught, but as something a person just has to do a lot of if they want to learn it. In fact, what Graff and Birkenstein call the "demystification" of academic writing, especially through the use of "writing templates" that provide those "basic moves," could also be seen as a way to short-circuit that reading-writing process and teach the writing without teaching the reading.

If we want to teach students to make choices with their own sentences and paragraphs, but we don't want to teach prescriptive rules that are embedded in racist and misogynist traditions, then I continue to assume that teaching reading, which exposes students to the choices

other writers have made and gives them a language to talk and think about those choices, is one important piece of that pedagogical puzzle.

The men of classical rhetoric were each other's audience. But how often did they think of themselves primarily as audience members? They thought of themselves as the speakers, and they thought of the speaker as the meaning-maker. The rhetorical traditions that modern composition has utilized do not really include a lot of theory about how to *listen* or how to *understand*. In *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, Berlin said that, historically, rhetoric's "major concern was with the practices of producing texts and only secondarily with interpreting them" (xvi). Rhetoricians thought of themselves as the producers, not the consumers, of texts. But that leads to problems of interpretation and a lack of theory about reading nonfiction that I take up in my next chapter.

Chapter 7: Difficulty and Non-Literary Reading

In *The Ethics of Reading,* J. Hillis Miller wrote, "Reading itself is extraordinarily hard work. It does not occur all that often. Clearheaded reflection on what really happens in an act of reading is even more difficult and rare" (3-4). Miller suggests that "clearheaded reflection" is difficult because reading is hard to observe. He says it "is an event traces of which are found here and there in written form" (4). I think, too, that "clearheaded reflection" of reading is difficult, for many reasons. Partly because, as Miller pointed out, reading itself is difficult to observe directly. The "traces" of student reading that appear in their writing are often smudged. Like fingerprints on a doorknob or footprints in the sand, there are layers of tracings—multiple readings of the same text, readings of multiple texts, sentences written and rewritten in an attempt to explain or clarify. All of these layered on top of each other, blending together and making it difficult, or impossible, for the instructor to reflect on "what really happened" in any given act of reading.

In composition studies, where "reading as praxis…as a process that lies along the boundary between practice and theory, is the least studied of the present areas of research and emphases…" (Helmers, Introduction 4), we don't have a lot of "maps" of our own. When it comes to reflecting on the act of reading, composition studies "leave(s) the work of defining reading to other fields," such as literary studies and education (Carillo, *Securing* 11). What this means is that we, in composition studies, understand the act of reading as that which comes from maps made by other people, in other fields, and for other contexts. This doesn't mean those maps are wrong, but it may mean that what they emphasize and what they render invisible are not as suited to the questions and challenges of college writing classrooms as they could be.

So, what does a map of reading look like in the context of college writing? In FYC, the most-taught course, not just in composition studies but in all of higher education, what tools do we have at our disposal for attempting our own "clearheaded reflection on what really happens in the act of reading?" That is what this chapter explores.

7.1. This is Not About Student Deficit

When I first started asking questions about how my students' reading impacted their writing, I inadvertently framed the question around student deficit: "Why aren't my students reading better? Why are they struggling with these texts?" The implication was that students should be better at it than they were. But over time, I realized that the reason I thought students "should" be stronger readers was that I had designed my assignments around assumptions I had made about their reading experiences and skills. Yes, my frustration came from a disconnect between what I wanted them to do with the texts I assigned and what they were actually doing with the texts I assigned. But why did I assume that the problem was with my students' reading instead of with my assumptions? And what is "college-level" reading, anyway? What "should" a high school graduate know and be able to do with texts that they find difficult to read? What kinds "should" be difficult for them?

As I tried to work through these questions, my first realization was that my frustration was not unique to me, to community colleges, or to first-year students. In fact, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that college students have always struggled to do and know what they are expected to do and know—and faculty have always been frustrated. Compositionist John Warner points out that the oft-mentioned 1978 *Newsweek* article, "Why Johnny Can't Write," was published one hundred years after "Harvard professor Adams Sherman Hill said, 'Everyone who has had much to do with the graduating class of our best colleges has known men who could not

write a letter describing their own commencements without making blunders which would disgrace a boy twelve years old'" (Warner 11). Such concerns are not limited to elite institutions or students. In his introduction to *Teaching Developmental Reading*, Hunter R. Boylan wrote, "Although the percentage of students requiring developmental education may come as a surprise to some, those familiar with the history of higher education in the United States are aware that there has never been a period when all students entering college and universities were fully prepared to be there" (1). He went on to describe the landscape of developmental college courses as far back as 1889.

If there have always been "underprepared" first-year students, and even underprepared Harvard graduates, who nevertheless *were* first-year students and graduates, it raises the question of what it means to be "prepared" for college. What metrics are being used to define people as prepared or unprepared to be what they are? This question may be especially relevant in community colleges, where the promise and hope is that anyone can learn, regardless of their preparedness. And, in community college or 4-year institutions, what do these questions of preparedness mean for the kinds of reading students "should" know how to do when they enter, and when they successfully complete FYC?

I want to propose that asking what students "should" be able to do when they enter FYC is largely irrelevant to the question of how to teach the students who are *in* any given classroom. To be sure, it's a vital question for making determinations about which students would benefit from a developmental reading/writing course, and one that, as a discipline, we should involve ourselves in (or risk leaving all the decisions up to people who do not spend time in classrooms and may have priorities that conflict with student success). But once the semester begins and we have the students we have, it is irresponsible to throw up our hands and decide that some of those

students don't belong there because they aren't doing what we want them to do with the readings we assign. Instead, our energy is better spent identifying the reading skills and strategies that we value most highly, understanding which are difficult and why, and then teaching and nurturing those skills through class instruction and design. Such an emphasis will not guarantee the success of every student in the classroom, but it would go a long way to harnessing the skills they already have and helping them to build on those skills.

That is the philosophy I bring to this chapter, in which I explore the "work" of reading the kinds of texts that are commonly assigned in FYC. Here, I will continue to explore and to further develop what I think is a better understanding of this work. An understanding that may well help to lead us to fruitful conversations about what we value in reading and its connections to thinking and writing. I think this conversation is a vital piece of our field's potential responses to Marguerite Helmers' call for more research and thinking about "reading as praxis" in FYC (Introduction 4).

7.2 Reflections on "Maps" of Reading in FYC

Composition studies may have underdeveloped reading theories and pedagogies, but that doesn't mean they are nonexistent. As Helmers says:

> [T]eachers of writing daily bring reading into their instruction and make assumptions about the value of reading. We teach reading to establish processes and practices; we select reading to develop habits of selection; we encourage students to reread and revise their written work; and we read their journals and essays. (Introduction 4)

In all of these activities, we who teach FYC courses are enacting our perspectives or theories on reading, and we are teaching or promoting certain ways of valuing and doing reading. One place to "see" these ideas is in textbook/readers designed for FYC courses.

I use the term “textbook/reader” to indicate that I specifically mean books that are designed for and assigned in FYC courses that include an anthology of readings and instructional materials of some kind. Bestselling examples of these, as I mentioned in Chapter 4, include the current editions of *They Say/I Say with Readings* by Graff et al.; *Everyone’s an Author with Readings*, by Lunsford et al.; and *The Norton Field Guide to Writing with Readings* by Bullock et al. All of these, and many others, include entirely or primarily short nonfiction texts—essays, in the broadest sense of the word. The assumption is that students will be assigned to read these essays and will respond to them in their own writing. This, of course, does not describe the structure of every FYC course design, but it is the design of the popular textbook/readers. It is also the design that I am familiar with at CJCC, where most faculty use *They Say/I Say with Readings*. Based on my on familiarity with *They Say/I Say*, which I used for several years in my classroom, and the fact that it conforms to the common notion that students in FYC will read and respond to short nonfiction texts, I will use it to work through some of the ways that reading, and reading instruction, is currently addressed in FYC. I do so with the understanding, of course, that what individual instructors do in individual classrooms or programs may differ from what the textbook authors had in mind, and also that my own interpretation of what the authors are suggesting is itself contingent and situated within my own experiences and understandings.

A main premise of *They Say/I Say* is that “accomplished writers routinely rely on a stock of established moves that are crucial for communicating sophisticated ideas” (1). They present these “moves” to students in the form of templates, and say that:

> Perhaps the most distinctive feature of this book is its presentation of many such templates, designed to help you successfully enter not only the world of academic thinking and writing, but also the wider worlds of civic discourse and work. (2)

These opening ideas establish that Graff et al. see these "moves" of academic writing as connected to content—the "sophisticated ideas" that accomplished writers communicate. I think they also show that Graff et al. more or less assume that students can read the assigned texts in the book without much trouble and, as soon as they are given the templates, can use them without complication. I see this in their claim that students can "use" the templates "right away to structure and even generate [their] own writing" (1). I also see it in the way that the reading that takes place in academic work is implied, but invisible, in their phrase "academic thinking and writing."

Graff et al. center these premises on the concept of the Burkean Parlor, which I described in Chapter 6, and the metaphor of academic writing as "conversation." They open their Preface, which is called "Demystifying Academic Conversation" with the sentence, "Experienced writing instructors have long recognized that writing well means entering into conversation with others" (xviii), and the title of their introduction is "Entering the Conversation." For them, the metaphor of "conversation" is used to emphasize that academic writing is not "a process of saying 'true' or 'smart' things in a vacuum," but that it is instead "deeply engaged in some way with other people's views" (3). They do not state that reading is not an important part of this process of being "in conversation" with others, but their use of the metaphor does tend to emphasize engaging with the *ideas* of others over the work of *reading* other people's words, making meaning of those words, and responding to those words with words of their own, all in text, rather than literal conversation.

They Say/I Say has one chapter on reading called "'What's Motivating This Writer?': Reading for the Conversation." In it, Graff et al. describe shifting class discussion questions from questions like "What is the author's argument?" to questions like "What other argument(s) is the

writer responding to?" (173). They made this shift after realizing that "the move from reading for the author's argument in isolation to reading for how the author's argument is in conversation with the arguments of others helps readers become active, critical readers rather than passive recipients of knowledge" (174).

I agree with them that there are good reasons to read "for how the author's argument is in conversation with the arguments of others," but I wonder about the method of centering this teaching and learning on class discussion and the concept of "reading for the conversation?" The emphasis seems to pull attention away from the words on the page and the reality that students, and all readers, need to be able to engage with those words outside of the context of class discussion.

7.3 Reflections on Traces of Student Reading

I have long wondered whether the metaphor of discussion does enough to help students understand, interpret, and respond to texts and passages they find difficult, particularly when they need to read a text independently, outside of class. What Graff et al. say about the value of helping students understand who or what an author is responding to feels incomplete to me. I do think it is valuable for students to understand a text in its context—to recognize that authors typically write in response to something, and that other writers may, in turn, respond to them. Understanding this helps with reading comprehension and helps students recognize that they can participate in the "conversation" as well. But I also think this common metaphor may have important limitations when it comes to the work students are learning to do when reading other people's words on the page.

Recall that, in Chapter 1, I described an oral reading exercise in which students read the beginning of the epilogue from a book called *Evicted*, by Matthew Desmond. In that exercise, I

observed that a student interpreted the word "patchwork" in such a way that he was able to make sense of Desmond's sentence, but that he came away from his reading with an interpretation of Desmond's argument that I thought was incorrect, or at the very least misleading.

In this next section, I attempt "clearheaded reflection" of "traces" of students' reading in their writing in response to another Matthew Desmond text—a *The New York Times Magazine* 2018 article called "Americans Want to Believe Jobs are the Solution to Poverty. They're Not." This analysis is my "map" of a common reading challenge I see in my classes. Following my close-read analysis, I further explain why I think the Burkean parlor metaphor is particularly ill-suited for addressing these types of reading challenges.

First, consider the following passage from Desmond's essay. It is formatted as it appears in the original online publication:

> *In America, if you work hard, you will succeed. So those who do not succeed have not worked hard. It's an idea found deep in the marrow of the nation.*

Using Graff and Birkenstein's "they say/I say" language, what is Desmond's argument, and who or what is he responding to? And how does he signal each? While recognizing that there may be a bit of "wiggle room" for different interpretations, as I read this, what Desmond is responding to is the existence of an idea. His argument is that this idea is "found deep in the marrow of the nation." This means the idea isn't just a common one that many individuals believe, but that it's part of American culture, and that it always has been. In this passage, he does not indicate whether he agrees with the idea or not. Instead, he argues that believing it is part of American culture.

I did assume that this would be a difficult passage for students, and tried to work through it with them in class discussion prior to asking them to write about it. Some students seemed to

understand. Most did not choose to quote the passage in their paper drafts. But among those who did, a number of them only quoted the first and second sentences, and responded to Desmond as if he was arguing that "if you work hard, you will succeed." This, in spite of Desmond's direct argument throughout the essay, including in the title of the essay, that most poor people in America are poor in spite of working hard, and in spite of our class discussion on these very sentences.

The above was not the only passage students struggled to understand in the Desmond article. In another section of the article, Desmond describes a conversation he had with a college student. This student praised a film character who, Desmond says "performs superhumanly well at his job to leap from homelessness to affluence." Desmond says:

> As I watched this young man identify with [the film] character, it dawned on me that what his parents, preachers, teachers, coaches and guidance counselors had told him for motivation — "Study hard, stick to it, dream big and you will be successful" — had been internalized as a theory of life.

Here, Desmond does not directly say what he thinks about this "theory of life," though I think his dislike for the theory is implied when he says the character had to perform "superhumanly well." What Desmond does do, explicitly, is say that this "theory of life" exists and that this student's mentors had taught it to him. Desmond's own argument (his "I say," in the Graff and Birkenstein parlance) is that this student had internalized the theory. Yet, the semester I assigned this Desmond article, the one student who quoted the passage in their paper said that *Desmond* said "Study hard, stick to it, dream big and you will be successful," rather than that Desmond was quoting someone else who had said it. It was yet another example of a student thinking Desmond's "they say" was his own argument—his "I say."

Why do I say that the Burkean metaphor of conversation is not well-suited to addressing these reading challenges? First, several of Desmond's "moves" are at least as visual as they are syntactic. In the first passage, the first two sentences, "*In America, if you work hard, you will succeed. So those who do not succeed have not worked hard,"* are in italics. This differentiates them visually from Desmond's claim that follows—"It is an idea found deep in the marrow of the nation." In the second passage, the "theory of life" that the student and his mentors have is set off with em dashes and put in quotation marks to indicate that they are not Desmond's words, but someone else's. These are elements that only exist in the printed form of the text, and students engage with that most fully when they read the text, not when they talk about it.

In their writing, students often copy their quotes incorrectly. This may indicate that the student either didn't notice the italics or didn't attach any meaning to the italics—or a combination of the two. In the second passage, the second student did initially recognize the visual cues of the quotation marks, in that he copied them correctly even down to the accurate internal quotation. I take such citation errors as a disconnect with the printed text. Discussing such issues in class may help students "see" the visual cues of printed text, but it also pulls them away from that text, particularly if the focus of class discussion is solely on the content of Desmond's argument and the context for it.

There are also cues in the words themselves, in both passages, that indicate when Desmond is repeating someone else's idea rather than arguing it himself. In the first, he says, "It is an idea that is found..." In the second passage, Desmond says that the "theory of life" is one that "his parents, teachers, [etc.] had told him…" In both, Desmond's indication that these are someone else's words is explicit in the structure of his sentences, the visual cues, and in the words themselves.

In regard to students' "acts of reading" Desmond, I see at least two student struggles. One is, as I indicated above, that they do not fully recognize the cues—visual and syntactic—that Desmond used to show when he was repeating someone else's argument or idea, and when he was stating his own idea. Class discussion that encourages students to look for the arguments Desmond is responding to may help students understand, cognitively, that Desmond may be responding to someone else's argument, but I'm not sure how they help students recognize or make meaning of the "moves" that Desmond uses to indicate when he is stating someone else's argument or when he is stating his own.

The second issue is with putting Desmond "in conversation" with other ideas students have seen and heard. Such a "move" actually makes it harder, not easier, for readers to understand what Desmond is arguing. Since Desmond's "they say" is a compilation of ideas that are common in America, and his "I say" disagrees with these common ideas, students' prior knowledge or extra-textual knowledge may actually be working against them in trying to understand Desmond's point. In a way, the fact that so many students think Desmond is arguing that "In America, if you work hard, you will succeed," supports Desmond's actual argument—that this idea is "found deep in the marrow of the nation." Typically, as I showed in Chapter 5 with *Cultural Literacy*, it is assumed that content familiarity helps students understand the text more easily. In fact, one of Graff and Birkenstein's discussion questions to students indicates this as well: "Are there other ideas that you have encountered in this class or elsewhere that might be pertinent?" (146). In the case of Desmond's argument, though, I think what many of my students "know" is that "if you work hard, you will succeed." This makes it harder, not easier, for them to recognize that Desmond is arguing against this pervasive idea.

This makes it all the more necessary that instructors understand the work that is required to successfully read passages like the examples I've given from Desmond above. But what is that work? What do students—or any readers—need to know and be able to do to read the types of essays they are commonly assigned in FYC?

7.4 Reflections on Reading Essays

If I say that FYC students are commonly assigned to read "essays," what do I mean? At various points in this dissertation so far, I have referred to "literature" to indicate the kinds of texts that are the focus of English literary studies, and I have used "non-fiction texts" to indicate the kind of texts that students are typically assigned in FYC courses. These terms, used this way, rely on a bit of short-hand that, like all short-hands, somewhat oversimplifies the issue while still being accurate enough to be useful, or at least commonly used. In truth, of course, "literature" and "non-fiction" are not mutually exclusive categories. But how else to quickly and, mostly accurately, describe the difference between the texts that are assigned in British literature courses and the texts that are included in FYC readers like *They Say/ I Say* and *The Norton Sampler*? It has been said, of essays, that "there is…no genre that takes so many shapes and that refuses so successfully to resolve itself, finally, into its own shape" (Hardison 611), and that "it is an exasperatingly hybrid and amorphous literary form" (Chadbourne 133).

Are essays assumed to be easy to read? Perhaps they are, since students are assumed to be able to write them. But is the assumption a reasonable one? I've already indicated some of the "moves" students must recognize and understand in order to parse Desmond's argument from the arguments to which he responds. Now I'd like to do a close reading analysis of another text, one that is highly anthologized in FYC textbook/readers, to unpack the work that the reader must do just to understand—to say nothing of interpret or respond to—the argument it makes. The essay

is Malcolm Gladwell's "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not be Tweeted," which was included in a number of editions of first-year composition textbook/readers, including the first three editions of *They Say/I Say: with Readings*, published by Norton; *Emerging,* published by Macmillan; and *Points of Departure*, published by Houghton-Mifflin/Cengage. It is copied below with my annotations:

- Underline indicates Gladwell's primary claim, which has two parts: people say social media has reinvented activism, but they are wrong. The second part of the claim is separated from the first by a long paragraph, and he does not use the word "but."
- Gray indicates references and concepts readers are assumed to be familiar with (based on the fact that they are not explained or defined)
- *Italics* indicates words that are used metaphorically ("upended") and/or with their less common definition ("dubbed," "critical")
- **Bold** indicates what I think are the most important phrases for understanding Gladwell's argument.

Gladwell's paragraphs read as follows:

> The world, **we are told**, is in the midst of a revolution. The new tools of social media have reinvented social activism. With Facebook and Twitter and the like, the traditional relationship between political authority and popular will has been *upended*, making it easier for the powerless to collaborate, coordinate, and give voice to their concerns. When ten thousand protesters took to the streets in Moldova in the spring of 2009 to protest against their country's Communist government, the action was *dubbed* the Twitter Revolution, because of the means by which the demonstrators had been brought together. A few months after that, when student protests rocked Tehran, the State

Department took the unusual step of asking Twitter to *suspend* scheduled maintenance of its Web site, because the Administration didn't want such a *critical* organizing tool out of service at the height of the demonstrations. "Without Twitter the people of Iran would not have felt empowered and confident to stand up for freedom and democracy," Mark Pfeifle, a former national-security adviser, later wrote, calling for Twitter to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Where activists were once defined by their causes, they are now defined by their tools. Facebook *warriors* go online to push for change. "You are the best hope for us all," James K. Glassman, a former senior State Department official, told a crowd of cyber activists at a recent conference sponsored by Facebook, A. T. & T., Howcast, MTV, and Google. Sites like Facebook, Glassman said, "give the U.S. a significant competitive advantage over terrorists. Some time ago, I said that Al Qaeda was 'eating our lunch on the Internet.' That is no longer the case. Al Qaeda is stuck in Web 1.0. The Internet is now about interactivity and conversation."

These are strong, **and puzzling**, claims. (*annotations mine*)

My point in annotating the above is to make visible the work that is involve in reading this passage.

What may stand out initially in my annotated passage above is the gray highlighting, at least in terms of volume. The gray, along with the italics, are all primarily external content—these are references, proper nouns, and vocabulary which a reader may be familiar with or not. There are a lot of them. On some of these, there are context clues—After Gladwell says "Moldova," he refers to it as a "country"—but on others, there is none—as in his mention of "Tehran." This essay was published in 2010, which was not long after the spring 2009 events that Gladwell references, and the time that has passed since may increase the number of

references a reader today is unfamiliar with. But even in 2010, it is hard to imagine that many undergraduates in the US were familiar with every single word, phrase, or idea highlighted in gray. In fact, I am not familiar with all of them. I cannot picture Moldova, I had to look up the word "revanchism," and I need the context clues to go on for "eating our lunch." Yet, I do not find this passage particularly difficult to read, and when I taught this text back in the early 2010s, most of my students did. Why is that?

Certainly, the fact that I have some familiarity with a number of these concepts does aid my comprehension—I've read Andrew Sullivan and get the "Web 1.0" reference, for example—if only because the passage does not overwhelm me with unfamiliarity at first glance. But I would argue that this familiarity is not the primary reason I can read the paragraphs without trouble. It isn't Andrew Sullivan, or even Moldova, that readers need to understand, because these are details rather than Gladwell's primary topic. To read this passage successfully, the reader must understand—either via familiarity with the structures or by learning to read for them, the rhetorical moves that Gladwell makes from beginning to end. These are the sections I have put in bold and underline in the annotated version above. I contend that this is actually *more important* than content familiarity—it is entirely possible to understand his claims without understanding any of the examples he gives to support those claims:

> The world, we are told, is in the midst of a revolution. The new tools of social media have reinvented social activism….These are strong, and puzzling, claims. (401-403)

It is not the gray and blue sections of the passage above that make or break a person's ability to read it, but the underlined sentences. These are short, relatively free of the more esoteric content in other parts of the paragraph, and they occur at the beginning of each paragraph.

The *most* important words for understanding his claim, I think, are “we are told.” This shows that Gladwell is not arguing that the world *is* in the midst of a revolution, but rather that “we are told” that it is. A reader who catches this may guess already that he will ultimately disagree with this claim, but he does not indicate his disagreement directly anywhere in the first paragraph. Instead, he follows by expanding on the claim with two complete sentences that give no indication of his disagreement, and instead state quite the opposite of what he will ultimately argue:

> The new tools of social media have reinvented social activism. With Facebook and Twitter and the like, the traditional relationship between political authority and popular will has been upended, making it easier for the powerless to collaborate, coordinate, and give voice to their concerns. (401)

Both of these sentences expand and add detail to what “we are told,” but taken out of context, as here, and quoted, they appear to be statements of Gladwell’s own claim. A reader has to know to pull the “we are told” forward from the previous sentence and apply them to these sentences as well.

Class discussion that asks students what arguments Gladwell is responding to may offer some framework for recognizing that the first paragraph is full of sentences that Gladwell disagrees with. But the *reading* work that needs to happen to understand what Gladwell is responding to is recognizing that “we are told” is the driving idea of the entire paragraph. A reader who does not understand that “we are told” is relevant to every sentence in the paragraph most likely will *not* understand that Gladwell is *not* claiming that “The new tools of social media have reinvented social activism,” even though that exact sentence appears in the passage. Because this is reading work, not discussion work, I do not think the question “What other

argument(s) is the writer responding to" (Graff and Birkenstein 173) is enough to help the student understand the significance of "we are told," or know to pull it forward as context for the entire paragraph.

A challenge of this passage is that Gladwell's "they say" is separated from his "I say" by eight vocabulary- and reference-heavy sentences. In addition to pulling "we are told" forward through the entirety of the first paragraph I quoted above, a reader must also recognize "These are strong, and puzzling, claims" refers *all the way back up* to the top of the previous paragraph. Additionally, the reader must pick up that, in saying "puzzling," Gladwell is indicated not merely confusion, but disagreement, with the initial claims he made eight sentences earlier. A reader who did pick up on the significance of "we are told" could easily have skimmed the next eight sentences, understood them to be evidence to support that "we are told" that the world is "in the midst of a revolution," and quickly get to Gladwell's response: The claim is puzzling.

Some of my analysis here may seem to indicate that what readers really need to know are the very templates that Graff et al. offer. I'm arguing, after all, that the real key to understanding Gladwell is not "Moldova" but "we are told." A problem with using templates for reading comprehension, though, is that there are simply too many possibilities for students to become familiar with all of them. Knowing that "they say/I say" is a common structure of academic writing is helpful information, certainly, but Gladwell doesn't use that literal template. And trying to focus too much on templates could have the same effect as relying too heavily on class discussion: useful to a point, but also runs the danger of pulling the reader out of the specific text they are trying to read.

7.5 Essays and Interpretation

The limitations of templates for *understanding* an essay, as opposed to writing one, may be more apparent in regard to interpreting, as opposed to comprehending, an essay. Some might argue that reading to comprehend is interpretive work, but much as we might consider that understanding "what happens" in Kate Chopin's "The Storm" is different from developing interpretations about what the story means, or what it might mean, to the author and/or the reader, essays can offer opportunities for interpretation that goes beyond what we might think of as a more basic comprehension.

Returning to Malcom Gladwell's "Small Change," here is a paragraph that comes after the one I examined above. He says:

> Some of this grandiosity is to be expected. Innovators tend to be solipsists. They often want to cram every stray fact and experience into their new model. As the historian Robert Darnton has written, "The marvels of communication technology in the present have produced a false consciousness about the past—even a sense that communication has no history, or had nothing of importance to consider before the days of television and the Internet." But there is something else at work here, in the outsized enthusiasm for social media. Fifty years after one of the most extraordinary episodes of social upheaval in American history, we seem to have forgotten what activism is. (404)

My question this time is less "what is this about" or "what is he saying," and more "what can we take this to mean?"

Some of Gladwell's sentences, in other parts of the essay, are not very open to interpretation. Arguably, they are not open to interpretation at all, being statements of fact: "At four-thirty in the afternoon on Monday, February 1, 1960, four college students sat down at the

lunch counter at the Woolworth's in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina" (399). When I say this is not open to interpretation, I do not mean that this, Gladwell's opening sentence, cannot be analyzed for rhetorical impact or function. I mean that, within the sentence itself, there is effectively no "wiggle room" to understand this sentence to mean anything other than the literal fact it states. It is possible to not comprehend it (if one does not know what a lunch counter at Woolworth's is, for instance), but there are not alternate understandings that are equally supported by the text.

By contrast, the sentence "Innovators tend to be solipsists" is more open to interpretation. One reader might think Gladwell is criticizing innovators. Another might think he is merely offering an observation with no implied critique. Who and what, exactly, he includes in "innovators" is also somewhat open—in the previous paragraph, he is writing about people who write about new technology, so he might only mean "tech" innovators, but it is also possible that he sees all innovators as solipsists. Readers can, if interested, find evidence to support these various interpretations, either within this single essay, in other writing Gladwell has done, or perhaps even in looking at any information that can be found about Gladwell's life outside of the texts he has authored. A reader could also look to the context in which the essay was published—it was in *The New Yorker*, which as a publication has a certain audience and publishes certain types of texts, and it was published soon after the events of which it describes. Either or both of these contexts could impact how a reader chooses to interpret Gladwell's tone or meaning. Whether or not these interpretive lenses are equally relevant is also open to debate.

I also suggest that the final sentence of the paragraph is the most open to interpretation. Gladwell says, "Fifty years after one of the most extraordinary episodes of social upheaval in American history, we seem to have forgotten what activism is." Not all of it is equally open—

when he writes "50 years after the one of the most extraordinary episodes of social upheaval in American history," he is referring to the Civil Rights movement, and that is clear from the fact that he has already referred to the lunch counter sit-ins. There may be some "wiggle room" for exactly which actions, moments, or events he includes as "the most extraordinary episodes." But what is most open to interpretation, and is, I think, the most important for coming to an understanding of what Gladwell means, is the "we" of "we seem to have forgotten what activism is." "We" is often an important word, when it comes to interpretation of nonfiction texts. Does Gladwell mean that *we* Americans have forgotten what activism is? That would make sense, because the Civil Rights Movement was an American movement. Still, in earlier paragraphs, he referenced activism in Moldova and Iran—though, arguably, his real focus was on American commentaries on those events.

But "we" could be more complex, and perhaps must be more complex, because Gladwell asserts that "we have forgotten what activism is," and then goes on to remind the reader what activism is (to him). Thus, he cannot be part of the "we" who have "forgotten," because *he* has not forgotten. If "we," which seems that it must include Gladwell himself, does not, in fact, include Gladwell, then who is it? Who is he talking to, or about, when he says "we seem to have forgotten what activism is?" Given that he is talking about social media, which in 2010 was a very new technology and which he sees as part of the problem in this "forgetting," and given that the Civil Rights Movement that took place 50 years ago is, for Gladwell, an example of the activism that we have forgotten, it could be that "we" is a reference not to a group of people that includes Gladwell, but to people who are younger than himself and/or more immersed in social media than himself.

The challenge, then, for FYC instructors, is to find ways to help students navigate texts on their own, outside of class, without adding to the thing students "need to know" that pull them away from specific sentences in the context of specific paragraphs and specific essays. Lists of templates and topical information, or even being told in class who or what the author is responding to will all only go so far when readers are faced with nothing but themselves and the text in front of them.

7.6 The Difficulty of Comprehension and Interpretation

I want to emphasize that, in my opinion, everything I worked through in this chapter, including the "lower order" or "basic" work of reading comprehension, is "college level work." This is not because students are deficient, but because reading is hard. I argue that when any reader is faced with a text that is difficult *for that reader*, all of the parts of reading become difficult, including the "lower order" skill of understanding. The analysis I worked through above, along with examples of student reading challenges at the beginning of this chapter, hopefully serve to illustrate just how complex "lower order" reading comprehension and interpretation really is, but it does not do much to illuminate what it is an instructor can do in a classroom to help a student through this work.

I have to assume that college English faculty are expert readers, and this may put us at a disadvantage for understanding what work students need to do to understand academic, or "academic-ish," writing—essays that state a position and support that position using various types of evidence, depending on the topic and author. Where Emily Dickenson and William Faulkner are understood to be difficult to read—for anyone—Malcolm Gladwell as well as many of the highly anthologized academic and academic-adjacent texts in FYC readers – all are assumed to be somewhat accessible. But phrases like "we are told," "so-called," and "not least

because" may be as unfamiliar to some student readers as "Moldova," "solipsism," and "Romanian revanchism." Or, students may be perfectly familiar with them, but may be too overwhelmed with "Romanian revanchism" to realize they understand the parts of the sentences they need to understand in order to gain a basic comprehension of the text.

This is not an argument for assigning "easier" texts, or texts that are closer to students' personal milieu. Rather, it is to suggest that how we think about which texts are difficult, and why, may benefit from further study. To somewhat paraphrase Bartholomae in "Inventing the University," in order to learn to *read* the "'distinctive register' of academic discourse," students need to grapple with that distinctive register (83). This may require rethinking—or thinking for the first time—about what it means to assign non-fiction essays, not merely as model texts or to provide students with content with which to respond, but also to teach them, through attending to the words on the page, how to read such texts.

Reading is complex and cognitive. It is social in the sense that making meaning from what we read involves a process of transacting with the author, the text itself, the context in which we do the reading, and our own prior knowledge and experiences. But it is also individual, independent—private in the truest sense of the word. And while the practice or act of reading may be relatively straightforward for many people in many contexts, it is never entirely straightforward for everyone, or for any one in all contexts. Whenever readers are faced with a text that is difficult *for them*, what may be "easy" in other situations becomes a difficult, active, intentional process of meaning making. Such active, intentional work is also required for any text, regardless of the difficulty it presents for a given reader, most especially when readers must respond by evaluating the text and offering their own ideas in response. I do not think the degree of difficulty this presents is fully addressed in current bestselling textbooks for FYC. In the ways

that is it addressed, such as in Graff et al.'s "reading for the conversation" metaphor, there is a tendency to pull the focus away from the words on the page, to think instead about context and conversation, and this ultimately does not do enough to nurture independent, meaning-making reading strategies that students can utilize outside of classrooms or class discussion.

Chapter 8: Not a Conclusion, But a Stopping Point

When my students work on something in class, in order to honor that some will work faster than others, I never say "finish up" anything else that is meant to imply that they should be "done" with whatever they are working on after a set amount of time. Instead, I say "take a minute to find a stopping point." At other times, I might say, "let me know when you've gotten as far as you can get with this right now, even if you don't feel 'finished.'" Both of these are a way of acknowledging that we all "work" at different paces, but also that "finished" may mean different things at different times. And sometimes, the truth is, "finished" means "I'm out of time" or "I've reached the limit of what I can do for now."

This chapter is not a conclusion, but a stopping point. As J. Hillis Miller wrote in *The Ethics of Reading,* "Even in the relatively spacious enclosure of six chapters only a beginning can be made with my topic" (3). Constraints of space are only one, and possibly the easiest one, to manage—there are also constraints of time, of perception, and experience.

In *Annihilation*, when the biologist begins to question the "why" and the "what" of the map she's been given of Area X, she says, "*Why* this stretch of coast? *What* might lie inside the lighthouse? ….*What* lay beyond the map?" (66). In this "stopping point" chapter, I ask similar questions, of myself and of my topic: "*Why* this topic? *What* might I have missed in my mappings of this topic that led to my particular argument? *What* lay beyond the map? *What* have been my limitations, my preconceived notions, my biases I wasn't able to fully observe or shed, but also *what* do I perceive as my contributions?

8.1 Exploration and Action: Challenges and Opportunities in Reflexivity

Throughout this dissertation, I've explored ways of understanding and analyzing ideas about reading that exist in the scholarly foundations of composition and related fields. In

historical accounts of the teaching of English, of literacy in the United States, and of FYC, I observed that, in the context of college English and composition, “reading” is often used to mean “reading literature” and “literacy” often refers to remediation, and that these connotations complicate attempts to integrate reading theory and instruction into composition studies. Added to this dynamic are disciplinary bifurcations splitting reading from writing and further splitting reading into literary-based and literacy-based foci. When it comes to the reading of essays, which are taught, in the context of FYC, as non-literary, the existing bifurcations and connotations steer any discussion of reading into the realm of remedial work, even though essays make particular rhetorical moves and responding to them meaningfully requires sophisticated interpretive work.

A consequence of the disciplinary bifurcations and resulting lack of attention to reading may be that disciplinary debates in composition studies are flattened into false, or at least unnecessary, binaries, such as “form vs. content,” that become entrenched debates which move back-and-forth without gaining much new ground. This dynamic may be exacerbated by long-standing notions of speaking and writing rhetorical texts—that is, politically and civically engaged arguments—that center the artistry, talent, effectiveness, or even “correctness” of the speaker/writer in such a way that the audience is distanced and the “success” of the composition is considered in a vacuum. Further, the oral tradition of rhetoric and the common metaphor of writing-as-conversation may de-emphasize the work of reading and the ways that written text operates differently from speech—the writing-as-speech metaphor may cloud our ability to recognize and provide instruction for the particular information, skills, and practices that are needed to read informational and/or persuasive writing.

In making these observations and arguments, I have tried not to overstate the connections I see between the marginalization of reading and the potential causes for that marginalization.

When the topic involves individuals or groups of people and why we do the things we do, I'm not sure cause and effect are ever fully knowable or observable—certainly not by one person making her one "map" of the landscape. Because I'm uncertain about my, or anyone's, ability to trace the "why or even what" of reading in FYC, or composition studies, the major challenge of this project has been to say something without pretending to say everything.

A funny thing about being a teacher and doing scholarly research is that the conclusions I so carefully try to qualify as situated, contextual, and partial in my writing, are the same conclusions I use to make concrete decisions in my classroom every single day. In the space of this dissertation, I can say "it may be that incorporating reading more meaningfully into writing instruction will have a positive impact on students and on the discipline." But in my classroom, during class, there is little room for "may."

Throughout this project, I've explored understandings and ideas about reading as a researcher, but also with years of experience as an instructor. These are not mutually exclusive identities, but in some ways they work differently. As a researcher and writer of this dissertation, I tried to be aware of my prior assumptions, my biases, and my "hunches" and to carefully notice and interrogate them as I worked. Research in this way is slow work—it's a process of constant looking-back-on and re-vising. Teaching can work in a similar way, but in the classroom, I lean into my hunches all the time. I still try to be aware of my assumptions and biases, but minute-by-minute, I make decisions—I decide whether to answer a question and how to answer it, I decide what to assign, I decide when the assignment should be do and what to do about students who don't get it done by that time. In the classroom, even an answer of "I'll get back to you on that" is a decision. By contrast, in research and writing, I can walk away, I can delete, I can wait.

I struggled to occupy both identities while I wrote this. My strong beliefs about the importance of teaching reading in writing classrooms started to form long before I started this project. They were based on classroom experiences that I value and which I don't necessarily *want* to put aside, even momentarily or as a mental exercise, when I read texts whose authors had different experiences and come to differing conclusions. My practitioner knowledge is hard-earned, and I am all-too-aware that it can be dismissed and ignored in favor of "data" that come from outside of the institution (North 21). That said, I also did not want to dig in my heels and refuse to learn from the experiences, research, and writings of others. I did not want to read everything as a skeptic first, but neither did I want to believe everything. I tried to return, again and again, to "close reading" in Gallop's use of the term—reading not for or against my assumptions, but to the extent possible, "read[ing] NOT what SHOULD BE on the page, but what IS" (8).

I also designed this project to work across disciplines. "Reflexivities of discomfort" comes from Wanda Pillow's post-qualitative research theorizings. "Close reading" comes from English studies—and not just English studies, but literary studies. Putting these ideas together in one project, I tried to "read uncomfortably," not to ignore my own experiences or ideas, but to read with a willingness to find the limitations and incompletions in my experiences and ideas. I feared that such an attempt might confuse readers or make my work clunky—a Frankenstein's monster of different ideas instead of the aesthetic "mixed media" composition I was aiming for. But I wanted, to the extent possible, to avoid "conventional humanist qualitative methodology" that is "so disciplined, so normalized, so centered" that it *"become[s] conventional*, reductionist, hegemonic, and sometimes oppressive…" (St. Pierre 613).

I do bemoan sentences in this dissertation that are too long, that qualify inelegantly, and that are hard to read. And I am frustrated by my inability to perfectly "see" my own lenses, assumptions, and biases and to examine them. But I think that my attempt to "read uncomfortably" was one worth making. It was sometimes clunky, always imperfect, always genuinely uncomfortable—but that just means I still have work to do. More maps to make, more tools to try, more areas to explore.

8.2 Reading (in) the Current Media Landscape

A major motivation throughout this project, but also a stumbling block, has been the historical moment during which I worked. I was less than two years into my doctoral studies when Donald Trump was elected the 45th president of the United States. It was difficult to read anything about his election or presidency without thinking about the topic of reading, and specifically of reading nonfiction, nonliterary texts.

For example, in 2018, a year and a half into the Trump presidency, the *New York Times* published an article called "Lies? False Claims? When Trump's Statements Aren't True" in the "Bulletin Board" section of the paper. The article quotes several readers who asked the paper to "'call a lie for what it is. A lie,'" and said that "It is not an opinion that he is lying. It is a fact." However, executive editor Dean Baquet, said that, among other things, the word "lie" "assumes someone knew the statement was false." That is, to be a lie, a statement must be said with the *intent* to deceive, which in turn requires that the speaker (or writer) knows it is false in the first place.

The question of authorial intent is one that literary studies has grappled with, but that I have not seen theorized or really even mentioned in the context of teaching FYC and assigning nonfiction texts. Does the writer or speaker's intent matter? Or is that unknowable, or irrelevant,

when it comes to the impact of their words or actions? Is a lie still a lie if the writer/speaker believes it to be true? Does it matter? In my classes, we talk about, and work to identify, statements of "fact" and statements of "opinion." I've since added another option: Statements that are neither opinion nor fact, but simply wrong. My students and I grapple with these questions, and are not always able to come to consensus about any given sentence.

Consider the following statements: On January 6, 2021, a mob of insurrectionists stormed the Capitol Building in Washington DC and attempted to violently overtake the government. Or, on January 6, 2021, a group of patriots marched to the Capitol Building to save democracy. Or maybe, on January 6, 2021, several hundred unauthorized people entered the Capitol Building after breaching security barricades. It is difficult, if not impossible, to state the facts of the January 6, 2021 events at the Capitol Building with complete objectivity. Was it a mob? A riot? A coup attempt? If the people who broke through security to enter the building genuinely believed that the 2020 election had been stolen from Donald Trump, as he himself told his supporters it had, should the event be called an attempt to overthrow the government, or should it be called what they say they believed it was—an attempt to "stop the steal" and save democracy?

Are any of the above sentences all fact and no opinion? I would say no. But does that mean that it is impossible to tell what is true from what is false? I would also say no. It may not be possible to describe the day with entirely objective language, or even to know exactly "what happened" on that day. But a lack of complete knowledge does not indicate a complete lack of knowledge. What we know and how we know it, and how we define "we"—are all thorny and difficult questions, but I believe that engaging in these questions in the classroom is vital to the project of "compos[ing] meaning" (Carillo *Securing*, 5). This, in my opinion, does not mean that we have to study the events of January 6, 2021 in FYC courses or that we have to assign texts

that analyze those particular events. Rather, I think that developing and integrating reading theory, particularly theory about reading nonfiction texts, into composition studies, and reading instruction in FYC, compositionists can begin to engage with these thorny, difficult, valuable questions.

8.3 Navigating "Comprehension" in a Post-Modern World

In the first section of the first chapter of this dissertation, I used the term "misreading" to describe a situation in which a student thought "patchwork" meant "patched together" in a slipshod, tenuous manner. I did so knowing that postmodern scholars would be uncomfortable, or downright in disagreement, with my position that the students' answer was "wrong."

But I believe that the student's reading was wrong, and that it's important to acknowledge it as such, for pedagogical reasons as well as theoretical reasons. This has partly to do with the fact that "patchwork" has a dictionary definition, and that the definition does not include any connotation of shoddy, slapdash "patching up" that my student thought it did. Yes, language is alive, and yes, words come to mean different things over time. But this does not mean that every word can mean anything, or that the meaning of a word can be interchanged with other words that sound or look similar to it, which is the move my student had made—"patchwork" sounded like "patch," so that's what he thought it meant. My insistence on calling the student's interpretation wrong also has to do with the argument Desmond was making, and the fact that "patched up" does not fit with that argument. The paragraph in which Desmond repeated "patchwork" several times stated that the "home" is the foundation of democracy. To understand the sentence "What else is a nation but a patchwork of cities and towns; cities and towns a patchwork of neighborhoods; and neighborhoods a patchwork of homes? (294)" in the

context of that larger argument, it is important to see “patchwork” as a positive, or at least neutral, connotation.

But I recognize the slippery nature of my argument, so here is another, perhaps more convincing, example. This was from another class—in fact from a developmental read/writing course, not from first-year composition. But the question of interpretation and comprehension is relevant in, I would argue, the same way, whether a student has been deemed “college level” or not. The problem, and the question, is the same for any reader of nonfiction: at what point does the “live circuit” between reader and text (Rosenblatt, *Literature* 24) break? When does a reading become a misreading?

In this particular class, we were reading Gloria Anzaldúa’s “How to Tame a Wild Tongue.” The opening paragraph is:

> “We're going to have to control your tongue,’ the dentist says, pulling out all the metal from my mouth. Silver bits plop and tinkle into the basin.” (33)

After reading just this paragraph out loud, I planned to ask the class a few quick and, I thought, easy comprehension questions—“What is happening?” and “Where is it happening?”—before moving on to the next paragraph.

But when I asked, “where is it happening,” one student said, “The desert.” After a pause in which I tried, and failed, to understand her answer, I said, “What makes you say that?”

She answered that deserts have “basins.”

I have a lot of thoughts about this misreading. One of them is that I like it—there’s a poetry to it. Anzaldúa was writing about the borderland between Texas and Mexico, much of which is a desert landscape. It is even possible that the student had scanned the rest of the essay

and noted that it took place in that borderland, and that her answer was informed by that knowledge. There's also simply something fun about the incongruousness of the scene at the dentist's office and an arid landscape. I also genuinely appreciated that the student answered the question, and I think the reason she gave for that answer was very sensible.

But another of my thoughts is that, no matter how poetic her answer was, it was also wrong. Even if we could argue that the scene may have taken place in a dentist's office in the desert, the "basin" into which the "silver bits plop and tinkle" is not a feature in a desert landscape. It is a misreading *of that sentence* to think "basin" means a literal region in a desert. The student's answer had a poetry to it, but it was not intentional and it was not based on a strong reading *of the sentence*.

But what does "comprehension" mean in a postmodern world? In the early 1990s, in the preface to a volume called *Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis, and the Postmodern*, Maxine Greene wrote:

> Across the world there has been a slippage of familiar foundations. Old authorities have become questionable, along with the long-sanctioned narratives explaining what has been and what will be. There is a restiveness with regard to categorizations once taken for granted. Persons of all ages are rejecting mere acquiescence to tradition; they are struggling to name the relations of power, to open spaces where they can be free. (ix)

These slippages, questions, and restiveness feel, to some of us, some of the time, like opportunity. There's a searching, a reaching to the questions. The "restiveness" is about freedom and openness. But, in a way, Greene's description of people who reject *false* authorities and *oppressive* traditions also describes people who reject *knowledgeable* experts and long-standing *practices that enrich* communities. Navigating all of this is extremely difficult.

Take, for example, the so-called "flat earth movement." This is an idea that has, since about 2016, grown in visibility. In an interview with Scientific American, Michael Marshall, who is an anti-pseudo-science activist, described conversations he'd had with people who believed the earth was flat (Mirsky). His observation was that so-called "flat earthers" believe that NASA is "a tool of the government" and "evil" (Mirsky). But more than that, he also found that they took parts of what NASA said and misconstrued or decontextualized it. For example, according to Marshall, one belief is that, because photos of the earth from space are composites—multiple photographs spliced together to show the whole earth—NASA must be lying about what the earth looks like from space. When in fact, the photos are composites because the earth is so enormous that to get a photo of all of it, even from space, they need to take multiple pictures and put them together.

But all of this raises the other point that Marshall goes into, which is that what flat earthers are fundamentally doing is trusting their own perceptions. He says they "place way too much emphasis on [their] own powers of observation." They think "you can't show me the curve. I'm looking out on the horizon. You can't tell me my eyes are wrong" (Mirsky). I am not suggesting that the so-called flat earth movement is a liberatory movement simply because it questions "old authorities." In fact, in the full context of this moment, I'm not sure I'd say that a movement such as "flat earth" actually *is* rejecting "old authorities." But from the perspective of the people *within* these movements, there is a sense of slippage, rejection, and questioning. Working through how some "slippage" rejects "mere acquiescence" and "open[s] spaces," while other slippages may be less liberatory, is important work.

How we read, what we read, what it means to read nonfiction, what it might look like to question authority while also looking for reliability—these are all questions that composition

could be well-placed to ask and explore. They are questions that involve issues of persuasion and logic, as in the rhetorical tradition, and also questions that involve issues of interpretation, as in the poetic tradition. Grappling with these questions, particularly in the context of reading nonfiction texts, could open up new ways of thinking about what FYC is and can be that might break the discipline out of entrenched "either/or" binaries. What might it look like to begin that work? The next two sections work through two areas for future research that I think are promising.

8.4 "Defining Critical Reading"

For a long time while I worked on this dissertation, I had a chapter in my outline called "Defining Critical Reading." In fact, one of the driving forces behind my initial interest in this project was my frustration with the common uses of the term "critical reading" that are simply never defined or explained, or, when they are, they are defined in ways that render it nearly impossible to build a critical reading pedagogy around them. One example is Jolliffe's definition, which I tried to unpack in Chapter 8. There are many others. For example, David Bartholomae, another highly influential reading compositionist, makes "critical reading" somewhat synonymous with "strong reading" in the following definition, writing that:

> Strong readers often read critically, weighing, for example, an author's claims and interpretations against evidence – evidence provided by the author in the text, evidence drawn from other sources, or the evidence that is assumed to be part of a reader's own knowledge and experience. ("Introduction" 283)

This is a description that makes sense while also failing to really define "critical reading." "Strong readers" is a flexible term on which most people could probably agree—"strong" is vague, yet has a positive connotation. But defining "strong readers" as "critical readers" is

something of a tautology: strong readers read critically, critical reading is strong reading. It doesn't help instructors know what to *teach*.

Another issue is that, in addition to there being many definitions for the same term, there are many terms that are used to, it seems, more-or-less indicate whatever it is "critical reading" is supposed to indicate. For example, in Sheridan Blau's "Performative Literacy: The Habits of Mind of Highly Literate Readers," Blau uses the term "critical literacy," which he says "requires students to become more active, responsible, and responsive readers than ever before" (18). But again, what is "active, responsible, and responsive," and why critical literacy instead of critical reading?

I don't mean to suggest that each of these individual scholarly texts lack internal logic. Jolliffe, Bartholomae, and Blau, along with myriad other scholars who talk about "critical reading" and terms that I see as related, know what they mean, and within the context of each full article, their definitions and terms make sense. The problem is that there are so many definitions, coming from so many different areas of education, curriculum studies, and English, that they rarely do, or even can, reference or respond to one another. They are also, often, reliant on relative terms, as in Bartholomae's use of "strong reading" to mean "critical reading," Jolliffe's "careful" to mean "critical," and Blau's "active, responsible, and responsive" to mean "critical." From the perspective of teaching and from the perspective of research, these myriad definitions and terms make it difficult to *apply* "critical reading" as a pedagogy or something that can be observed.

I continue to think that this is vital work that we must, as a discipline, take up. Jolliffe calls critical reading "the *bete noir* of college composition" because:

> A great many studies of composition examine it in some way; the overwhelming majority of composition projects and assignments require it; a substantial litany of scholarship… attests to college students' difficulties with reading and understanding texts of all kinds. Yet critical reading almost never takes center stage in composition studies. ("Who is Teaching" 128)

I agree with him, but I would add to this that it's difficult to place something in the center if it is so undefined, amorphous, and slippery that we cannot even sketch out its possible shape or size. This goes, as well, for Bosley's concern that "there is little research that describes how composition instructors teach critical reading strategies" (285). How can researchers describe these pedagogies, or even identify them as such, when the definitions are so varied?

When, and how often, "critical" is meant to indicate "vital," or to indicate an evaluative critique, or even intended to connect to critical theory as advocated by scholars who identified as part of the Frankfurt School, for example, remain important future areas of research for me. However, in composition studies and in English writ large, the words "reading," "literacy," "rhetoric," and "composition" are used not only with different definitions, but also different, and contradictory, implicit connotations by different scholars. Even the name of the discipline that I've called "composition studies," and even whether it is a discipline or a field is hotly debated (Malenczyk et al.). In order to posit my own definition of critical reading, or to advocate for one existing definition, as I initially hoped to do, I would first want to better understand the pedagogical ramifications of some of these other definitions and ideas. Defining critical reading turned out to be on the other side of my "stopping point" for this project.

8.5 Reading, FYC, and Equity

Everyone I know who has assigned readings on social justice issues, which is everyone I know who teaches FYC, has had the deeply uncomfortable experience of teaching a student whose racist or misogynist ideas are not only still entrenched at the end of the semester, but are more clearly articulated due to the fact that the student has become a better writer. Long before I started this study, I found myself deeply worried that books like *They Say/I Say* had the unfortunate, and surely unintended, consequence of teaching some students how to sound as if they had genuinely read and sat with other people's ideas before responding with their own, when in fact they had simply learned to more successfully incorporate cherry-picked or decontextualized quotes into their own arguments. They'd become more confident as writers, and more effective at sounding academic, without actually engaging with new ideas.

This is not an argument against assigning readings on social justice issues, but it is always a reminder to me that assigning this reading instead of that does not make my course feminist or anti-racist. In fact, assigning certain texts and then failing to provide reading instruction that allows students to successfully understand those texts can have the opposite effect. The last thing I want in my classrooms is for students to think that I've invited them to actively debate the humanity of a group of people—but that is exactly what can happen if we as instructors are not careful.

Much that has been written about first-year composition has dealt in some way with power and status. Some of that writing, especially the historically-oriented writing that analyzes how the course came to be a near-universal requirement, is focused on the status of composition (the course first, and later the discipline) within the university. Applebee, Crowley, and Berlin all contribute to that conversation. Other writing focuses more on issues of student equity. Crowley

again has this focus, as does Bartholomae. At least two position statements from the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) have highlighted problematic elements of college writing construction—1974's "Students' Right to Their Own Language" and 2020's "This Ain't Another Statement! This Is a DEMAND For Black Linguistic Justice!" These examples barely scratch the surface on work that unpacks the problematic nature of evaluating students on what they write and how they write it—and making the course a requirement for graduation. But they do not engage deeply with reading. The 2021 "CCCC Position Statement on the Role of Reading in College Writing Classrooms" that does focus on reading makes some connection between reading and equity, saying:

> This statement assumes that, like instruction in writing, instruction in reading is most ethical and effective when it engages students' diverse experiences, needs, and capacities and when it works from an asset-based (rather than a deficit-based) theory of learning.

However, the statement does not directly engage with the issues of power and hegemony raised in "Students' Right" and "This Ain't Another Statement."

Yet, reading is as subject to hegemony as writing. As Berlin said, "No matter what else it expects of its schools, a culture insists that students learn to read, write, and speak in the officially sanctioned manner" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 1). I think it's important for the field to consider when and how to support students' resistance to arguments they read, particularly those that call their humanity into question.

In "The Argument of Reading," Bartholomae argues that close reading is "a form of argumentation" that should be the basis for FYC (*Margins* 245). For him, teaching "close reading" means "teaching students how to work with words (turning them this way and that) as a form of critical practice" (249). He acknowledges that this doesn't sound like it rises to the level

of the “’big’ questions (say) of race, class, and gender,” but maintains that it is as important. I agree, for the reason being that, in a heavily print-based society such as ours, we cannot fully engage with the “’big’ questions” in text if we aren’t encouraged to “work with words…as a form of critical practice.” And while text-based practices are far from the only way to engage with the “’big’ questions,” they are the way that we are qualified and, I think, obligated to teach in our FYC classes.

This is an argument I make in the concluding pages of this dissertation partly because these are the thoughts I am left with—the ideas I most urgently carry forward from this point—and partly because, for now, they are still ideas. Too often, I think, in an effort both to be genuinely useful and also with an interest in *seeming* useful, we tell ourselves that the work we’re interested in doing is also the work that is most responsible. If my commitment to equity and social justice was not clear in Chapters 1-8, where I did not explicitly tie my interest in reading to my commitment to social equity, then who am I to claim that these ideas are socially equitable ideas?

8.6 The “End”

In *Annihilation*, the biologist is contaminated almost as soon as she enters Area X. While exploring, she feels a compulsion to get closer and closer to something she cannot identify, in order to, she tells herself, see it more clearly. But as she leans in closer, she says:

> I was unlucky—or was I lucky? Triggered by a disturbance in the flow of air, a nodule…chose that moment to burst open and a tiny spray of golden spores spewed out. I pulled back, but I thought I had felt something enter my nose, experienced a pinprick of escalation in the smell of rotting honey” (25).

Her first thought is not for her physical safety or for the threat to the mission if she has been contaminated by the very landscape she is researching, but for her standing in the group. Her reputation. She forces herself to show no sign of the contamination, explaining, “My natural instinct was always for concealment. Already I was imagining the psychologist’s reaction to my contamination, if revealed to the group” (25).

Can it be anything other than ridiculous to imagine that a researcher could remain uncontaminated by the landscape in which she lives and breathes? Is a researcher going to do anything other than get closer and closer, until the inevitable contamination happens? The biologist’s experience gestures toward the futility of objectivity. But the search for truth does not free us from our egos. We fear for our reputations. We fear losing our standing in the group. We fear being judged as wrong or thought ridiculous.

The biologist says, “Nothing that lived and breathed was truly objective—even in a vacuum, even if all that possessed the brain was a self-immolating desire for the truth” (8).

My Area X is first-year composition. This is not due to “any inherent plan or process,” but instead “is the product of complex interactions of people, political and social institutions” (Berlin, “Literacy” 251). But, to paraphrase Berlin, this does not mean that my choices have been just “one damn thing after another.” I live in this environment and draw my maps here because I like it here. I am, we might say, contaminated by this place. I’ve breathed it in. I’m part of it, and I am anything but objective.

Many scholars, both within and outside of composition studies, critique the very notion of first-year composition as a course, or at least as a required course. Some critique it quite harshly. As I read their arguments, I couldn’t help but feel fear—what if the course stopped

being required? Or changed into something I no longer liked? What if that meant the environment I live in disappeared?

This project has been maddeningly metacognitive. It has been a process of reading and writing about reading and writing, and teaching. There's no end, it seems, to the layers this produces. It occurred to me, sometime in the final days of drafting these pages, that the process is the product. The value of research is less the answer and more the process of inquiry. And often the best it can produce is new questions.

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