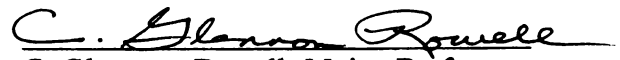
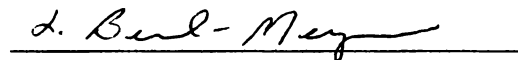


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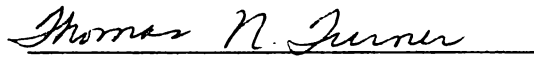
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Sandra Lee Tompkins entitled "Theory Becomes Practice: Combining Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric in Describing the Meaning-Making Processes of College Freshmen as They Respond to Poetry." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.


C. Glennon Rowell, Major Professor

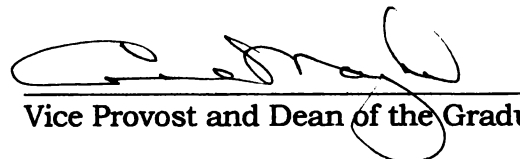
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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate Studies

THEORY BECOMES PRACTICE:
COMBINING READER-RESPONSE THEORY AND THE NEW RHETORIC
IN DESCRIBING THE MEANING-MAKING PROCESSES OF COLLEGE
FRESHMEN AS THEY RESPOND TO POETRY

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Sandra Lee Tompkins
December 2001

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my brother Dr. Forrest G. Tompkins, who has supported me in my endeavor through his devotion, encouragement, and generosity.

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In conclusion, I acknowledge the following publishers for their granting me permission to reprint the poems used in this study (see Appendix E).

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ABSTRACT

For my study, I investigated the meaning-making processes of college freshmen as they interpreted and discussed poetry. Operating from a theory base involving Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric, I studied the students' individual construction of meaning and their social construction and negotiation of meaning, respectively, as they interpreted poems. I used the methods of qualitative researchers in gathering the data: participant observation; a collection of artifacts that included student compositions, written notes, and audiotaped discussions from small-group work; purposive sampling of these artifacts; questionnaires; and field notes. I placed myself as a full participant observer, since I served as both professor and researcher in my own classroom. For each theory, I identified and described categories of the meaning-making processes derived from the artifacts, and I used the constant comparative method for refining them. For the purposive sampling procedure, I used maximum variation sampling of the student compositions and the audiotaped discussions in selecting salient examples to demonstrate these meaning-making processes for both theories.

By identifying descriptive categories to delineate the students' thinking processes both individually and communally, I have demonstrated how Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric can be practiced in the classroom. Progression from the individual construction of meaning to the communal construction and negotiation of meaning resulted in the students' producing comprehensive compositions about poems. Professors and researchers can

observe how my students constructed their interpretations by rethinking their initial responses, by negotiating their points of difference and points of agreement, and by incorporating into their own compositions their reactions to each other's views.

Through studying the meaning-making processes inherent in these theories, professors and researchers can understand how students interpret poetry and how theory informs practice. As a result of this study, I have more awareness of the possible thinking behaviors of students, that is, the different ways they relate to poetry and to each other in discourse communities. The categories of meaning construction I have identified for both theories provide me with a better understanding of student work as I continue to teach poetry interpretation.

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CHAPTER I

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

Theoretical Base

My study operates from Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric. Both theories recognize the postmodernist view that reality offers no permanent, objective truth; thereby, literature reflects the subjectivity, ambiguity, tensions, and conflicts of an unstable reality. Accordingly, reader-response theorists believe that meaning in a poem is activated by the mind of the reader rather than being inherent in the text itself. These theorists draw from constructivism in postulating that the text does not represent a permanent truth from an objective reality. Their focus is the work as experienced by a reader that transcends both the text and the reader to become an event in a particular time.

A reader constructs meaning for a poem through a process that is recursive and cumulative as he or she reads and rereads the poem, accessing prior knowledge and experience, utilizing new information, modifying thinking, and making associations. As a reader brings prior knowledge and experience to different reading events for the same poem, he or she can further modify interpretation by rereading, reflecting, and accumulating meaning over time. Furthermore, reader-response theorists recognize that readers can construct multiple interpretations of the same poem rather than determining one unchanging explication.

This recursive, cumulative process is also evident in the social construction of meaning of the New Rhetoric as members of a discourse community build meaning by offering their prior knowledge and experience, their reflections and associations in their movement towards consensus about viable interpretations of a poem. From the New Rhetoric's perspective, the conversation is ongoing; members strive for perfect agreement but this achievement is unlikely, since the text is not regarded as an object independent of interpretation and since each member brings a particular and unique perspective to the conversation.

Each member of a discourse community comes from certain social/cultural contexts and holds certain ideologies. Through dialectical reasoning, members attempt to gain or increase the adherence of others in the community by explaining their differing views of a poem. In this community each member has an equal voice in the cooperative search for meaning, supporting neither agreement nor difference exclusively but instead being open to the perspectives of others. An individual can change, modify, or defend his or her view in light of other interpretations without feeling pressured to overcome difference. By deferring consensus, members promote a negotiation of meaning to achieve understanding of other views and mutual respect for them.

Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric combined in practice focus on an ongoing process of individual and communal response in constructing meaning. Both the individual reader and the discourse community transcend a plurality of views to promote a multivocal community

in interpreting poetry. Through their different life experiences, prior education, and ideologies, members bring a shared competency to the act of interpretation as they converse in mutual cooperation towards consensus building. A particular discourse community reaches a tentative truth about a poem in a particular historical moment of the ongoing conversation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify, describe, and demonstrate the meaning-making processes of college freshmen as they interpreted and discussed poetry. In attempting to explain these processes, I employed Reader-Response Theory (a literary theory) and the New Rhetoric (a rhetorical theory). The reader-response focus was on the individual reader transacting with a text; the new rhetorical focus was on the social construction and negotiation of meaning in a discourse community. From the artifacts of student compositions and audiotaped group work, I derived categories to delineate the meaning-making processes inherent in these two theories. In studying these processes, I gained an understanding of how students interpret poetry and how theory translates into practice.

Description of the Study

I conducted my research at a two-year college in a rural Tennessee town where I am a full-time faculty member teaching composition and American literature. The participants were my students from one intact class of eighteen students taking Freshman Composition 1020, which included a six-week unit

on introduction to poetry that spanned from January 16 through March 1, 2001. I used the methods of qualitative researchers for my investigation because I was studying learning processes that are better observed through using participant observation and artifacts rather than by attempting to quantify the subjective nature of human perception in interpreting poetry.

I acted as a full participant observer, being both researcher and professor in my own class. I chose the classroom setting, since I was not investigating students' responses out of the normal context of their classroom experiences. The research involved actual assignments that students normally complete in my freshman composition course. My purpose was to observe how theory translates into practice within naturally occurring events; therefore, I did not use case studies. Case studies would place students in a research environment where they would receive special attention over those not chosen, and this method would require extra time and effort from them.

I considered myself as an active member of the classroom discourse community, for I am also a reader of poetry. Even though as researcher I was observing readers as they constructed meaning, either individually or communally, as professor I provided guidance, instruction, feedback, and evaluation. The students were fully aware of my role as researcher and their role as participants in the research. I clarified that their writing assignments and group discussions were course requirements and that the only departures from their normal class routine were questionnaires and audiotaped group work for my study. Since their participation was voluntary, whether students chose to be part of the study in no way affected their grade for the poetry unit.

The artifacts were my students' compositions about the poems and their audiotaped small-group discussions of the poems. From these artifacts, I derived major categories and subcategories of the meaning-making processes inherent in the two theories. I then used a type of purposive sampling, maximum variation sampling, of these artifacts to provide salient examples of the meaning-making processes. I targeted both typical and divergent data from the work of my students, who displayed varying levels of ability and education. I projected that the data obtained would have transferability because students of different abilities and backgrounds are typically found in freshman classrooms. To help me in furthering my understanding of the interpretive process, I administered pre- and post-questionnaires for students to anonymously report their past experience and instruction in poetry and their current experience from my class.

I established triangulation through using multiple sources of data. The written artifacts consisted of two separate compositions about one poem. The first composition illustrated the individual construction of meaning, and the second illustrated the social construction and negotiation of meaning. This second composition was more comprehensive than the first because the student had been exposed to other viewpoints in group/class discussions. Students incorporated the ideas of fellow classmates in that second composition by referencing their names as they argued their points of difference and points of agreement about a poem. In addition, the first composition included handwritten notes from the audiotaped group discussions as well as from class discussions. These notes and audiotapes served to help me crosscheck and

verify information from one composition to the other. Furthermore, the substantial selection of salient examples from the student compositions and audiotaped group work provided rich data depicting the meaning-making processes. Finally, the questionnaires and my field notes offered some insight about the students' experience with this particular theory-base for instruction.

Related Research

I discuss in Chapter II several studies using Reader-Response Theory or the New Rhetoric as their underlying theories for research. As a qualitative researcher, I derived my categories from the data my study produced, rather than using those I encountered in these studies. However, I did adapt certain practices of other researchers for my own needs. For instance, instead of using undirected small-group discussion, I acted as a facilitator for semi-directed small-group as well as whole-class discussions because I defined myself as a part of the discourse community and the professor whose responsibility was to instruct.

From the reader-response to the new rhetorical perspectives, researchers demonstrated that meaning making begins with the personal voice in isolation but then builds on that initial interpretation to include the viewpoints and understandings of others. A notable advantage to social interaction is that students serve as guides and instructors for each other in affirming significant points while questioning others to determine the validity of interpretations. My study differs from other research in that I required my students to incorporate the ideas of fellow classmates into their own compositions. From observing the

examples of student writing, as presented in Chapter IV, I believe the second compositions my students produced, after the group/class discussions, were more comprehensive in interpreting the poetry as compared to their initial compositions. Research findings from other studies corroborate my contention that the social construction of meaning is essential to the process of building interpretation to produce comprehensive readings.

Assumptions

I made the following five assumptions in conducting the study. I presumed students could be independent learners; that is, they could read poems and derive interpretations without prescriptive instruction but rather with instruction that guided or coached them. A second assumption was that I believed as students read poetry, they would demonstrate a recursive, cumulative process, rather than a linear process. While rereading a poem several times, they would access prior knowledge and experience to help them organize meaning in making corrective changes, synthesizing new information, and acquiring additional insights. As readers would move through the poem several times, they could accumulate their impressions and knowledge toward a comprehensive understanding of the poem.

The third assumption was that the recursive, cumulative process also would be evident in the communal meaning building as students modified, changed, or defended their interpretations in the process of discussion. As interlocutors would reread and discuss a poem, they would be enabled to accumulate additional information and insight that could lead to a more

comprehensive understanding of the poem than would be possible as independent readers.

For a fourth assumption, I presumed that students would work cooperatively in groups as they socially constructed meaning. I expected they would demonstrate respect and tolerance for differing views to achieve social cohesion while negotiating meaning. In the same manner, I expected students to work cooperatively with me as their professor in completing the compositions, wherein they should demonstrate this negotiation of meaning by referring to others' interpretations.

The fifth assumption was that I anticipated categories of response would emerge from the data in terms of characterizing the meaning-making processes evident in the individual and communal construction of meaning. I believed these categories might be similar to those I had encountered in other studies; on the other hand, I allowed for the possibility that different categories might emerge from my study.

My goals for studying the meaning-making processes inherent in Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric were to gain an understanding of how students interpret poetry and how theory translates into practice. The learning goals for my students, based on the above assumptions, were as follows:

- 1) The student will understand that reading poetry is a recursive, cumulative process so that rereading a poem over time is an integral part in the process of understanding.

- 2) The student will recognize that knowledge is both individually and socially constructed; he or she is not learning in isolation but can incorporate others' ideas into thinking and writing about poetry. In this way, comprehensive interpretations of poems are obtained, and students become social learners rather than isolated learners.

Definitions

For this study, I adopted the following terms that are common to the language of reader-response and new rhetoric theorists; in practice, I adapted some of these terms for my own particular methodology.

Reader-Response Theory is a literary theory that focuses on the interrelationship between the reader and the literary work, that is, on the reader's experience of the text rather than on an objective analysis of its elements. Reader-response theorists do not believe the text carries an objective meaning independent of the reader's knowledge, experience, imagination, or beliefs; therefore, the meaning derived from the text is not identical for every reader.

Constructivism is philosophy that claims the individual constructs reality based on his or her knowledge, experience, and beliefs. Constructivists do not discount an objective reality but believe each person interprets it from an individual perspective. Radical constructivists do not acknowledge an external reality independent of an individual's interpretation of it.

The New Rhetoric is a rhetorical theory contending that meaning can be socially constructed in an ongoing dialogue wherein interlocutors negotiate

opposing views in a movement towards consensus. New rhetoricians recognize the plurality of views possible, which most likely do not lead to irrefutable conclusions.

Theory-driven method is a practice of teaching based on a theoretical framework.

The recursive, cumulative process is the individual's reading and rereading the text as he or she constructs meaning by accessing prior knowledge and experience, utilizing new information, modifying thinking, and making associations.

A reading is a composition or verbal report that reflects a student's thinking as he or she constructs meaning. Particular to my study, Reading One is a first response to a poem that is written individually without the input of other classmates or professor. Reading Two is a composition that demonstrates the student's comprehensive understanding of the same poem, written after receiving feedback from the professor for Reading One and after the student has discussed the poem with classmates in the group work. For this latter reading, the student incorporates references to other students' interpretations as he or she demonstrates points of agreement or points of difference in building a final interpretation of the poem.

A reading event is the reading of a poem in one sitting or the discussion of the poem in one session of group work.

A discourse community is a group of people discussing topics of interest to them. For my study, the community comprised three to four students or the class as a whole responding to a poem.

A *viable reading* is an interpretation of a poem that scholars would view as being workable. For my study, a viable reading was an interpretation that fit the evidence inherent in the poem and that received consensus from a discourse community. Students were permitted to incorporate their personal responses to poems as part of their readings; however, they were required to offer an interpretation that could be defended by direct references to the poem. Not all readers would agree on one exact interpretation of a poem, but as a discourse community they did impose limitations for acceptable readings.

VAWPs refers to Verbal and Written Protocols that are similar to think-alouds of other studies. I added the written dimension for enabling students to capture their thoughts for later use in the second composition. The verbal protocols were the students' discussion of a poem in small groups. As they verbally expressed their ideas, they incrementally wrote down their points in the negotiation of meaning for the purpose of later incorporating them into Reading Two. The verbal protocols from the small-group work were audiotaped so that I could better observe the communal construction of meaning than was possible in class. The written protocols were attached to Reading Two so that I could see how students further developed their interpretations after Reading One.

An *impromptu panel* is similar to the fishbowl technique where a class listens to a panel of other members discuss a subject. For my study, a small group of three to four students sat apart from the rest of the class, usually at the front of the room, and discussed a poem while the other students listened and took notes. I name this method *impromptu* since the panel students had not discussed the poem previously.

The *participant observer* is a researcher who functions as a member of the community investigated but in varying degrees of participation, ranging from nonparticipation to full participation.

Artifacts are collections of materials comprising the data of a study.

Purposive sampling is to select salient examples that emerge from the data obtained, rather than randomly selecting them.

Maximum variation sampling is to target both typical and divergent data in order to maximize the range of information.

Transferability is the degree of similarity from one research setting to another.

Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data in order for the researcher to provide different viewpoints of the same events, thus increasing confidence in the research findings.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Theoretical Basis

Both Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric focus on the notion of transaction as an ongoing process in a lived-through experience not only encompassing individual responses to a work of literature but also the social construction of its meaning. Readers are not passive respondents to a text, letting the text determine a limited view, but they are active participants in constructing meaning from the text. In the same manner, interlocutors are not focused on perpetuating limited, personal perspectives of a work, but rather they are promoting openness in socially constructing its meaning. They transcend a plurality of individual positions to promote a multivocal community wherein transacting involves living through the experience of being in an historical moment, an event which encompasses both the work and the conversation.

Theorists of Reader-Response Theory see meaning, or truth, as residing not in the text but rather in the minds of the readers. This theory can be aligned with constructivism, which postulates that reality is in the mind of the knower who constructs representations of reality based upon prior experiences and beliefs. Although constructivists do not discount an objective reality, they believe each person interprets it from an individual perspective. However, radical constructivists do not acknowledge an external reality independent of an

individual's interpretation of it (Jonassen, 1991). From a reader-response perspective, Bleich (1978/1980) refutes an objective paradigm by stating "that all observers have the same perceptual response to a symbolic object creates the illusion that the object is real and that its meaning must reside in it" (p. 135). Similarly, Fish (1970/1980) asserts, "The objectivity of the text is an illusion" (p. 82) and there are "no fixed texts, but only interpretive strategies making them" (Fish, 1976/1980, p. 183). Fish (1970/1980) believes that the "activating consciousness of the reader" creates the experience of the text (p. 83). Perfect agreement among readers would require the text to be an object independent of a reader or a discourse community, as the New Critics hold.

The New Criticism, in prominence from the 1930s to the late 1950s, regards the text as an objective entity, separate from the reader, the poet, and any other extrinsic concerns. The poem's intrinsic worth can be discovered by a formalistic dissection of its various elements, thereby not separating form from content. Thus, the structure of the poem, consisting of the textual elements, is valued over its meaning or theme, which is simply considered another element of structure. Meaning, therefore, cannot be reduced to a paraphrase but rather meaning can only be explained in terms of the other poetic elements that lead to a unified structural whole, a balance of the tensions present in the poem (Leitch, 1988). Since Reader-Response theorists hold that literature is characterized by its openness to multiple meanings and that its meaning resides in the mind of the reader, a discourse community holding a plurality of views would not likely determine one "right" interpretation.

Rosenblatt (1978/1994) describes the poem as “an event in time” (p.12), and Iser (1974/1980) envisions a “virtual dimension” as “the coming together of text and imagination” in a “living event” (pp. 54, 64). The poem *becomes* the reader’s experience of it through his or her “activating consciousness” (Fish, 1970/1980, p. 83). Rosenblatt (1985) explains this transactional perspective as a “unique coming-together of a particular personality and a particular text at a particular time and place under particular circumstances” (p. 104). Each reader brings to the work his or her own knowledge and ideology that influence the reading at a particular time; however, the reader can change or modify response with subsequent readings and the influence of other readers in the discourse community.

New Rhetoric theorists see meaning, or truth, as constructed by interlocutors in an ongoing conversation moving towards consensus. From this perspective, Crosswhite (1996) defines audience as being an event; the discourse community itself is happening in time as students experience the negotiation of meaning. He explains that because each audience, or discourse community, has particular competences and ideologies, “the specific ways in which any particular example of argumentation is ideological vary from particular audience to particular audience” (p. 190). Similar to the individual experience of the work itself, students comprising an audience of interlocutors involved in discussion are experiencing an event in time. They are “constantly becoming one audience or another” (p. 139), increasing or decreasing their degrees or intensities of adherence to particular views of a work. They move towards consensus of interpretation, with an “aspiration for agreement”

(Perelman, 1979, p. 15) but will most likely not achieve it, except perhaps for their agreement on certain details about the work.

Bleich (1978/1980) describes this dialectic as a “communally motivated negotiative comparison” of responses (p. 135), which Fish (1976/1980) identifies as “interpretative communities” (p. 183). Students who make up these communities are informed readers; that is, they share interpretive strategies used to “write” the text (Fish, 1976/1980, p. 182), or as Crosswhite (1996) describes, “shared competences and agreements” (p. 53). Their understanding of literary conventions is developed through their earlier education and through the present class instruction. Their views of life experience, as evoked from the poetry, are gleaned from their own experiential reserves. According to Holland (1975/1980), “interpretation is a function of identity” (p. 123); each reader recreates the work in terms of his or her “adaptive and defensive strategies for coping with the world” (p. 126).

The transactional experience of reading is a “self-ordering and self-corrective process” (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, p. 11), or in my view a “recursive and cumulative” process (Tompkins, S. L., 1997, p. 317); correspondingly, the social construction of meaning is characterized by an ongoing process of rereading, reflecting, and accumulating information as a discourse community. In what Iser (1974/1980) names a retrospective process, the reader modifies or reorganizes his or her thinking, especially after becoming familiar with the text through several readings. In this manner, gaps in comprehension are filled and “alien associations,” that is, other interpretations possible, are less likely to interfere with meaning making (pp. 61-62).

In both the individual construction of meaning and the social construction of meaning, closure is postponed. I find my students have the tendency to leap to interpretation rather than take time to explore a poem thoroughly. As Fish (1970/1980) advises, “[c]oming to the point should be resisted” (p. 89), and Culler (1975/1980) recommends avoiding “premature foreclosure” (p. 117). Similarly, Perelman (1979) cautions against arriving at indisputable right answers, thereby judging with “certitude” (p. 128), because of the contingent nature of individual cases, that is, the current rhetorical situation. The immediate experience of a poem can vary for different individuals as well as for different audiences, and interpretation can change over time in subsequent encounters with the poem.

Each student is “an incarnation of the universal audience,” meaning that a particular audience of one individual is able to comprehend different views while adhering to only one (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958/1969, p. 37). The student is able to understand that not every competent person will be convinced of an interpretation as if he or she is part of a universal audience that transcends time and achieves absolute agreement. As Crosswhite (1996) observes, audiences are culture specific, since each member brings his or her particular ideology to the conversation. But at the same time, they are in a “cooperative search for truth” (p. 143). Students in a discourse community are involved in an ongoing process of seeking consensus, yet they demonstrate “a willingness to go on seeing one’s opponent’s side” (Crosswhite, 1996, p. 154).

Crosswhite (1996) defines a paragon audience as being ideology-free in its openness, tolerance, or sympathy; however, the available audience with its

“ideological disabilities” better describes the norm (p. 195). Therefore, students will only approximate the paragon audience, having a “degree of ideology-freeness” (Crosswhite, 1996, p. 198) or variable degrees of adherence to interpretations (Perelman, 1979, p. 129) as they argue their points of difference and points of agreement about poems and the issues they present. Berlin (1982, 1988), in his notion of social-epistemic rhetoric, also views the outcome of argument as tentative truth in a particular historical moment arrived at by a particular discourse community.

Burke’s (1967) notion of identification and Holland’s (1975/1980) concept of the reader’s identity are similar in that there are certain triggers in a work with which readers can identify, whether in the form of Burke’s god-terms or Holland’s life experiences. These triggers evoke a sense of commonality or cohesiveness within the group to promote productive communication. Students readily identify with certain culture words, such as *God*, *morality*, *money*, *death*, or *love*. In the same manner, they relate certain ideas in poems to their own lives, such as religious experiences, love encounters, ethical dilemmas, or grieving. Although these god-terms or life experiences transcend historical time because they are universal, students can offer different interpretations of them in a particular moment, that is, in a particular reading event as a particular audience in a discourse community.

The importance of socially constructing meaning, then, is in the cooperation each member demonstrates in making the conversation productive, in allowing all voices to be heard equally. The student can demonstrate Elbow’s (1973/1991) idea of rendering, or trying to “get inside the head” of another.

“Decentering,” or remaining open to the views of others (Kroll, 1984, p. 179), promotes mutual understanding, or being able to identify with others.

Similarly, Gadamer (1975/1986) advocates this openness in his notion of moving within the life worlds of others to gain insight into ourselves.

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) refers to this same process, but in regard to a reader’s living through the experience of the poem. I believe her idea equally applies to identifying with others during discourse: “The reader seeks to participate in another’s vision . . . to gain insights that will make his own life more comprehensible” (p. 7).

As Crosswhite (1996) claims, differences are not obstacles to be overcome. Similarly, Clark (1994) does not see the elimination of disagreement as the goal of a discourse community. Trimbur’s (1989) notion of dissensus advocates a deferral of agreement for a mutual exchange of differences with the important focus being understanding among the participants rather than reaching agreement. Rorty (1979) believes the ongoing conversation is more important than finding “objective truth” (p. 377), and Rorty (1982) promotes loyalty to others in the discourse community as being more important than the argument itself or determining a right answer. Therefore, communal discourse is predicated on the interchange of agency, or self-empowerment (Ewald & Wallace, 1994), and deference, or deferring personal opinion (Wyschogrod in Clark, 1994), and their interdependency promotes an equal exchange of opinion, favoring neither consensus nor difference exclusively (Clark, 1994). The conversation will be sustained when students can work cooperatively

together as a discourse community, with a focus on loyalty to the group and respect for each member's contribution.

Research Studies

Reader-Response Theory

To illustrate multiple interpretations of meaning, Soles (1995) conducted a study of sixty first-year literature students at Camosun College, a community college in Victoria, British Columbia. He practiced a reader-response approach and encountered several perspectives on the "it" of Dickinson's poem "I Like to See It Lap the Miles." Without being given background information for the poem, students described its object as a horse, cow, or goose; as a car or a steam shovel; as the sky, the sun, a river, a glacier, the wind, a storm, or a tornado. Only one student "correctly" identified the object as a train. Soles and his classes then determined "to what extent the various interpretations were supportable" as grounded in the text (p. 137), since students constructed the text "in the context of their own values and beliefs" (p. 139). The examples of student interpretations that he provides clearly demonstrate their close connection to the text of the poem. As Rosenblatt (1978/1994) has recommended, "[T]he reader should not project ideas or attitudes that have no defensible linkage with the text" (p. 14). Soles (1995) concluded that Reader-Response Theory is a method for eliciting "creative and independent thinking" from students in their recreating a text (p. 139).

A study by Langer (1993) demonstrated Reader-Response Theory's assertion that constructing meaning is a recursive process and that meaning

resides in the reader who is guided by the text, by prior knowledge and experience, and by a cumulative understanding of the text. Langer's descriptive study investigated a cross-section of 24 seventh and eleventh graders randomly sampled from inner-city and suburban schools. She developed four stances to describe the process that readers move through as they construct meaning. This process is their moving in and out of "envisionments," or "text-worlds," defined as "the ideas, images, questions and hunches that fill a person's mind during every reading, writing, speaking, or other experience where people gain and share knowledge through language" (p. 6). Having students read poetry and stories as well as social studies and science texts, Langer used think-aloud protocols to record the students' envisionments, which she described as Stances in the Process of Interpretation.

Langer (1993) defined these stances as four categories. Being Out and Stepping Into an Envisionment is the reader's use of prior knowledge, experiences, and recognition of textual elements to connect with the text and construct meaning. Being In and Moving Through an Envisionment is the reader's building upon the previous stance by using its envisionment, prior knowledge, and the text. Stepping Back and Rethinking What One Knows is the reader's using the previous envisionments to reconsider prior knowledge. And finally, Stepping Out and Objectifying the Experience is the reader's detaching from the previous envisionments and critically reflecting on the text or reading experience (p. 7).

Langer (1992) described these reader orientations as "reaching toward a horizon of possibilities" (p. 37). As in a hermeneutic circle, students

understood new parts of the text in terms of the whole, but they also reconsidered the whole by recursively returning to their previous understandings, thus changing their perspectives of the work in an ongoing process. Throughout the reading of a particular work, the text-worlds changed as information was gained, discarded, or altered toward a “final envisionment,” a text-world that was also subject to change because it included what students understood as well as the questions they still held (p. 39).

Langer (1993) found that low-rated readers more often needed to gather information from the text, returning to stance 1, to develop and maintain an envisionment than did the high-rated readers. On the other hand, the high-rated readers developed, maintained, and elaborated on their envisionments (stance 2) more of the time than did the other readers. However, both types of readers did not often rethink or critically reflect (stances 3 and 4) on their reading experience. In addition, the high-rated readers elaborated from the text, that is, explored a range of possible meanings through utilizing prior knowledge and experience while sometimes prior knowledge and experience interfered with the low-rated readers' engagement with the text so that they focused on one possibility of meaning. Langer (1993) concluded that low-rated readers need to be informed of a purpose for reading before and during the reading.

Earthman (1992) studied the initial meaning-making strategies of eight more-experienced graduate students and eight less-experienced college freshmen in a state university. In her think-aloud protocols, she focused on three types of responses: gap filling, text repertoire, and multiple perspectives.

Gap filling involved the students' using their imaginations to interpret plot, character relations, or symbolic language not explained in the text. Earthman found that when texts provided clear, adequate signals, both graduate students and freshmen bridged the gaps in a similar manner; however, when text signals were few, freshmen, unlike the graduate students, had difficulty connecting with the text, became confused, and resisted further discussion.

The second type of response, text repertoire, or extratextual reality, encompassed allusions, historical/social context, and literary conventions. For this category, Earthman found that graduate students were sensitive to evoking meaning from beyond the text, while freshmen missed many of the references and paid little attention to literary conventions. In Earthman's focus on multiple perspectives, the third type of response, she found that graduate students would revise their understandings as they read, while freshmen would adhere to their first impressions. Moreover, freshmen, either through inability or unwillingness, would resist forming a different perspective when prompted to see another level to a poem or story. On the other hand, graduate students were able to comprehend two perspectives or multiple levels simultaneously.

Earthman's (1992) study provides a typical portrait of some college freshmen. Similar to my observation that several of my own freshmen tend to leap to interpretation, Earthman acknowledged that previous experience with instruction in literature could have influenced students to seek one right answer and to get there quickly. During early interviews, she attempted to prompt students towards another view, but gave up because of their strong

negative reactions and her not wanting to disturb the researcher-participant relationship by “turning into a teacher figure” (p. 379).

Dias (1996) hypothesized that readers are capable of making meaning from poetry on their own without first being prepared or directed by teachers. He investigated differences in approaches to reading poetry demonstrated by average-ability readers in grades nine and ten. He focused on two groups of approximately twenty-five students at each of the grade levels from a large, semi-urban comprehensive school. He purposely chose average-ability students so that his findings would be more generalizable than if he had worked with low or high ability groups.

Dias employed two methods for eliciting unstructured response: undirected small-group discussion and RAPS (Responding-Aloud Protocols). The small-group discussions and a plenary session were completed within a fifty-minute class period, and at no time did Dias permit students to write notes on their discussion. He wanted responses to remain immediate, for he believed that orally responding to a poem while in the process of reading captures the process in action, not once removed by the interposition of writing.

The purpose of the undirected small-group discussions was to help students develop confidence as readers of poetry so that in the RAP sessions they would demonstrate similar assurance to freely articulate their thoughts without worrying about that one right answer. For these taped think-alouds, Dias chose twelve students, six from each class level, as case studies. Dias discovered from the RAPs that “initial encounters [with poems] are powerful determiners of how the poem will continue to be read” (p. 31). Without the

influence of other readers, the students relied more heavily on their first impression of meaning. Furthermore, as a result of the undirected small-group sessions, Dias discovered that students did not regard the interviewer as an answer provider, but instead worked out meaning for themselves.

Through examining the small-group work, Dias observed that students gained confidence in their ability to articulate ideas and to become independent thinkers and risk-takers. In addition, he noted that students gradually became less defensive of their own opinions and less intolerant of others' ideas but instead adopted a more open attitude towards the text and different perspectives.

In summary, the above studies demonstrated how Reader-Response Theory is put into practice. Soles' (1995) study illustrated the theory's allowance for multiple meanings. Langer's (1993) research showed the recursive and cumulative nature of response in the reader's constructing meaning from prior knowledge and experience combined with textual elements. Earthman (1992) focused on readers' using their imaginations to fill gaps in their comprehension of text elements, using references beyond the text to create meaning, and tolerating multiple perspectives. And Dias (1996) presented the notion that readers are independent thinkers, capable of creating meaning in an unstructured environment, corroborating the contention that meaning resides in the mind of the reader.

Both Soles and Dias illustrated that a reader-response approach could elicit independent thinking and risk taking from students, whereas Langer, Earthman, and Dias found that some students tend to adhere to their first

impressions of a work and resist further discussion. Both high- and low-rated readers in Langer's study did not often exhibit rethinking and reflecting about a work. Similarly, the college freshmen in Earthman's study resisted discussion when having difficulty in comprehending the text. From Dias' RAP data, he found that without the influence of other readers, as during the group work, some students relied more heavily on a first impression of meaning. These findings corroborate my contention that a combination of Reader-Response Theory, the individual construction of meaning, and the New Rhetoric, the social construction of meaning, provides the means for students to build comprehensive readings of literature.

The New Rhetoric: The Social Construction and Negotiation of Meaning

Reader-response writing is expressivist in that students reveal their first thoughts about a work, their first attempts at meaning making, and their personal reaction to a work of literature. On first glance, expressivism and social constructionism seem like pedagogical opposites in that expressivism centers on the development of personal voice in isolation rather than in the social setting of communal voices (Fishman & McCarthy, 1992). Berlin (1982) describes expressionist pedagogy as advocating that truth is found in private experience, or the personal voice. Yet he claims that this approach also involves the stripping away of erroneous thinking through the dialectic method, by "the interaction of two interlocutors of good will intent on arriving at knowledge" (p. 771). He claims the purpose of dialogue is "to get rid of what is untrue to the private vision of the writer, what is, in a word, inauthentic"

(p. 772). I believe, as truth is not self-evident and immutable, both the individual and the community are creators in shaping their separate experiences of the world to communicate on a level that includes all voices cooperatively in the construction of meaning.

Fishman and McCarthy (1995) refute the expressivist-constructivist distinction in their study of Fishman's introduction to philosophy class at a state university by demonstrating that expressivist writing can accommodate the goals of a social-constructivist classroom. Reader-Response Theory advocates a first connection of the reader with the text in isolation from other readers; therefore, the first reading would be written as expressivist writing. Subsequent readings would then involve the communal construction of meaning advocated by the New Rhetoric. I believe both types of meaning making working together can develop comprehensive readings of literature.

Their study was in two parts: Fishman investigated the conflict between teacher authority and student voices; McCarthy studied the communal structures emerging from "generating and positioning difference" in the classroom for both students and teacher (p. 62). Fishman described the teacher-student relationships in his expressivist classroom as falling on a continuum between the liberal emphasis on individual equality and the communitarian emphasis on cooperation and shared beliefs. In the liberal view, individuals convene to discuss differences and to achieve independent ends; in the communitarian view, individuals become the cooperating parts of an organism, each committed to the preservation of the group despite competing differences in order to keep inquiry open.

Fishman, as professor, established himself as a co-learner of equal status to his students. He attempted to take the focus off the competition for grades and center attention on communal effort toward self-discovery and philosophic inquiry. In effect, the intrinsic reward of inquiry was expected to outweigh the external reward of grades. His class was made up of twenty-three students from various majors. For the first three weeks of the course, students discussed and wrote about their personal viewpoints on a number of issues, such as racial inequality, gender, or marriage. The researchers were pleased with the communal structures emerging in how the students learned to tolerate a multiplicity of viewpoints in exploring difference, to identify with others' perspectives, to clarify or modify beliefs, and to achieve social cohesion through trust. This open trust was evident in the transcripts from interviews McCarthy conducted and from class tapes where students would reveal sensitive personal information to further discussion.

Unexpected difficulty occurred when students resisted taking the leap from social discourse about life issues to academic discourse about assigned philosophy readings. On the continuum between liberal and communitarian emphases, Fishman and McCarthy (1995) found that as Fishman moved his class closer to the communitarian emphasis, the more difficulty he had in getting students to read the philosophic texts. Fishman's role as co-learner undermined his role as authority figure in motivating students to read difficult texts in relation to the life issues discussed. For instance, instead of answering study questions as a preparation for class after reading a text, some students

wrote their responses in class during discussion. The researchers concluded, “Fishman’s classroom was a gathering of novices without an elder” (p. 76).

Fishman had projected that the internal rewards of students’ establishing their own voices and their commitment to the discourse community in shared inquiry would motivate them to read the demanding material; however, they viewed the texts as “unexciting, irrelevant, and just too hard” (p. 77). The traditional competition for the external reward of grades was not a major part of his class; for example, the homework was graded as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Consequently, some students challenged his expertise or expressed dissatisfaction with the grades on their essays in light of the communitarian trust developed.

Fishman and McCarthy’s study presents the issue of professor as co-learner. In using Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric, a professor creates an environment that features the importance of the individual voice as being equal to all other voices, including the professor’s. Even though the instruction is less structured than in a teacher-directed classroom, the professor still must provide guidelines and parameters in order for the work to be conducted successfully. Social cohesion is maintained through mutual respect, and the extrinsic reward of grades is a part of the intrinsic reward of shared inquiry.

Fishman uses the same metaphor as Atwell (1987) in describing the communitarian emphasis present in his classroom to elicit philosophic inquiry. Both see students exploring a topic as if they were seated around a dining room table, which represents the social construction of meaning. Atwell studied her

own eighth-grade students' writing about adolescent novels. The dining room table materialized mainly in the form of letter writing that involved Atwell and her students sharing their responses to novels and asking and answering questions about them.

Kaiden (1998) investigated social interaction in her college-level developmental reading class. Students completed summary logs before the class session that were a first response to a literary work. During class, two groups worked on the same section of the novel—sharing, discussing, and recording their log responses on a transparency to be presented in the plenary session. When each group discussed their findings, the other class members affirmed the selection of significant points or questioned the validity of certain other points, especially in comparing the two groups' views of the same section. The students found that one group provided a more detailed account than the other but misinterpreted some information.

Kaiden concluded that this socially interactive environment enabled students to further build and refine their interpretations of a literary work. In addition, she noticed improvement in students' first responses in subsequent summary logs and in their confidence as readers because of their exposure to their classmates' work. Kaiden's finding confirms my contention that communal discourse is vital in students' constructing comprehensive interpretations.

In summary, both Fishman and McCarthy (1995) and Kaiden (1998) demonstrated that the combination of expressivism (the personal voice in isolation) and social constructionism (the communal voice of the dialectic

method) promotes the development of comprehensive interpretations.

Fishman's class used expressivist writing to explore individual responses to issues, and Kaiden's class wrote summary logs in response to literature. Both classrooms were set up as Atwell's (1987) dining room table metaphor; each class of students brought to the table their initial ideas to be explored further as a community. Fishman's students approached Crosswhite's (1996) paragon audience in their displaying tolerance for multiple viewpoints, in identifying with other perspectives, and in achieving social cohesion. In the same manner, Kaiden's students acted as "interlocutors of good will intent on arriving at knowledge" (Berlin, 1982, p. 771); they affirmed significant points, questioned others, and pointed out erroneous thinking. These two socially interactive environments enabled students to further build on and refine their thinking about the works studied.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Description of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify, describe, and demonstrate the meaning-making processes of college freshmen as they interpreted and discussed poetry. In attempting to explain these processes, I demonstrated how Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric could be put into practice in the classroom as a theory base for instruction. By first focusing on the individual construction of meaning and then on the social construction and negotiation of meaning, professors and researchers can observe the recursive, cumulative process of reading events as students construct their interpretations over time and as they move towards consensus on possible readings. In studying the meaning-making processes inherent in these theories, professors and researchers can understand how students interpret poetry and how theory informs practice.

Selection of Research Site and Participants

My research site was a two-year college located in a rural Tennessee town. I am a full-time faculty member teaching freshman composition and American literature at this institution. I secured written permission from the academic dean and the English department chair to have my students as the participants for the study. I also obtained written approval from The University of Tennessee's Institutional Review Board (IRB) in accordance with Form B (see

Appendix A), the Departmental Review Committee (DRC), the department head of Theory and Practice in Teacher Education, and the members of my committee.

The participants of the study were students taking Freshman Composition 1020, which includes the research paper and an introduction to poetry and fiction. My study's focus was on the poetry unit. Since I had intended to have approximately fifteen participants, I selected one intact class from among my four classes; this class totaled eighteen students. Because my classes usually contain typical college freshmen, I projected that the data obtained would represent a range of proficiency to provide transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), that is, generalizability, in that students of different abilities and educational backgrounds are commonly found in freshman classrooms.

Since I was employed as a full-time professor during this study, I chose the classroom setting with myself as the professor and the researcher. This environment provided the opportunity for me to understand my students' thinking behaviors as they interpreted poetry in that a purely research setting was unavailable to me. I was not, as a researcher, investigating students' responses out of the normal context of their learning experiences. I observed how theory plays out in practice that involves, for the most part, naturally occurring events. Consequently, I chose not to interview students or to do case studies because these activities would require extra time and work for the students as part of a research setting. Furthermore, I believed students involved in case studies would receive special attention by gaining learning

experience over the ones not chosen. Therefore, I preferred to include all members of the selected class equally in revealing a larger picture than is possible with only a few from this class.

Duration of the Study

The timeline for the study was a six-week unit, consisting of twelve 75-minute class periods, from January 16 through February 22, 2001. After the final class, students were still composing their last reading for the unit to turn in the following week; therefore, the actual ending date was March 1, 2001. Table 1 is an outline of the unit, adapted from the syllabus for the course.

To introduce the poetry unit in the initial class, I explained the two theories and distributed my guidelines for composing the readings (see Appendix B). I then informed my class about the research I wished to complete for my dissertation project. After explaining the components of the study and answering the students' questions, I distributed consent forms (see Appendix C) and secured signatures of those who wished to participate. Since the research involved actual assignments that students normally complete in my freshman composition course, no student objected to being a participant. For this first class, I also distributed the pre-questionnaire (see Appendix D) for the students to complete anonymously and return in the next class. I explain the questionnaire component later in this chapter.

As part of this first class, I read aloud "The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm" by Wallace Stevens to illustrate that poetry should be read aloud in order to better visualize the images and feel the emotion inherent in

Table 1: Timeline for the Poetry Unit

Tuesday	1/16	Introduction to the Poetry Unit and the Research Study
Thursday	1/18	Example poem: Developing a Reading: "Ethics" Elements: Imagery and Diction
Tuesday	1/23	Reading One of "A Blessing" Elements: Metaphor, Simile, Symbol, Allusion
Thursday	1/25	Reading One of "Saint Francis and the Sow"
Tuesday	1/30	Reading One of "The Unknown Citizen" Elements: Structure
Thursday	2/1	Reading One of "anyone lived in a pretty how town"
Tuesday	2/6	Reading One of "Sestina" Reading Two of a selected poem from first three poems
Thursday	2/8	Reading One of "Facing It"
Tuesday	2/13	Reading One of "This Is a Photograph of Me"
Thursday	2/15	Reading One of "Her Kind"
Tuesday	2/20	Reading One of "Ego Tripping" Reading Two of a selected poem from poems four – seven
Thursday	2/22	Reading One of "Two Hands"
Thursday	3/1	Reading Two of a selected poem from poems eight – ten

the words. For the second class of the unit, I selected “Ethics” by Linda Pastan for modeling the individual and social construction and negotiation of meaning. The students completed handwritten responses to the poem and then discussed their ideas in small groups. I collected their responses in order to provide feedback and get an idea of the range of interpretation, but I did not grade them. My purpose was that students practice the meaning-making processes before they attempted their first graded assignment; therefore, I did not include this example poem and responses as part of the study.

With each successive class, students interpreted one poem and word processed a composition, Reading One, for each of the ten poems. Approximately every other week, they word processed a second composition, Reading Two, in which they reinterpreted one of the poems studied during that period by rethinking what they had written in Reading One and by including their points of difference and points of agreement with other students. As indicated in Table 1, for the first few classes I presented mini-lessons on the poetic elements to assist students in their interpretation of the poems.

Procedures

I used the methods of qualitative researchers for my investigation. These methods included participant observation; a collection of artifacts that included student compositions, written notes, and audiotaped discussions from small-group work; purposive sampling of these artifacts; questionnaires; and field notes on the meaning-building and consensus-building processes in the classroom.

Participant Observation

Spradley (1980) defines the participant observer's purpose as "to engage in activities appropriate to the situation" and "to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation" (p. 54). In both engaging and observing, the participant observer experiences "being both insider and outsider simultaneously" and "alternating between the insider and outsider experience" (p. 57). Accordingly, Spradley defines the observer's involvement along a continuum of types that range from nonparticipation to complete participation. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) define this "full participant" as "simultaneously a functioning member of the community undergoing investigation and an investigator" (p. 40). I place myself along this continuum at the highest level of involvement, complete participation or full participant, because I am both professor and researcher in my own classroom. From this dual stance, I allow my students the freedom to construct meaning on their own; however, at the same time, I consider myself as a member of the discourse community who can further my students' knowledge and skill in reading poetry. According to Berlin (1996), in the participatory classroom "[t]he teacher must display neither complete passivity nor complete dominance in discussion" (p. 103). Therefore, I set up semi-directed small-group discussions, as opposed to undirected small-group discussions (Dias, 1996), so that I could guide, inform, and instruct my students when appropriate.

As cited above in Chapter II, Soles (1995) employed Reader-Response Theory in studying his own students' construction of multiple meanings, and

Kaiden (1998) studied her students' social interaction in constructing meaning. Furthermore, Fishman and McCarthy (1995) investigated expressivist writing and communal structures in Fishman's classroom. Other teacher-researcher scenarios are Atwell's (1987) *In the Middle*, a study of her middle-school students' reading and writing processes, and Palonsky's (1986) *900 Shows a Year*, an investigation of the teaching life in high school from the viewpoint of himself as a teacher.

Materials and Artifacts

I chose poems for my study rather than fiction because their relative brevity enables my students to perform several readings at one sitting. I purposely selected poems that were likely to elicit multiple interpretations so that the negotiation of meaning among students could occur. Similar to the kind of poetry Dias (1996) chose for his study, I selected poems that were likely to be unfamiliar to students and professional interpretations of them not readily available. Furthermore, this poetry reflects postmodernist ambiguity and evokes open-ended inquiry as opposed to inviting New Critical analysis that would be relatively free of ambiguity, bias, or cultural differences. Fish (1970/1980) asserts that he is attracted to works that "do not allow a reader the security of his normal patterns of thought and belief" (p. 88). The poems in my study were taken from the introduction to literature anthology used in all Freshman 1020 classes at my institution (DiYanni, 2000). I secured written permission from each of the original publishers to reprint the selected poems for the appendix of this study [see Appendix E].

One artifact is my students' Readings One and Readings Two of the poems, that is, individual compositions and compositions constructed from the small-group and whole-class discussions, respectively. A *reading* of a poem is a composition that reflects the student's thinking processes, or interpretive strategies (Fish, 1976/1980), as he or she constructs an interpretation. Reading One (1½ word-processed pages) was written individually as a first response to a poem. The students brought this reading to class for group reading and discussion, with three to four students comprising each group.

I selected members of the small groups on the basis of their initial performance in class and in their Readings One to form groups comprising strong, medium, and weak achievers. I did not choose to review their high school transcripts or standardized test scores because I was concerned this information could cause my labeling certain students before I could judge for myself how they performed in this unit. One method of establishing groups is for each group to retain the same members from one class session to another for the duration of the unit. The students would certainly get to know each other very well and become quite familiar with each other's cognitive and writing styles. On the other hand, I wanted my students to work with a variety of people so that they could experience multiple viewpoints and writing styles; therefore, I changed the group mixes each week.

I divided the class period into three segments of approximately 25 minutes each, but the realities of classroom life often altered this time frame. Especially at the beginning of class, students being tardy or my returning papers and answering questions about the previous poem could use up ten

minutes. In the first segment, one person in a group read the poem aloud, and then each student exchanged Reading One with another student in the group. The students read each other's compositions, taking notes that especially targeted agreements and conflicts as well as any new information and insights discovered. Students exchanged Readings One a second time and followed the same procedure.

Another artifact is the audiotaped second segment where students discussed their Readings One and their notes in the semi-directed small groups to reveal their points of agreement and points of difference as well as any new insights that developed through the discussion. I decided to audiotape each of the four or five groups per class because I wanted to obtain as much data as possible. In this way, I would have a large reservoir from which to choose salient examples. If I had chosen to tape only one or two groups per class, I could possibly have missed some key examples from those not being taped. For discussion of three poems, I added variety to this class activity by having students form what I call impromptu panels (Tompkins, S. L., 1997). The audiotaped panel was situated at the front of the classroom while the rest of the class unobtrusively listened and observed the members as they discussed a poem. The panel method is an effective way to model the behavior of readers as they struggle to build meaning, have sudden insights, or provide observations on poetic elements. The panel members paused to write down their ideas; in turn, their classmates also wrote notes on what they were hearing about the poem. As researcher, I could obtain field notes more easily in this setting than during my facilitating the semi-directed small-group discussions. From the

tape recordings of group work and panel discussions, I selected and transcribed representative examples of the meaning-making processes studied.

I call this second segment Verbal And Written Protocols (VAWPs) because students verbally expressed their ideas and incrementally recorded key points in their notes as the conversation progressed. As a discourse community, they decided and recorded what interpretations of the poem best fit the evidence of the text and their own lived-through experiences. I, as professor, circulated and offered any guidance necessary to further discussion; as researcher, I attempted to take field notes on what I observed happening in the conversations, as I focused on the recursive, cumulative process in the negotiation of meaning.

The third segment involved a plenary session wherein each group reported their possible interpretations to the class. Once again, as discussion continued over the group findings, students took notes on any new views, information, or insights they heard. They also recorded any differences or agreements they especially found interesting. At this time, I continued my field notes and offered guidance and instruction as necessary. As a class, we then determined what readings were possible and viable. I collected and graded Readings One, and returned them by the next class. For conducting my research, I made photocopies of the Readings One, with their attached class notes, before returning them. I placed this material in folders labeled for each student.

Approximately every other week, students selected one poem from those studied to write Reading Two (2½ to 3 word-processed pages), which

synthesized Reading One and the class notes, both from the small-group and plenary sessions (VAWPs). For this reading, students defended, changed, or modified their views of the poem and indicated acceptance or rejection of other possible interpretations as determined by the group and classroom consensus building. They argued their points of agreement and points of difference with the other readings from their group and class discussions to arrive at a final comprehensive reading, citing student first names in their compositions. To protect the anonymity of my students, I assigned pseudonyms, which I use in my discussion of the students' work in Chapter IV.

I collected and graded Readings Two, returning them within one week. For my research, I made photocopies of Readings Two to place in the student folders along with their Readings One already present. In matching Reading One with Reading Two for the same poem, I could observe the recursive, cumulative process evident in the progression from individual construction of meaning to social construction and negotiation of meaning.

By the end of the unit, students had completed ten Readings One and three Readings Two. Each student produced approximately 15 pages of Readings One and 7½ – 9 pages of Readings Two. Covering only ten poems (eleven if counting the example poem) in a six-week unit might seem content deficient; however, a course in freshman composition is more writing based than reading intensive, the poetry being a springboard for the writing and critical thinking. Moreover, I have learned from my previous teaching experience that covering two poems in depth was not possible in one class period.

After grading Readings One and Two, I returned them to students in an expedient manner so that they could learn from my feedback for subsequent readings. As the professor, I was obligated to return the graded papers in a timely fashion, and as the researcher I had to be sure that my research in no way interfered with the learning process. I evaluated the ten Readings One more leniently than Readings Two because they were a first response and counted as 25% of the overall unit grade, while the three Readings Two counted as 75%. I did not report individual grades for each student because my focus was on studying the meaning-making processes inherent in the two theories rather than on doing assessment. Developing criteria for grading a subjective process is always difficult because of the different levels of ability and educational background. Consequently, the criteria I used for evaluation were as follows. In responding to a poem, students should demonstrate a line of reasoning, show genuine effort by providing effective support from the poems, offer some evidence of insight, successfully incorporate and negotiate other viewpoints into their arguments (Reading Two), use poetic elements accurately, and follow the standards for well-written papers. The goal was for the student to produce a Reading Two that was comprehensive in interpreting the poem and in demonstrating both individual and communal meaning-building and consensus-building processes.

Purposive Sampling

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the purpose of sampling in naturalistic inquiry as being “to maximize information, not facilitate generalization” (p. 202);

they mean that providing thick description through multiple sources facilitates transferability to another setting (pp. 124-125). Since qualitative research is dependent on context, each situation being unique unto itself, purposive sampling most often includes “as much information as possible” (p. 201).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that “maximum variation sampling” is usually the type employed “to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor” (p. 201). They provide certain characteristics for sampling. The sample must emerge from the design and not be specified in advance, it can be refined to target the most relevant information in terms of emerging patterns, and sampling is ended when information becomes redundant (pp. 201-202). The researcher bases the sampling procedure on “emerging insights about what is relevant to the study” and “purposively seeks both the typical and the divergent data that these insights suggest” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 33).

To comply with Lincoln and Guba’s criteria for sampling, I allowed my categories of the meaning-making processes to emerge from the data, being careful to make them my own even though I could not help being influenced by reading other research studies. But as Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) contend, “The categories that emerge should be considered as one analyst’s organization of the data. It is possible that no other scholar would discover the same categories” (p. 118). Although similar to those in other studies, I believe my categories are unique because I have identified, described, and organized them to reflect my particular research experience.

I developed major categories and subcategories for both Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric to identify and describe the meaning-making processes, that is, the meaning-building and consensus-building processes I observed. To demonstrate these categories, I selected salient examples from the student compositions (Readings One and Two) and the VAWPs (class notes and the audiotaped small-group discussions). These examples represent two behaviors: 1) the recursive, cumulative process in students' constructing meaning both individually and communally and 2) the social construction and negotiation of meaning as demonstrated in the group work. The samples reflect both typical and divergent data in targeting the most relevant student work to illustrate the meaning-making processes. Typical data are represented in the categories that reflect the methods students routinely use to process poetry, such as their accessing prior knowledge to interpret a poem. Divergent data are represented in the categories that reflect their misusing information by misreading either the text or another student's reading of the poem or by their interjecting material extraneous to the poem. I define misreading as divergent because I found that this behavior was not typical, that is, not frequently observed.

Although I am detailing many specifics for maximum variation, I do not include every piece of student writing, that is, all Readings One and Two for each student, as the examples would become redundant. For narrowing my focus in studying these artifacts, I have chosen to report on Readings One and Two in combination for each student, thereby including only the Readings One that pair with Readings Two. Since Reading One is a first response, the

recursive, cumulative process and the social construction and negotiation of meaning are evident only in the combination of Readings One and Two. Each student produced this combination for three out of the ten poems studied. Consequently, I used the remaining Readings One from students not choosing to write again on a particular poem to verify any information taken from them for the Readings Two of other students.

The group/class notes that accompany Reading One, which were included in the Readings One and Two packet, were helpful in confirming from whom a student obtained information included in Reading Two. These notes usually reflected only what a student copied from another student's Reading One during the nonverbal group work. Only occasionally did students continue their note taking during the actual discussion of the poem, whether during the group work or during the plenary session. I observed that my students had difficulty discussing the poems and periodically writing down their points. The audiotapes served to further verify material from other students incorporated in the Readings Two, especially when particular points were not indicated in a student's notes. For my writing about the student examples, the audiotapes helped me to clarify or elaborate on certain points from both Readings One and Two, and they provided additional insight about certain passages.

Questionnaires

I administered both pre- and post-questionnaires to my students as a method of self-report (see Appendix D) for my observing the influence of Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric for instruction. In studying how theory

translates into practice, I had set out to gain insight from the questionnaires about the students' experiences with the poetry. The preliminary questionnaire required students to describe their past experiences with reading poetry—their feelings about this genre, previous class activities and instruction, kinds of writing assignments, and their confidence level in interpretation. This report provided a background for my students' experiences with poetry that helped me understand their current reactions, level of proficiency, and confidence. Students filled out this first questionnaire anonymously outside of class by word processing their answers. I believe this anonymity enabled students to feel comfortable in responding honestly because my conception of an individual student could not be influenced.

The post-questionnaire included my students' reactions to poetry after completing the unit—their current feelings about this genre; their evaluation of the class activities, instruction, kinds of writing assignments, and the underlying theories; and their confidence level in interpretation. They also completed this questionnaire anonymously outside of class by word processing their answers. In this manner, I was assured that their responses were genuine and not attempts to influence my grading; however, I found that in some cases I could recognize the writing style of a student.

I had expected a 100% return rate for both questionnaires, whereas, according to Gay (1992), 70% is needed to validate any conclusions. The actual return rate was 72% for the pre-questionnaire and 33% for the post-questionnaire. Since I cannot provide an adequate point-by-point comparison of the two questionnaires, I include the trends I observed in the responses to

certain questions for underscoring my points of discussion in Chapter V. As a result of minimizing this component, I focus the study on the Readings One and Two and the audiotapes as the major components. I suspect the reason for the low rate of response to the post-questionnaire was that the class had started the research paper unit in addition to finishing the last Readings Two. Consequently, the students' time was more limited at the end of the unit than at the beginning when they had no other assignment but the pre-questionnaire for their second class.

Field Notes

I attempted to write notes on the meaning-building and consensus-building processes in the classroom. I had hoped to be able to listen to student discussions and capture their essence when I was not engaged in guiding those discussions. However, I found the method of scripting very difficult while being a full participant observer. I, like by students during group work, had difficulty listening and responding to discussions while periodically writing down my observations. I became so engaged in the points each student made that I would forget to record how students constructed or negotiated these points. Only later during my listening to the audiotapes from the group work was I able to make the necessary observations of the meaning-making processes. The only loss of information, then, was during the plenary sessions, not audiotaped, in which I was more of an active participant.

Data Analysis

For identifying and describing categories of the meaning-making processes (see Table 2 in Chapter IV), I used the constant comparative method delineated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). I began my analysis of the data by working with the Readings One, reading ten compositions for each of eighteen students. I organized the compositions by poem so that my familiarity with each poem would allow me to concentrate on the category building. By constantly comparing the similarities and differences of the meaning-making processes students used in their Readings One for each poem, I was able to identify and describe major categories and subcategories for Reader-Response Theory, placing each category and its description on a note card. For instance, I noticed examples of students' using the text for supporting a point (Text Evidence) or using personal experience in relating to an idea in a poem (Parallel Associations). I labeled these examples by category in the margins of the student compositions but did not include the examples themselves on the note cards.

I established major categories as distinct from subcategories by "making category properties explicit" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 342), that is, by describing category characteristics explicitly. For example, I at first labeled a major category as Prior Knowledge, the accessing of previous learning about the subject of a poem. Upon reaching the integrating stage of the constant comparative method, I realized that Prior Knowledge is just one characteristic in my major category of gap filling (Iser, 1974/1980), which I later named Parallel Associations. I define Parallel Associations as a meaning-making process by

which the student makes connections between the poem and his or her knowledge, experience, imagination, or belief. I identify these subcategories as Prior Knowledge, Personal Experience, Imaginative Projection, and Ideological Stance.

In the next step, I worked with the combinations of Readings One and Two, reading all three composition packets for each of eighteen students organized by the poems they selected. Inexplicably, no student chose one of the ten poems studied; therefore, only nine composition packets for the remaining nine poems are presented in my data. My reading of the combination Readings One and Two served two purposes in that I could observe the recursive, cumulative process for both individual and group construction of meaning. First, from a Reader-Response approach, I studied the recursive, cumulative process evident in students' individually rethinking their interpretations from Readings One to Readings Two. I identified and described major categories for this stage, placing them on note cards and noting them in the margins of the compositions per example. To illustrate, I observed that students would either maintain an original view (Maintain Original View) or modify it in some way (Change Original View), but without any indication of being influenced by group or class discussions.

From the New Rhetoric approach, I studied the recursive, cumulative process evident in the social construction and negotiation of meaning. I identified and described major categories and subcategories on the note cards and noted examples in the margins of the compositions. At this juncture, I observed ways in which students argued their points of agreement and points of

difference with other students in rethinking their own interpretations. To illustrate, students would demonstrate the major category Points of Agreement by agreeing with other views and using them to support their own ideas (subcategory Agree and Connect). Or they would demonstrate the major category Points of Difference by disagreeing with other views and pointing out what they believed to be erroneous thinking (subcategory Disagree with Reason). At other times, students would indicate comprehension of other views, but prefer their own (subcategory Disagree with Tolerance).

After establishing the categories and subcategories, I moved to the next stage of the constant comparative method—refining or delimiting the categories. I reduced the original list because of “improved articulation and integration” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 343), as I continued to cull more examples of the categories from the students’ Readings One and Two. I derived from the data eight major categories and eleven subcategories for Reader-Response Theory and three major categories with eight subcategories for the New Rhetoric. A complete list of these categories and their descriptions are presented in Chapter IV, Table 2.

Subsequent to identifying and describing the finalized categories for both theories, I began the process of locating salient examples from those marked in the margins of the compositions. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) point out that qualitative data is naturally excessive and Wolcott (1990) recommends that the researcher “can” the majority of data obtained (p. 35). Therefore, as explained in the “Purposive Sampling” section, I have narrowed my study to include only the Readings One and Two combinations for accumulating examples of the

categories. In this way, I am “doing less more thoroughly” (Wolcott, 1990, p. 69) because the recursive, cumulative process inherent in both the individual and the social construction and negotiation of meaning was evident only in this combination of Readings One and Two. I used the remaining Readings One from students not choosing to write again on a particular poem to verify any information included in Readings Two from other students.

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend for purposive sampling, examples should be refined to target the most relevant information in terms of emerging patterns but at the same time they are “to maximize information” (p. 202). In my study, I have selected the most relevant examples from the student compositions in demonstrating the categories, but I have maximized this information by including repetitive examples of the categories for each of the nine poems selected. This repetition of category examples could be interpreted as excessive, since another component of sampling Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend is termination when examples become redundant. For instance, the major category Text Evidence appears frequently in the examples, as students use passages from a poem to support their own points. Similarly, the subcategory Imaginative Projection is accessed often as students explore the different possibilities for meaning through their imaginations. And students oftentimes apply the subcategory Agree and Connect to indicate their agreement with other students’ points and how these points support their own. But I contend the repetitive examples are not redundant in that they provide a variety of illustrations for each category to demonstrate the multiple possibilities of response for interpreting each poem. Teachers and professors of English would

be especially interested in the examples about poems they have taught or would like to teach.

Unfortunately, the audiotapes were of poor quality because of the background noise created by each group's discussion. However, I was able to glean some salient examples for crosschecking passages students incorporated in their Readings Two from their group work, either for my clarifying or elaborating on certain points or for my gaining deeper insights about particular passages. When relevant, I added excerpts from the audiotapes to examples from the Readings Two to further demonstrate specific categories.

Limitations of the Study

My full participation as professor-researcher provided me the two stances of being insider and outsider. From the educator's insider stance, I was supported by fourteen years of teaching experience; from the researcher's outsider stance, I have published one previous study of my classes for which I employed Reader-Response Theory in identifying and describing the meaning-making processes of student responses to poetry (see Tompkins, S. L., 1997). From the researcher's outsider stance for the dissertation project, I had to work within the time frame of an academic unit that involved one intact class.

As the insider, I had the advantage of knowing my students well, probably being more familiar with how to serve each student's needs than an outside researcher would know. And at the same time, as the outsider, I had to be unobtrusive in collecting data so that I did not interfere with the teaching-learning process. For example, in writing the field notes for my classroom

observations, I frequently stopped observing and writing in order to attend to my students' questions. In refocusing my attention, I could have missed some points of interest to the study. I somewhat offset this limitation by occasionally using impromptu panels, where a small group of students discusses a work while the rest of the class listens and takes notes. During this panel discussion, I could take field notes without being interrupted.

In analyzing the data, I kept an open mind about my observations and findings, letting the emerging patterns from the data guide me in my category development and interpretations. I am certainly influenced by the research studies I have encountered and even by my own previous published study of Reader-Response Theory, but I have taken care not to be biased towards the categories of the other studies.

As professor, I preselected the operative theories and the poems to be studied based on what I believe is relevant to instruction and to student interests. However, some students might have responded differently to another teaching approach or to other poems. As researcher, I have preselected the class I included in the study based on the time frame of the Tuesday-Thursday schedule and the number of students in the class. In this way, we could complete the study of one poem in three 25-minute segments during one class period rather than having to split the study of this poem into two class periods for the Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule. This choice provided the advantage of continuity; however, by limiting my data to this one class, I could not include additional examples from other classes regarding the processes I was exploring.

As researcher, I was setting out to identify, describe, and demonstrate the recursive, cumulative process, inherent in reader response and the social construction and negotiation of meaning. Yet I found that I could not expect all student participants would complete their work, cooperate productively in the small groups, or produce comprehensive readings by moving through the entire process from Reading One through Reading Two. Overall, the cooperation was very good, with few students turning in late work, not completing work, or not striving to do their best work.

I set up the desks and tape recorders and graded the compositions as routinely as possible to offset the possibility that my students would feel “on stage” during the study because of the taping sessions for group work and the special attention I would be giving to their compositions. As was true of my previous experience of audiotaping class work, in this study I found that students initially showed awareness of being taped and made comments directed to this intrusion. However, as students got more involved in their work, they usually ignored the taping, especially after a few class sessions. Furthermore, as I took field notes during class, I was careful not to let this task interfere with my obligation as professor.

As part of my normal routine, I informed students about the theory base for this unit. Any extra attention to their written work was for the purpose of my research, which I conducted after I had made photocopies of the compositions, then graded and returned the originals promptly. In this way, I did not allow the project to interfere with the normal routine.

In summary, there were three ways my students differed from their normal routine in comparison to my other classes. My students read and signed consent forms to be part of the study, they completed pre- and post-questionnaires, and they were audiotaped during small-group work.

Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) for the study, I have provided the limitations delineated above. To offset subjectivity and bias, I established triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993) through using multiple sources of data, thereby providing thick description. The written artifacts included Readings One and Two and the VAWP component of written notes from group and class discussions. The audiotaped group work involved the semi-directed small-group discussions as part of the VAWPs. These notes and audiotapes served to help me crosscheck and verify information contained in Readings One and Two. The substantial selection of salient examples from the student compositions and audiotaped discussions provided rich data depicting the meaning-making processes. In addition, my field notes captured some of the processes of meaning making that I studied in class and observed in the writing. To further contribute to triangulation, the questionnaires provided some insight about the students' experiences with this particular theory-based instruction.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to generalizability as transferability. They claim “the degree of *transferability* is a direct function of the *similarity* between the two contexts, what we shall call ‘*fittingness*’ . . . the degree of congruence between sending and receiving contexts” (p. 124). Since my classes included students with various levels of ability, I projected that the data obtained would represent a wide range of proficiency in that students of different abilities are typically found in freshman classrooms. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that “the naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry,” but the researcher can provide “the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (p. 316). The thick description I obtained from the maximum-variation sampling, along with the other sources, should support a transfer to similar classroom contexts. Ultimately, the research consumer must decide the degree of “fit” a particular study has for his or her particular context. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “It is . . . *not* the naturalist’s task to provide an *index* of transferability; it is his or her responsibility to provide the *data base* that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers” (p. 316).

CHAPTER IV

THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

My purpose in conducting this study was to identify, describe, and demonstrate the meaning-making processes of college freshmen as they interpreted and discussed poetry. In this chapter, I show how the two theories of Reader Response and the New Rhetoric operate in the classroom: first, by my identifying and describing the categories of response I derived from the artifacts of student compositions and audiotaped discussions; second, by my culling salient examples from these artifacts. To illustrate the theories, I selected examples from those students who chose to write both a Reading One (a composition individually constructed as the initial response to a poem) and a Reading Two (a composition socially constructed, synthesizing the initial response with the communal responses from group and class discussions). I demonstrated how the students rethought their interpretations upon a second encounter with the poem in developing a comprehensive reading, especially with the influence of others' ideas from group work and class discussion.

These examples demonstrate the recursive, cumulative process of Reader-Response Theory and the social construction and negotiation of meaning of the New Rhetoric. Although I divided the examples into two separate sections in representing each theory, the recursive, cumulative process was evident in the social construction of meaning as well as in the individual

construction, since students were influenced by their peers' interpretations in rethinking their own views.

The Categories of Meaning-Making Processes

Reader-Response Theory: Reading One

During my study of the Readings One for all ten poems, I derived categories for the recursive, cumulative process of Reader-Response Theory (see Table 2). The three major categories in operation are Text Evidence, Parallel Associations, and Misreading. Text Evidence includes the student's attention to literary conventions; that is, the poetic elements of imagery, diction, metaphor/simile, symbol, structure, allusion, and theme. For this category, students relied on their interpretive strategies (Fish, 1976/1980), either learned from previous education or current instruction. The second major category, Parallel Associations, is essentially what Iser (1974/1980) calls gap filling, which is the reader's imagination working to construct meaning from what is not explicitly stated.

I have identified four subcategories for Parallel Associations. The first subcategory is the student's accessing Prior Knowledge about the subject of a poem, that is, any background information helpful in interpreting the poem. The second subcategory is Personal Experience, representing the student's finding a comparison from life experience that reflects ideas in the poem. Holland (1975/1980) refers to this comparison as the reader's imposing his or her own particular coping mechanisms, "adaptive and defensive strategies for coping with the world" (p. 126). Especially cogent to gap filling is my notion of

Table 2: The Categories of Meaning-Making Processes

Reader-Response Theory: Reading One

Text Evidence: attention to literary conventions

Imagery	Structure
Diction	Allusion
Metaphor/simile	Theme
Symbol	

Parallel Associations: gap filling, the imagination constructing meaning

Prior Knowledge---background information
 Personal Experience---comparisons to ideas in the poem
 Imaginative Projection---possibilities for meaning
 Ideological Stance---personal belief or opinion

Misreading: extraneous projection or misinterpretation of text evidence

Reader-Response Theory: Readings One and Two

Maintain Original View---little or no modification
 Clarify Original View---refinement or elaboration
 Add New Detail---material not included in previous reading
 Change Original View---substantial modification
 Maintain or Correct Misreading---misinterpretation carried or corrected

The New Rhetoric: Readings One and Two

Points of Agreement

Agree and Connect---material used for support or clarification
 Agree and Adopt---new material accepted as viable to include
 Degree of Adherence---partial agreement
 Accept as Viable---acceptance of alternate views
 Change or Modify---acceptance of alternate view in lieu of own

Points of Difference

Disagree with Reason---pointing out errors in thinking
 Disagree with Tolerance---comprehension but preference for own view
 Disagree with Respect---deference for maintaining social cohesion

Misreading---misinterpretation of Readings One or group/class discussion

Imaginative Projection, by which the student projects possibilities for meaning into the poem from his or her imagination. This third subcategory is similar to what Iser (1974/1980) labels “alien associations,” or other possibilities for interpretation (pp. 61-62). The fourth subcategory is Ideological Stance, by which a student asserts his or her belief or opinion concerning a point raised in the poem.

For the third major category of Misreading, I noted infrequent instances where the student would misinterpret text evidence or imaginatively project extraneous ideas, or “mnemonic irrelevances” (Richards, 1929), not centered in the poem. I consider this category divergent data, because of not being typical.

Reader-Response Theory: Readings One and Two

For studying how the students demonstrated the recursive, cumulative process from Reading One to Reading Two, I compared these two readings for each student’s three selected poems from the ten studied. I found five main categories in operation here, as the students demonstrated different ways of rethinking or reflecting on their first readings. Students Maintain an Original View with little or no modification, Clarify an Original View by refining or elaborating on it, Add New Detail not included in Reading One, Change from an Original View by modifying it substantially, and Maintain or Correct a Misreading stated in Reading One.

The New Rhetoric: Readings One and Two

In my study of the Readings Two for each student's three selected poems, I derived three major categories for the social construction and negotiation of meaning of the New Rhetoric. I identified five subcategories for the Points of Agreement and three subcategories for the Points of Difference, as students demonstrated rethinking their views from Readings One after reading and discussing other students' views in the group work and the plenary session. As was true for the reader-response section, the third major category is Misreading, as students sometimes demonstrated misreadings of each other's work.

In the first subcategory for Points of Agreement, Agree and Connect, students linked other students' views to their own for support or clarification. For the second subcategory, Agree and Adopt, students adopted new views from other students not present in their Readings One. In the third subcategory, students showed a Degree of Adherence (Perelman 1979), or partial agreement, with other students' ideas but maintained their own views. In subcategory four, Accept as Viable, students accepted other students' views but maintained or defended their own. Here students demonstrated rendering (Elbow, 1973/1991), or comprehending alternate perspectives while adhering to only one (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958/1969). Finally, students Change or Modify their own views in accepting alternate perspectives as viable.

For the first subcategory for Points of Difference, Disagree with Reason, students showed their disagreement by pointing out erroneous thinking in a dialectical approach to others' views (Berlin, 1982). In subcategory two,

Disagree with Tolerance, students disagreed with but showed tolerance for alternate views in stating that they could understand but not accept the other viewpoints, preferring their own. For the third subcategory, Disagree with Respect, students demonstrated deference for alternate interpretations that they could not accept in order to maintain social cohesion (Rorty, 1982) while adhering to their own viewpoints.

Student Responses to the Poems

Nine poems are represented here, since no student chose “Sestina” by Elizabeth Bishop for writing a Reading Two. These poems are reprinted in Appendix E for the reader’s convenience. The number of students writing a Reading Two for each poem is as follows: “A Blessing,” five; “St. Francis and the Sow,” two; “The Unknown Citizen,” eleven; “anyone lived in a pretty how town,” four; “Facing It,” eight; “This Is a Photograph of Me,” five; “Her Kind,” six; “Ego Tripping,” two; and “Two Hands,” eleven. As a result of this distribution, I usually cull more examples from the poems selected by a greater number of students.

In the section for Reader-Response Theory, I provide only the student’s name when presenting the examples, but for the New Rhetoric section, I also include the group members’ names, even though not every member chose the same poem for writing a Reading Two. In this way, I do not need to repeat what student is a group member throughout my discussion of the example, since sometimes a student draws material from classmates in the plenary session, which I specifically label as class discussion. Similarly, the material students

take from group members is usually from the Readings One, but I specifically indicate when information is used from the audiotaped discussions.

In taking salient examples of the theories for each poem, I indicate the passages I use from Readings One and Two either by stating in the sentence to which reading I refer or by abbreviating the readings as R1 or R2 after the passage. Sometimes I include both R1 and R2 to indicate that the student repeats the same or basically the same point in both readings. Whenever the example includes material from other students' views in group work or class discussion, this information comes from Readings Two only.

Material that students cited from their group members is written in the notes of each student as taken from a group member's Reading One. But only occasionally do the notes reflect additional information taken from the actual group discussion or the plenary session. As I noted in Chapter III, students had difficulty discussing the poems and writing down their thoughts at the same time. Consequently, I have included salient examples from the audiotapes that demonstrate the social construction or negotiation of meaning pertaining to points referred to in the Readings Two. The audiotapes serve to clarify information or to provide elaboration on certain points for gaining deeper insight about the selected examples.

In both the written and audiotaped examples of student work, the quoted passages sometimes contain misspellings and nonstandard usage errors. To preserve the integrity of student work, I have replicated all errors as represented in the originals. To represent variations in the audiotapes, I use ellipsis for indicating unnecessary material omitted, "[pause]" for a student's

silence, and “[inaudible]” for parts of the conversation that I could not transcribe.

“A Blessing” by James Wright

Reader-Response Theory: The Recursive, Cumulative Process

Example 1: Carol

In Reading One, Carol uses text evidence in terms of the imagery to depict the relationship between humans and nature. She briefly describes how the friends are drawn to the ponies, but in Reading Two she clarifies this description, thereby demonstrating her thinking further about this literary convention. Carol states, “Wright’s use of simple and clean imagery creates an easily visualized setting” (R1), as compared to “Wright captures the reader’s attention by using varying descriptions that are easily visualized. He makes the reader feel as if they are actually experiencing what he has written” (R2). As seen in the following statements, she experiences more engagement with the life world of the poem in her Reading Two. Instead of repeating “There is a light breeze” and “Two horses appear” (R1), she states “I could imagine feeling a light breeze” and “Then I could see the two ponies” (R2).

Example 2: Sean

Sean views the poem as being about “the yearnings of a man wanting to break out of his shell hardened by the pressures of everyday life” (R1, R2). For Reading Two, he elaborates on this point by using imaginative projection in creating “a mental picture” of the persona not present in the first reading. Sean

writes, “I have a vision of an older obese man sitting at his desk. He is crammed into his tiny cubical at work, day dreaming and longing to leave from the monotonous routines of a nine to five job” (R2). Sean later continues his description, “This poor hardworking ‘John Doe’ has a place of serenity that he longs to visit. He wants to find this place so he can be at peace” (R2). Sean, in using imaginative projection, gives the persona character traits and a life situation beyond the poem so that Sean can make sense of the persona’s present moment.

In Reading Two, Sean clarifies his Reading One point that “the ponies are symbolic of freedom” by his interjecting a personal experience and connecting it to what he imagines is the persona’s situation: “Many times in life I find my self envious of the freedom that animals posses. . . . they do not have to live in the rat race that many of us have to struggle to survive in everyday ” (R2). In a similar manner, for Reading One Sean interprets the line “There is no loneliness like theirs” as “the loneliness that the ponies have is not one full of sadness, it is a unique loneliness, they are away from the hassles of the world.” For Reading Two, he expands this point into an ideological statement about combating the pressures of life: “When we try to figure out and understand ourselves we must become lonely and attentive and try to listen to a voice that is greater than our own. We have to allow ourselves to listen to our heart and what lies in our soul instead of hearing all the voices of the world that are trying to persuade us into believing false statements that we know are not true” (R2).

The New Rhetoric: The Social Construction and Negotiation of Meaning

Example 1: Carol with Sean and Howard

In Reading One, Carol interprets the last lines “That if I stepped out of my body I would break / Into blossom” as meaning “ [T]he body is like a seed. A seed is a shell, ready to burst open and blossom.” For Reading Two, she supports her view by connecting it to Sean’s interpretation of this line in his Reading One when he states, “I believe that this poem is filled with the yearnings of a man wanting to break out of his shell, hardened by the pressures of everyday life.” Furthermore, Carol observes in both her readings, “The speaker views, in the pony, a world that is alive and full of freedom.” She extends this observation beyond Sean’s view, though, by believing this blossoming is a crossover to death: “When the body dies, it releases the spirit within. Therefore, the spirit is free to wonder and to live within nature” (R1, R2).

In Reading One while contemplating this idea of death, Carol includes a personal comment on the poem: “It leads one to wonder about life after death and whether they should dread or accept death.” In Reading Two, she elaborates, “It also makes one question whether death is the only way of escaping the world.” I believe her last statement reflects a modification to her previous view of the bursting seed as representing the body dying and the spirit released into nature. In light of the alternate view Carol read in Sean’s Reading One, she now sees that one can find freedom from everyday stresses by visiting and connecting with nature.

Example 2: Sean with Carol and Howard

Sean indicates a degree of adherence to Carol's view. He agrees "to an extent" when Carol writes about crossing over to nature from the human world at death. To support her view, he points out "The metaphors that the character uses makes many of us feel like we are in such a blissful state, this blissful state is known as heaven" (R2). However, he maintains his original view of the last lines, with modification. Sean paraphrases Carol's interpretation of these lines by stating "It is a metaphor for when the body dies, the spirit is ready to burst," but he adds his view that the lines mean "if he stepped out of his daily routine that he would become a new person. He would bloom into a new individual, someone beautiful and happy" (R2). Here Sean combines his own metaphor of breaking out of a shell and Carol's metaphor of the bursting seed in showing his partial agreement.

Example 3: Scott with Patty and Jimmy

For Reading Two, Scott pursues further a Reading One observation that the poem is about friendship. Scott writes, "He [the persona] talks about the horses glad to see *my friend* and me" (R1, italics by student). For Reading Two, he recognizes the metaphor comparing the ponies and the friends because of Patty's interpretation: "Patty believes that the poem is related to the persona's loneliness in life. That his partner and he needed each other to cure their own loneliness." Scott adopts Patty's view by refocusing his attention from the general subject of friendship to the specific parallel between the animals and humans: "They [ponies] might be lonely but they have each other" and "The two

horses could also represent two lovers.” He uses imaginative projection to explain the reason for the lovers being in the pasture: “Maybe they are lovers and wanted to spend time out with nature. Maybe they were having problems and just needed some fresh air. Sometimes people just have to get away from life from time to time.”

Scott is also influenced by Jimmy’s puzzling over a contradiction in the middle lines “They love each other. / There is no loneliness like theirs.” Scott reconciles the contradiction by imaginatively projecting that the ponies recognize the friends are like them in wanting to be alone. He explains in Reading Two, “They do not herd with the other horses because they just want to be alone. When they see the two people, who are just like them, they are happy to see someone else who is in love just as much as they are.”

Scott maintains this new focus on isolation in Reading Two by further elaborating the loneliness theme: “[T]heir loneliness is voluntarily. . . . They do not want to be bothered by the other horses. The same thing can be said about the couple. They wanted to get away from the everyday hustle of life.” He provides a personal experience to describe this getting away: “If one has ever just set and watched mother nature at work it is so beautiful. Some times if you just take a nature walk it can relieve the stress that is bothering you.” Scott is demonstrating Holland’s (1975/1980) idea that “interpretation is a function of identity” (p. 123) in that Scott is imposing his own coping mechanism into this scene.

Example 4: Wendy with Adrian, Stanley, and Julie

Wendy points to text evidence from the line “We step over the barbed wire into the pasture” to illustrate her view of “a division that man has with nature. . . .How barriers have been placed between man and nature” (R2). For supporting her view, she uses Julie’s notion that the pasture could be an escape from what Wendy calls “restrictions that bound man from true freedom.” Wendy elaborates on this point: “This freedom in a sense is unattainable for man, but only a taste of what the ponies possess” (R2).

Wendy disagrees with Adrian’s interpretation of the line “There is no loneliness like theirs.” When Adrian states “Though lonely, the ponies, like the visitors are happy with what life has given,” he sees the ponies and visitors as being blessed because of their brief encounter. But Wendy expresses her disagreement with his view: “I feel the men are in a situation that cannot be understood. A place where True Freedom is unattainable, I feel that we have closed ourselves in a self made prison of the mind.” Despite her thinking this freedom of nature is unattainable for humans, Wendy accepts as viable Adrian’s statement “This poem is symbolic of the world, and how we take the things we do have for granted.” She responds to this new point, “I think that people in general do not appreciate the thing’s they have.”

Pursuing her theme that the visitors can achieve only “a taste” of the ponies’ freedom, Wendy shows a degree of adherence to Stanley’s interpretation. She quotes his passage, “[The persona] wishes he did not have to deal with problems of human life, and that he could have the carefree attitude that the ponies display.” She responds, “I feel that this is partially true; we all want

things to be easy . . . and the road we travel may not be so bumpy with the barriers life throws at us.” She adds an ideological comment from her personal experience: “I have learned that true freedom has to [be] found inside us before we can truly attain it in the world around us.”

During their audiotaped group discussion, some members demonstrate dialectical argument by pointing out erroneous thinking regarding the imagery. Julie contends, “I think they’re wild ponies [inaudible], so they really don’t have owners. So they’re just out there alone all day [inaudible]. He’s [the persona] probably the only one to come to visit them.” Wendy responds, “That’s very good. I never thought about it like that.” Julie continues, “They’re wild. They don’t have nobody loving them [inaudible].” However, Stanley refutes her point by referring to text evidence that discloses the ponies are owned: “Well, they’re in . . . there’s barbed wire, though, in the pasture.”

Adrian then builds on Stanley’s point: “Yeah, it could all just be symbolism, you know. The barbed wire could be symbolizing the just, you know, the barriers that animals have with man or it could be a literal [pause].” Stanley then supports Adrian’s latter point: “It could be a Freud—a cigar is just a cigar.” The members laugh. Stanley continues, “That’s what he used to say: ‘Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar’; no other meaning to it. There’s nothin’ other than the fact it is just a literal object. He’s here in the location . . . this is out in the Midwest. He says the word *pasture* so that does mean an isolated area used for grazing.” Adrian supports Stanley’s point: “Yeah, I mean, when I read it I took it as literally being a fence, but, you know [pause].” Perhaps Adrian wishes to pursue the symbolism idea, but does not. Julie does not defend her

contention that the ponies are wild. Since she does not choose to write a Reading Two for this poem, a correction of her view cannot be determined but perhaps inferred.

Example 5: Seth with Alex and Mark

In Reading Two, Seth maintains his original view of the poem as representing the seasons. He disagrees with Mark's viewpoint and provides a reason: "Mark had a literal interpretation that the persona of the poem was appealing to horse lovers and showing peace and tranquility. I did not really agree with this interpretation. I believe that the persona was looking more for the hidden meaning in this poem rather than the obvious one on the top layer" (R2). Seth envisions the seasons as "the chain from the twilights of fall to through the dark harsh winter, then slowly becoming spring and blossoming into summer" (R1, R2). He draws support for the winter image by referring to his classmate Wendy's view of the barbed wire, or what he calls "a metaphorical fence," as representing the barrier between man and nature. For Seth, in both readings, the barbed wire represents "piercing sheets of freezing rain falling down that has to be walked through to get to spring" (R1) and "the harsh elements of winter that must be struggled through" (R2). Both students' interpretations of this image convey a sense of passage.

For supporting his theme of change, Seth uses Alex's metaphorical interpretation of the lines "That if I stepped out of my body I would break / Into blossom." Paraphrasing Alex's idea of "seeing things from a different perspective," Seth states, "This seems to match up with the interpretation that I

had in that the stepping out of the body is being reborn, thus seeing things in a different light" (R2). Inexplicably, Seth does not include his Reading One view of this passage where he states, "It feels as if he is speaking of the sun stepping out of the body of clouds and becoming bright and warm causing all the flowers and other things to come into bloom" (R1). But he does add in Reading Two, "I still see the sun coming out and holding the 'slenderer' one in its arms and warming it up." As verified in the audiotape, no one of his group members challenged Seth's interpretation of the diction where he sees the "we" as representing "the warm sun and clear skies as winter turns to spring" (R1). The usual interpretation is that the "we" refers to the two friends visiting the ponies.

During the audiotaped discussion, the group members do come to a consensus that the last two lines reflect some kind of change; therefore, they accept Seth's view as viable. Alex states, "He [the persona] is able to realize what a blessing it is to be able to see all these things in a [pause] from a new perspective. You know, he's able to [pause] that in itself is the blessing, not the fact of his interaction with the animals, is one thing, but the fact that he's actually noticing and caring is even more special to him." Mark responds, "In a way it kinda shows the cycle of life [inaudible]." Seth agrees: "Yeah, that's what I was thinkin', like the, you know, the cycle of life is the cycle of months, you know, through the years showing the seasons change like life does, you know, from the spring to winter, you know, then continues on with the spring again, and then when it goes into darkness [inaudible]. When he steps out of his body, going from winter to spring, he's going from death to life."

“Saint Francis and the Sow” by Galway Kinnell

Reader-Response Theory: The Recursive, Cumulative Process

Example 1: Adrian

Adrian observes a structural literary convention for Reading Two not present in Reading One other than his stating “Line 12 is where the story really begins,” indicating at that time the presence of only one story. But he notes for Reading Two that “the persona tells two stories,” that is, structurally the poem has two sections. He states, “The whole first half of the poem describes the bud and explains in detail it’s significance.” He adds, “The second story in the poem is an allusion to the story of Saint Francis and a sow. This story gives the reader a good idea of the significance of the first part of the poem.”

Example 2: Marilyn

From Readings One to Two, Marilyn corrects a misreading about character. In Reading One, she believes the persona has a friendship with the sow, whereas the persona is actually alluding to St. Francis’s feelings for the sow. She states, “He and the sow have a really good relationship, almost like they are best friends.” But in Reading Two, she refers to St. Francis as “the man”: “The persona somehow seems to give off the impression that the man and the pig were very close and that the man cared very much for this sow.” However, in Reading Two, Marilyn adds another misreading based on the text evidence in the last four lines that the sow is nursing: “I believe that if the man hadn’t been there to help the sow through her childbirth, then the sow couldn’t have done it.” Mistakenly she claims, “Throughout the poem, however, it

speaks of the sow and her newborn babies” (R2). Pursuing this direction, she interjects an ideological statement, “It speaks of the miracle of childbirth and the love behind it. Children are the most precious gift that a mother could ever receive” (R2).

Marilyn takes her imaginative projection much further, veering from the central idea of the poem: “These newborns were full of love. Not only for their mother, but I believe for the man, as well. They probably didn’t know much about the man at first, but as they grew older, I’m sure this man made them feel loved, much like the man did for their mother” (R2). The audiotape verifies that Marilyn does not mention this Reading Two interpretation during the group discussion. Apparently, she is not influenced by her group members’ interpretations, either from their readings or discussion, in her developing new details that cannot be supported by the text evidence.

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Example: Adrian with Julie and Stanley

Adrian revises his view of the bud from Reading One, where he states, “I believe that the bud symbolizes every form of life, and that every life has the potential to blossom.” But in Reading Two he changes his view to “a bud stands for all living things, even those that do not flower,” relying on text evidence from the first three lines. However, he rethinks this new definition in light of Wendy’s comment in class discussion that even though the sow is usually considered “a very dirty animal,” the poet’s “use of the sow is a clean start, a rebirth, a bud that will evidently in some way flower.” Consequently,

Adrian modifies his new view in Reading Two: “While I believe that the bud stands for literal living things, I now agree that it also stands for the potential of a new start, or rebirth of these living things.” In modifying this later view, he is actually reflecting his original view in Reading One—“every life has the potential to blossom.”

Adrian adds a new detail to his explanation of the bud by agreeing with Julie’s description as representing, in Adrian’s terms, a “spiritual life cycle,” or as Julie states, “the meaning of spiritual life from birth to death.” He connects this point to his own view by stating “The significance of the bud is seen many different ways and still valid because the bud stands for all things.” I interpret his meaning as, allowing for multiple interpretations, the bud can also represent a spiritual potential. He goes on to disagree with Wendy’s interpretation of the bud in class discussion as representing “the fact that people and things are both different and similar” because he sees no evidence in the poem to support her opinion. Adrian provides no further explanation, for he does not recognize that Wendy is referring to the bud as a metaphor for people, both being different species but similar in the idea of blossoming. This example demonstrates a student’s misinterpreting a classmate’s point.

In Reading Two, Adrian refers to group consensus, as verified by the audiotape: “We concur that the persona is trying to get across the point that everybody and everything is inherently good. However . . . sometimes you have to reteach a thing how to love.” He draws from Stanley’s points that the poet gives “human emotions to the pig” and that “even animals respond to kindness” in developing what Adrian calls his “new perspective” on theme. He states, “[I]f

kindness means this much to an animal, consider how much more it would mean to a person. Perhaps all things have hope. No matter how ugly or horrible life has been, there is always the hope of rebirth.” Here Adrian is reflecting Wendy’s idea of rebirth and the potential for “a clean start.”

“The Unknown Citizen” by W. H. Auden

Reader-Response Theory: The Recursive, Cumulative Process

Example 1: Alex

In Reading One, Alex states, “I think the overall tone of the piece is purely sarcastic.” He clarifies this idea in Reading Two and corrects his initial observation that the tone is “overall” by observing that interpretation “hinges on the way the poet structures the poem,” that is, into two sections. He elaborates on this structural convention by observing “Without the second strophe, the meaning of the poem is just as it seems, the story of a man who lived a good life and was well thought of by others. However, the derisive, sarcastic tone of the last two lines creates a need to ask these questions, not only of the subject but also of ourselves.”

Example 2: Paul

Paul expresses in Reading One that a strength of the poem is in helping him use his imagination. He clarifies this idea in Reading Two and interjects an ideological statement: [T]he fantasy of the seemingly perfect man makes me use my imagination to put myself in his position which I found to be an interesting experience. I couldn’t see myself as being the ‘unknown citizen’ though, because

I, like most other people in my generation, want to be known for something when they die.”

Example 3: Stanley

Stanley observes in Reading One, “Oddly, the man who is given so much praise is not once referred to by name at any point in the poem, outside of a number on the monument” (R1). For Reading Two, he clarifies this point: “Whether or not the ‘JS/07/M/378’ of the inscription title is his actual name or his initials followed by a set of numbers with some other meaning is never revealed.” Later he elaborates on this new point by stating “[H]e may simply not have a name at all, other than that singular catalog number at the top of the monument. This would mean that his is a society where individuality is of little or no importance, as he really is nothing more than a number and never was” and “He was nothing more than a faceless, voiceless automation” (R2).

Stanley also clarifies his Reading One idea that the government represented in the poem can parallel that of the United States. For Reading Two, he adds an ideological statement: “[O]ur government does keep close eyes of its citizens, though not quite to the degree of this government, and true individuality is no longer rewarded by American society. Dozens of companies use variations of ‘be an individual’ for advertising purposes, but you are to be an individual on their terms.” Stanley includes this ideological information to underscore his Reading One idea that the citizen is being used as a symbol: “At the time this was written, the US needed to hold up shining examples of its

society for all to see to prove it was superior to the Fascist and Communist governments of the time” (R1, R2).

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Example 1: Alex with Chris and Paul

Alex relies on Chris’s view of the citizen to support his notion that the poem “tells the story of a ‘normal’ man leading a ‘normal’ life.” He continues, “but in my opinion the poet questions our perception of what being ‘normal’ is” (R1, R2). Alex quotes from Chris’s Reading One: “I feel that the persona is trying to tell us that this man had basically everything that he needed, physically, in his life. Somewhere along the course of this man’s life he started to wear down mentally and emotionally.” Alex then connects Chris’s idea to his own questioning about the poem: “I think Chris raises two hard questions: Can a man be ‘successful’ with only his physical needs met, and; Why would someone so ‘successful’ begin to break down emotionally and mentally?” In Reading Two, Alex repeats a question he pondered in Reading One: “How can we be free or happy when our success and sense of being is relative to how others view our accomplishments and us?” He adds an answer for Reading Two: “In my eyes this cannot even be considered living. To be constrained from doing something you know to be right by the fear of what the majority of other people will say or do cannot in any way be construed to be freedom.”

I believe his latter questions were influenced by our class discussion of what it means to be a leader or follower. Alex picks up this idea of going against the majority by including our example of Martin Luther King, Jr. He

states in Reading Two, “At a time when it was socially acceptable to hold prejudices and bigoted beliefs, Dr. King and a few others like him (black and white) broke from the status quo, forever changing the attitudes that held this country divided by racial barriers.”

Example 2: Chris with Alex and Paul

Initially, for Reading One, Chris uses text evidence and prior knowledge to support his theory that the citizen is a potential suicide. He states, “The persona leads me to believe that this person may have committed suicide. One reason is, there is a higher rate for suicide with former veterans of war. The men that have come home from the wars, especially the Vietnam, had a high rate of suicide in large part because instead of coming back heroes they came back with no respect for fighting the war.” Chris is confusing the Vietnam War with other wars, and he misreads the text in stating that “the pressure of succeeding in finding a good job was very hard on him.” Obviously, Chris has not noticed the text evidence of the citizen’s having a steady job: “He worked in a factory and never got fired / But satisfied his employers.”

For Reading Two, however, Chris changes his view through the influence of Paul’s reading, from which Chris quotes: “The man in the poem is not only a model father and employee, but also a model of what the poet believes is a responsible grown man.” Chris corrects his misreading and elaborates on this new view: “When I first read the poem I did not see his point of view. I felt that this man found by the Bureau of Statistics, was not a model citizen but a man who had committed suicide due to the pressures of veterans coming back home

from war. After discussing this with Paul I realized that he may be right. For instance, this man had a factory job, a satisfied employer, good family, and everything else necessary for the modern man.”

Chris mentions group consensus on their view of the poet: “As we [Chris and Alex] were talking to Paul we both were convinced that the poet looked up to his fictional character.” From the audiotaped group discussion, Chris and Alex do indicate agreement on this point. But Chris does not include Alex’s point about the sarcastic tone that Alex notices as the poet’s purpose, reflected in his Reading One and in the audiotaped discussion. Chris paraphrases Alex as saying only that “[h]e did not step out on a limb to protest anything he did not believe in. He just went on living his life very simple.” The reason for this omission is puzzling, since Chris wrote in his notes next to Alex’s name: “Feels the overall piece is purely sarcastic.” Perhaps Chris did not consult his notes when writing Reading Two, or he did not accept Alex’s view as viable.

Example 3: Paul with Alex and Chris

Paul rethinks his initial view of the citizen while still writing Reading One. He at first sees the poem as “a successful attempt on a depiction of a normal mans life.” But then he determines that this citizen is actually a model father, employee, and “a responsible grown man.” He continues, “My opinion is that the poet admires the unknown citizen, or maybe fantasizes about being that man.” Paul adds to the poet’s purpose in his Reading Two by stating that the poet means “to show admiration and a wanting sense to be as perfect as he.” Paul interprets the questions in the last two lines of the poem as

supporting this idea: “It seems as if by these two lines alone the persona is daring the reader to find something strange or unusual with the unknown citizen’s life.” Yet, as revealed in the audiotaped discussion, Paul puts a different spin on Alex’s sarcastic view of these lines by revealing another possible facet of sarcasm that actually reflects his own view of the citizen’s being a model.

Paul states in the audiotaped discussion, “I kinda think the last two lines are sarcastic too ‘cause seem like the author, I mean the poet, tryin’ ta dare you to find somethin’ that, um, ya know what I’m sayin’, that sticks out, [Alex and Chris indicate agreement] that’s unknown [inaudible]. It seems like he tryin’ ta see if you can find somethin’ wrong with him [Chris indicates agreement]. That would kinda make it sarcastic too.” Paul, therefore, maintains his own view of the citizen as a model and sees the dare as a form of sarcasm which accentuates this fact, as if the person attempting to find something wrong is doing so because of not believing anyone could be this perfect.

Therefore, Paul maintains his positive view of the poet’s purpose despite being exposed to Alex’s point about the sarcastic tone of the poem that reflects a negative view of the citizen. But Paul, in Reading Two and in the audiotape, exchanges agency (Ewald & Wallace, 1994) for deference (Wyschogrod in Clark, 1994) in expressing tolerance for Alex’s view in order to maintain social cohesion. Paul states in Reading Two, “He thought unlike I did that the persona was poking fun at the model of the unknown citizen” and “Overall he believes the poem is a sarcastic attempt to describe a normal man’s life. I could see his perspective on things just as he could see mine and although we argued

a little we came out on good terms on both opinions.” Actually, from the audiotape, rather than “arguing” Paul merely responds to Alex’s negative view as “I liked the way you [pause] what you had to say, too.”

In reference to Chris’s believing the citizen committed suicide, Paul, in his Reading Two, shows respect, or deference, for this perspective while disagreeing: “Chris’s view is very different and entertaining, but I don’t believe at all that the unknown citizen is dead.” Paul is not convinced of this view even though Chris offers in the audiotaped discussion the text evidence that the citizen had taken out insurance policies, which action he believes one would do before a suicide: “He left money for his family.” Paul shows deference and tolerance in the audiotaped discussion also: “I didn’t think about it as you did, about the suicide. It was tight, though. I can see how you thought about it.”

Example 4: Mark with Julie, Scott, and Patty

Mark believes in both readings that this poem is about “the everyday citizens that pull their weight in this country but go unrecognized” (R1, R2). He includes an ideological statement in Reading Two: “The traits of the man described are what American society today needs to get back to.” But also in Reading Two, he mentions Patty’s view that the man is already dead; therefore, Mark changes his perspective from the man’s being the model citizen in the present to his being seen from “the past point of view from his life.” Mark now believes the poem is “the benediction of his life.” He elaborates on this line of reasoning to add another ideological statement: “Through this view by Patty it helped me to view the poem as a sermon. The sermon would be about the

lifestyle of a Christian.” He continues by stating that “it [the poem] was not only an outline of ‘the model citizen’ but possibly ‘the model Christian.’ ” He adds that the title of the poem could be “the title of the sermon at the man’s funeral.”

Mark adds more religious detail to this idea during group discussion, but he does not include this information in his Reading Two, most likely because of not writing it in his notes and forgetting about it later. He states from the audiotape, “Maybe he’s talkin’ about, like, I don’t know, the Bible verse about, you know, that we’re to have a good name. A good name is better than riches and maybe it’s kinda like a sermon about how we should have a good reputation among people and, you know, pay our bills, you know, be content with what we have.”

Example 5: Patty with Julie, Mark, and Scott

Patty interposes an ideological statement that her group members discuss as a viable possibility. In reference to the last two lines of the poem, Patty questions in both her readings whether the citizen has God in his life: “If so he would be free and happy, but if not then the answer would be no” (R1, R2). Their group discussion of text evidence centers on this religious interpretation. Patty includes from her notes Mark’s statement “the Installment plan could mean he knew he was going to heaven” and Scott’s statement “the greater community could be heaven.” Patty does not include in her Reading Two other details from their discussion of the installment plan as indicating that the citizen gave to the church, but the audiotape clarifies this point. Mark

states, “Maybe he invested in where he would spend eternity.” And Julie observes, “I look at it as kinda like an insurance plan [inaudible].” Patty responds, “To insure that he gets to Heaven.”

Patty adopts Mark’s ideological view that the citizen is ordinary and unrecognized because he is not a sports hero or a politician and connects this view to her own. She writes, “Mark also pointed out that the unknown citizen knew that the riches on earth would have nothing to do with the riches in heaven and that he was building his treasure box in heaven and not on the earth.” She also adopts Mark’s view of the man as being a model citizen in her statement “More people need to be like the unknown citizen and this world would be such a better place to live in.”

Example 6: Julie with Mark, Scott, and Patty

In her Reading Two, Julie adopts Patty’s ideological question about the presence of God in the citizen’s life. She paraphrases Patty’s idea in referring to the last two lines of the poem: “[E]ven though everything the man had accomplished in his life made the persona seem happy, if there was no God in his life, he truly may have not been happy emotionally.” Julie also adopts Mark’s religious view, expressed in group discussion, of storing treasures in heaven. She responds, “I believe the poem was not meant to sound like a perfect and non-realistic life, but the way a person lives his/her own life without letting the fame and worldly values get in the way.”

From class discussion, Julie vehemently disagrees with Jimmy’s view that the poem is made up and fake: “He did not see why someone would go and

research this whole man's life and not even put his name on the poem. To have heard such an arrogant comment from this student views of this poem had made me quite upset." From the plenary session, Mark expresses tolerance for Jimmy's view that "the man was a fake," but does "not necessarily agree" with him: "I could see where he was coming from because one would think that if everyone knew this information about this man then they would know his name."

Example 7: Jimmy with Carol, Adrian, and Wendy

Jimmy expresses tolerance when he states he can "see" Carol's point, which he paraphrases, that the citizen was "set up to be a role model to try and make other conform." He also accepts as viable her point that the citizen is "a passive, unthinking, and voiceless person." But Jimmy maintains his original view: "However, though I think that her idea is a sound one it did not change how I saw the poem." Jimmy likewise accepts as viable and paraphrases Adrian's idea that "the Greater Community judged him based on his accomplishments rather than his happiness." But Jimmy interprets the poem from a literal perspective in opposition to the students in his group and to the class as a whole. He does not recognize the others' view of seeing the citizen as a representative of his culture. Jimmy contends, "It is way too obvious that the story is all made up. I believe this because if it were true his family would have put up a monument to him, not the state" (R1, R2). He uses imaginative projection to explain that the persona is merely wishing this citizen could have been someone close to him: "So maybe the persona never knew who his father

or someone was and wanted them to be this person [the unknown citizen].” He comments on his stance: “[M]y view of the poem did not change because I never saw myself as being right or wrong just different from others.”

Example 8: Howard with Marilyn and Stanley

Howard changes his interpretation of this poem because of the influence of a group member and the class discussion. In Reading One, he describes the citizen as someone to be admired because the persona is “always positive throughout the poem.” Howard relates this citizen to his own personal experience in observing how a person can influence other people: “There is someone who has made a difference in their lives, and the unknown citizen has definitely done this.” However, in Reading Two, Howard adopts Stanley’s view of the citizen as being subject to the control of the state. Howard paraphrases Stanley’s idea: “He says that since the unknown citizen done everything for the greater community; the society had to be one that frowned upon personal success.” Howard elaborates on this new view: “This man appears to be just doing what is told of him and not what he want to do, so the reader begins to ask himself/herself is the unknown citizen really happy?” He adds, “I didn’t even think about this the first few times I read this poem.”

Howard rethinks text evidence to verify Stanley’s opinion by referring to the last two lines of the poem and these lines: “Our researchers into Public Opinion are content / That he held the proper opinions for the time of year.” Howard comments in Reading Two, “This really changed my mind about the whole poem.” He adds an ideological statement: “You could even tell he was a

bit cowardly, the author points out in one line that he never interfered with the education of his children. How could a parent not interfere with their children's education, that is very important to people's lives." Finally, Howard determines that the citizen is not happy: "I bet he just was glad to see a day come to an end, so he didn't have to go by what everybody else was telling him." From our class discussion about leaders and followers, he refutes his original view that the citizen is a model: "If everybody were like him, we would all be the same and stay the same for the rest of our lives; because no one would want to get better at anything, they would just want to keep up with everybody else."

"anyone lived in a pretty how town" by e. e. cummings

Reader-Response Theory: The Recursive, Cumulative Process

Example: Alex

Alex comments on the literary conventions of diction and structure. In Reading One, he states, "It [the diction] adds a maddening sense of perplexity and randomness that makes the poem a great read." For Reading Two, he clarifies: "In my eyes, the genius behind this poem is the poet's use of contractions, intentional grammatical errors, and plural and singular terms woven into sentences that are puzzling but at the same time self-explanatory." As an example, Alex offers text evidence: "While the grammar the poet uses is difficult to comprehend, seemingly enigmatic terms like 'anyone' and 'noone' are easily explained if interpreted literally. In my opinion, 'anyone' and 'noone' are not singular specific personas, they are a generalization used by the poet to illustrate a view of society" (R2). Alex claims the diction underscores the poem's

theme: “[B]y making the words themselves lose their meaning through the diction used we see how life itself can lose purpose without compassion for others” (R2).

In Reading One, Alex affirms that “The prevailing sentiment is apathy” by pointing to text evidence in these lines: “one day anyone died i guess / (and noone stooped to kiss his face).” And Alex particularly emphasizes the line “little by little and was by was” for the poet’s use of past tense to give the stanza “a post-mortem feel.” In Reading Two, Alex clarifies this theme of apathy by focusing on the persona’s entry into the poem through the line “one day anyone died i guess.” Alex states, “The poet includes himself in the group or society alluded to, and along with ‘anyone’ and ‘noone’ describes himself as being apathetic and complacent. . . .The term ‘ i guess’ evokes a lack of compassion and care that is prevalent throughout the piece.” Later in Reading Two, he continues this point: “To me this passage seemed sterile, devoid of any remorse or regret as someone passed away.” Furthermore, Alex adds an ideological statement in Reading Two to his Reading One contention that “the poet paints a picture of life without concern for others” (R1). He identifies the poet’s point: “When we lose respect for life, for even death, we become dead to ourselves and to the world around us” (R2).

The New Rhetoric: The Social Construction and Negotiation of Meaning

Example 1: Carol with Adrian, Jimmy, and Wendy

Carol indicates prior knowledge in her introduction to both readings, “I find this poem interesting because of the fact that it focuses on an issue that is

very real in the world today.” Her interpretation of theme centers on the loss of individuality, apparently a god-term (Burke, 1967) for her. Therefore, she disagrees with a group member by stating, “I think this poem is a little more complex than what Jimmy thinks when he states, ‘I see this poem as being about being alive, growing up, growing old, and dieing.’” Carol sees the characters anyone and noone as a couple who are different from the other citizens. She uses imaginative projection in saying “They do not conform to the rules of society; therefore, they do not belong. However, I believe they are the only true, loving people of the town, besides the children” (R1).

In supporting her view that the townspeople do not care about the individual, she quotes Jimmy’s statement “I see it as saying that if you do not care for *anybody* then *no one* will care for you” [italics mine]. Carol labels these townspeople as “lost souls” who do not care for each other as compared to the two main characters’ love for each other (R1, R2). She adds in Reading Two, “However, anyone and noone do truly care for each other.” Carol bases this view on the text evidence, as from the line “she [noone] laughed his joy she cried his grief,” a quotation among others that she adds in Reading Two. For additional support of her view, Carol uses Wendy’s statement “I feel that she was someone who he confided in. She shared his pain as well as his joy.”

The lines “they / said their nevers they slept their dream” evoke an additional insight for Carol in Reading Two. From Reading One she states, “Although lacking in emotion, some of the townspeople had dreams for their future. They just never acted on them.” In Reading Two, she clarifies by saying “However, anyone and noone fulfilled their dreams.” To support this

perception, she quotes Jimmy's statement: "By them loving themselves and God, they got to live together forever in their own summer." Carol thus modifies her original view that the two characters "die and are buried without much thought" (R1) and includes in Reading Two that "They lived in eternal happiness with each other" (R2).

In the audiotaped group discussion, Carol adds more detail to her meaning for these lines and encounters opposition from Jimmy but support from Adrian for her view. Carol states, "Everyone in the town that had 'said their nevers,' they slept their dreams, which means they never realized their dreams; they had their dreams, but they never fulfilled it. With the couple, however, it said 'they dreamed their sleep,' which means they hadn't dreamed it; they did fulfill it." Jimmy responds, "That's about when they're already dead, though. 'They dreamed their sleep' is about their death." Adrian counters, "Well, yeah, that means they fulfilled their dreams in their life." Jimmy responds, "I interpreted it different. I saw they died. The dream is fulfilled with their afterlife, is the way I saw it." Adrian: "You mean that they had a dream of an afterlife?" Jimmy: "No, they actually went to their afterlife [inaudible]." Adrian responds with deference, "Well, that's a relevant point. But I think that by their sleeping their dreams, you know, they were in, even though they were dead, their souls [inaudible] because they had their dreams fulfilled during their life as a happy married couple . . . unlike the rest of the people . . . they lived their dream."

Example 2: Jimmy with Carol, Adrian, and Wendy

Jimmy contends that his “opinion of the poem did not change” (R2). However, he does accept Carol’s notion of individuality as being viable. He states, “I can only find one thing to support that theory and that is the names of the characters in the poem. I believe that they were called anyone and noone because it made them seem as if they could be anybody.” He paraphrases Carol’s idea from her Reading One that “the townspeople had loveless marriages and laughed at others pain.” He points out the text evidence that supports her contention: “She got this from the lines ‘someones married their everyones / laughed their cryings and did their dance.’” Jimmy expresses a degree of adherence with her view: “I agree with her about the loveless marriages. However I do not agree with her on the laughing at the pain of others.” He sees the line as “talking about the townspeople themselves” and that “they went on with their normal lives laughed cried and even danced. . . . I think that they would have accepted the pain of others.”

Example 3: Patty with Mark, Julie, and Scott

Patty originally interprets the poem in a general way. She refers to the text evidence concerning the seasons in both readings: “To me this means the poem is telling a story of seasons and how things change like the circle of life. The persona is telling how we grow up and do not remember our childhood, then get married, grow old and die together” (R1, R2). However, a group member influences Patty to modify her view. Julie helps her see that the poem has characters; with this new information, Patty develops an ideological

interpretation for her Reading Two. She states, “When noticing the man was named ‘anyone’ and the woman was named ‘noone’ made me really think of how it was in 1940 when this poem was written. A woman was a nobody, she had no rights to do anything.” From the audiotaped discussion, Patty elaborates, “‘Noone’ was a good name for the woman because no one recognized the things that she did do.” Julie, in the discussion, picks up on Patty’s mentioning the publishing date as being 1940 and makes an observation about the relevance of Patty’s point: “You said that it is in the 1940s, so their era back then is like men worked, women did the housework.” Patty responds, “Right, and women weren’t recognized for anything they did.” Julie continues, “I mean, a person reading this in the 1940s or 50s could have got something totally different from what we got today. . .” Patty: “Yeah.” Julie continues, “. . .because their life was different and the way they thought was different.”

“Facing It” by Yusef Komunyakaa

Reader Response Theory: The Recursive, Cumulative Process

Example 1: Adrian

In Reading One, Adrian describes the tone as “dismal” in reference to the first four lines of the poem. But in Reading Two, he describes the tone as “dark and bleak” and elaborates: “The repetition of the word ‘black’ adds impact to the tone of darkness.” Additionally, he notices the significance of the poem’s title: “The persona has experienced grievous events and ‘facing’ the wall draws the intense emotion to the surface.”

Example 2: Sean

Sean accesses prior knowledge and personal experience to provide additional insight for Reading Two, not included in Reading One. He remarks, “The Vietnam War was by far one of the brutal and savage wars ever fought. It is hard for many veterans to express their emotions on war. My uncle that is a Veteran of the Vietnam War will not talk about his experiences in the war. The war holds many painful memories for him. These excruciating memories are hard for people in my generation to comprehend. My fellow peers and I have been fortunate enough not to have ever had to deal with the horrible aspects that come along with war.”

Example 3: Wendy

In Wendy’s Reading One, she includes a personal experience describing her grandfather’s part in the Vietnam War and how he was wounded in the right leg, causing him to limp. For Reading Two, she elaborates, “The limp was a constant reminder of how close to death he came.” She then relates her own experience to that of the persona in the poem: “The place he held in my heart is still there, the same as the veteran in the poem for the ones he saw on the wall.” Like Sean, she compares herself to others in terms of not comprehending the nature of the sacrifice: “I did not realize what my grandfather did for me the same as now for the ones, the people who don’t appreciate the sacrifices of these veterans.”

Example 4: Howard

In Reading One, Howard refers to the text evidence concerning Andrew Johnson, “I touch the name Andrew Johnson; / I see the booby trap’s white flash.” Howard uses imaginative projection for interpreting these lines: “He saw exactly what happened to this person. To me the poet also says that the main character was almost a name on the wall. Maybe he was beside Andrew Johnson at the time that the booby trap went off” (R1). Howard further projects his description of this scene and adds a personal comment in Reading Two: “The sight of seeing one of your friends blown off the earth’s surface, yet there would be no way to help him relieve his pain. The sound and cries of young men would keep me up for at least the rest of my days. I could not bare to go to war and experience the things that these men and women saw in the Vietnam War” (R2).

Example 5: Paul

In Reading One, Paul uses imaginative projection for envisioning himself inside the Memorial, while in Reading Two, he clarifies the scene more thoroughly. He states in Reading One, “I could actually see myself as the character looking out toward the world and the people passing by in it.” For Reading Two he elaborates, “Feeling the mood throughout the poem, I could easily see how emotionally moved the veteran could have been standing there looking at the wall. It wouldn’t surprise me if I did actually go to the wall in Washington D.C. and look at the wall myself and see a man there reflecting on

the war. . . .I think I would actually be moved by just a bunch of names carved into a black rock.”

Example 6: Judy

For Reading Two, Judy clarifies an image she merely mentions in Reading One. The text reads, “Names shimmer on a woman’s blouse / but when she walks away / the names stay on the wall.” In Reading One, she interprets these lines: “He can see the names reflecting off a women’s shirt, but as she moves the names do not.” In Reading Two, Judy clarifies this passage: “Maybe his is hoping she will take some of the names with her. The number of veterans and their deaths overwhelms him.”

The New Rhetoric: The Social Construction and Negotiation of Meaning

Example 1: Adrian with Seth, Scott, and Sean

Adrian makes a new observation in Reading Two: “The persona is living in the moments that the wall of names brings him.” He cites both text evidence and Scott’s interpretation to support this point. Adrian states, “The evidence to support this lies in the persona’s description of how the wall takes hold of him and pulls him into the war memories.” And he cites Scott’s statement “All of the memories from the wall probably just poured into his head when he saw the wall.”

Adrian disagrees with Scott’s comment from his Reading One that the persona had “a lot of near death experiences during the war” because Adrian feels the poem is centered on the casualties rather than on the persona. Adrian

responds, “I think that most of his terrible memories involve the deaths of his friends.” Whereas Scott relies on the text evidence describing the persona’s expectation of finding his own name on the wall, Adrian points to the lines that describe a particular friend, Andrew Johnson. But Adrian agrees with Seth’s statement “The war has killed his mind” by pointing to the same line Seth chooses as support: “I’m stone. I’m flesh.” Adrian observes, “The evidence is in the paradox. . . . This is a powerful line that allows the reader to see that the veteran feels dead to the world” (R2).

Scott sees a direct relation between the red bird and the white vet: “I believe that the white vet was in the Air Force. His plane probably got shot down in the war.” Although Adrian acknowledges that the red bird can represent a plane exploding, he sees no text evidence to support Scott’s observation that the white vet is dead. Adrian takes an entirely different view. In both his readings, he sees the white vet as being alive and standing along with the persona at the wall: “I believe that the two veterans have an understood connection with one another. Both veterans think they should be on the wall with their fallen comrades and not standing beside it” (R2).

This group’s audiotaped discussion about the red bird metaphor reflects the social construction of meaning in their observations. Seth: “One thing I didn’t look at was when you guys [Adrian and Sean] were talkin’ about the red bird being like a plane. I never looked at that till [inaudible] symbolizing an explosion thing.” Scott: “I didn’t either.” Sean: “I thought maybe he saw the red plane and he saw an explosion on the ground.” Adrian: “Yeah, I wouldn’t have picked that up except for, huh, let’s see where I have it in here. [Adrian

reads from his paper and paraphrases lines from the poem.] Um, if you kinda put it together, you know, the poet in this poem uses a lot of color [inaudible] to describe things, and, you know, when he is referring to the death of all those people, he's using hard black describing the wall, which is kinda the color of death [inaudible]. Red, you know, I think an explosion is kinda red [inaudible] it would be a bright red." Sean responds: "When it said red, I figured, I thought about blood." Adrian: "Let's see, I thought about that too." Sean: "I thought maybe he saw an explosion and when he went up to it he saw blood all over the ground." Adrian: "Yeah, I just [inaudible] to keep the gore out. Even though I actually did think [pause] I thought about that but I decided I'd make it an explosion instead of massive carnage."

The discussion continues focusing on Adrian's contention in Reading One that the two veterans have "an understood connection" as they stand side by side, represented by the window image. Scott: "I like what you said about the window as the understood connection between the two veterans." Adrian: "Yeah . . . they don't like even talk, but they've both come there to do the same thing—to just sit there and remember, you know, and wonder how they're alive and remember their friends. They just kinda look at each other [inaudible] there's like a connection. They don't have to say anything. They know exactly why the other one's there, you know, and it was probably a little bit comforting to them both."

In reference to the image of a woman's erasing names, Adrian adds a new detail for Reading Two that relates to the theme. He demonstrates a degree of adherence to Scott's Reading One statement "There is nothing to take these

names off the wall,” but Adrian believes “the poet’s intention goes deeper than a reminder to the living.” In Reading One, he states, “War veterans who live through war do not really live at all, but die with the things they have witnessed.” For Reading Two, he adds, “The most powerful image left with the reader is the inner death that occurs when the war is over. War is death to both the men who die in combat and to the men who survive and must go on living.”

Example 2: Stanley with Mark, Jimmy, and Paul

Stanley points out an unusual view of the persona that Mark suggests in group discussion. “Mark had the interesting proposal that the persona was on the opposite side in the war, and that his feelings of sorrow were guilt. The name he was searching for on the wall was the name of a soldier he had killed and his presence at the wall was a plea for forgiveness from the man he had killed.” Even though Stanley admits, “This is an interesting notion that I had considered,” he points out its illogical nature because of text evidence: “The problem is that the person writing this would likely encounter some hostility that is not mentioned or even hinted at in the poem.”

Example 3: Paul with Stanley, Mark, and Jimmy

Paul accepts the other views as viable and even shows deference for them, yet he maintains his own interpretation. As he states, “During a group discussion I found that some of my classmates opinions on the poem were more appealing than the one I had.” Paul’s view is that the persona is a ghost, “a person in spiritual form inside the Vietnam Veterans Memorial” returning to tell

his story from “within his own mind” (R1). Both Mark and Stanley view the persona as being alive and standing at the wall remembering the war. Paul demonstrates rendering (Elbow, 1973/1991), but prefers his own view, “I could see things in the same light as both saw it. As a matter of fact, I first interpreted the poem the same way as they did, but decided to go with something different, that’s why I came out with the ghost thing.”

From the audiotaped discussion, the group members, in turn, accept Paul’s view as viable and show deference as well. Stanley asserts, “I still think that Paul has the most interesting interpretation [inaudible] completely different from mine.” Mark agrees, “Yeah.” Paul “[inaudible] I tried to make it into a different [inaudible].” Jimmy, “It works. . . . I would have never even have thought of it, though, but I can see it. . . . He [the poet] just saw the wall and it inspired him to write a poem through one of them’s eyes, you know, like he was dead. It could happen.”

Example 4: Chris with Howard and Wendy

In Chris’s Reading One, he refers to the lines “I see the booby trap’s white flash. / Names shimmer on a woman’s blouse / but when she walks away / the names stay on the wall” as being “a very important part of the poem because it shows the lingering disgust on the mind of a Vietnam veteran.” For Reading Two, he clarifies this passage as representing a division in the persona’s thoughts: “This is a very significant part of the poem because the persona is at the point in which he feels like he is caught between the memories of the war and the reality that he is standing there at the wall.” Chris is

referring to the names reflected on the blouse as representing the past reality of the casualties while their disappearance when the woman turns represents the present situation of the persona's being a survivor. Chris adds to this view by adopting Wendy's notion that the woman represents, as Chris quotes, "a part of his life that was happy." He explains, "After talking with Wendy I realized that the persona saw the reflection of the blouse and it blocked out the pain of his past for a split second and after the reflection was gone the pain was still there." Although Wendy does not express this idea in her Reading One other than stating the woman represents happiness, Chris imaginatively projects the notion that the movement of the blouse took away the names for a moment—a reprieve from the pain the persona endures.

Example 5: Wendy with Chris and Howard

Wendy adds a new point to her Reading Two developed from her learning the views of her group members, which she adopts. She now sees the persona as being "in constant battle with himself" in light of the Readings One statements she quotes from Chris and Howard. Chris states, "He may feel that he let himself down by not dying in the war himself." And Howard reflects, "It is hard to come back from war and be the same person as when you left." Wendy adds, "The ones that survived are still in a personal war of their own."

Example 6: Judy with Alex and Julie

In Reading One, and repeated in Reading Two, Judy views the white vet's image one way and then changes her mind about what it means: "At first I

think this is a real man that has been in the war has come to visit.” Text evidence prompts her to rethink this view: “Then the persona states, ‘He’s lost his right arm inside the stone.’ This makes me think he was killed during the war and his name is one of many that are on the wall.” Judy speculates that the persona’s seeing the plane reminded him of this vet, and in Reading Two she cites a group member’s point as support for the notion the white vet is a casualty that the persona is remembering: “Alex sees the persona confused and disoriented because he cannot grasp what is going on around him. He believes these are memories that haunt him” (R2).

Judy sees the persona as being the wall itself. From the lines “My black face fades, / hiding inside the black granite” and “I’m stone. I’m flesh,” she determines the poet is using personification. She states, “He is made up of stones, but he is also made up of the names of soldiers” (R1, R2). Later in Reading Two, she clarifies this position: “He sees the tragedy of the war day in and day out. He is filled with all of these names, and he knows what happened to each and everyone of the men. He cannot escape the tragedy because he is the wall.” Judy cites Alex’s notion that the black face represents the persona’s anguish and sadness. She shows tolerance for Alex’s view, but disagrees: “I can see where he is coming from, but I do not believe that this man is alive” (R2). Judy also disagrees with Alex’s points that the man has come to the wall to face his past, that he feels guilty for surviving the war, and that he does not know how to move on. She explains her reason: “I do not see that in the poem. I don’t understand how he got that he feels guilty” (R2).

In group discussion, Alex indicates that he was “blown away” by Judy’s interpretation, thereby accepting it as viable: “It never occurred to me to think of the wall itself as the subject. . . . I like it a whole lot better than my opinion.” He later comments, “It’s kinda if these walls could speak, the stories they would tell kind of thing. . . . Really, no other type of expression can, you know, a memorial to people who died, war, and the stories that go with that.”

“This Is a Photograph of Me” by Margaret Atwood

Reader-Response Theory: The Recursive, Cumulative Process

Example: Julie

Julie makes a new observation in her Reading Two concerning the structure of the poem, apparently discovered upon her looking more closely at the punctuation. She notices the poet’s use of parentheses to separate her description of the scene in the photograph from the persona’s particular focus in this scene. Julie states, “One thing I had just noticed is open parentheses started after the persona described the scenery of the beginning. It [the poet] ends the parentheses at the very end of the poem. It [the parentheses] separates the imagery of the photo and the meaning behind the photo. It [this division] brought some significance to the poem, because at first I saw the poem as one whole, and now it is two different pictures of the poem. The location where this picture was taken, and the feelings of the persona for this picture.”

The New Rhetoric: The Social Construction and Negotiation of Meaning

For discussion of this poem, I requested volunteers to form two impromptu panels, each one taking its turn separately. Because of required attendance at a special chapel lecture, the class was reduced to 50 minutes. Julie, Mark, and Seth made up the first panel, and Carol, Stanley, Adrian, and Jimmy made up the second. While the class listened and took notes, panel members sat in a semi-circle at the front of the room and discussed their Readings One of the poem, without having first read them silently. The following are examples from class members who chose to do a Reading Two, with only Julie, Mark, and Seth represented from the panels.

Example 1: Mark with Julie and Seth

In Reading One, Mark relates, “The poet seems to be coming from a spiritual sense after her own drowning,” and “[S]he is looking at the photo from her spirit as if she is dead.” He imaginatively projects that someone took the photo but did not notice the persona’s presence in the lake and that her spirit frequents the house mentioned in the poem. Mark states, “The persona could be looking at the photograph in that person’s house because it may be a place her spirit stops frequently to think.”

For Reading Two, Mark changes his interpretation: “[A]fter the class discussion I see it as more of a literal view; that the author may not be dead but looking at a photograph contemplating.” Mark adopts Seth’s idea that the persona has “lost her mind” and is contemplating suicide. Mark explains that “where his view differs from mine is that I thought the persona was actually

looking at a photograph where as he thought that it was a mental photograph. He thought that she was mentally picturing her suicide.” Mark cites text evidence to affirm this new view from the lines “but if you look long enough, / eventually / you will be able to see me.).” Mark continues, “Through this I believe she could be using her imagination enough to where she is viewing herself drowned in her mind.” From the audiotaped discussion, Mark indicates his initial agreement with Seth’s perspective and connects it to his own: “[S]he could be dead spiritually anyway if she’s suicidal.”

Mark disagrees with Julie’s view of the photograph, which he paraphrases from the panel discussion: “She felt that the persona was mentally handicapped and depressed because of her circumstances, and the photograph was the image of a place that made her happy or brought back good memories. I do not totally agree with this because in the photo the persona views herself being drowned.” However, Mark expresses a degree of adherence in saying, “I think she [the persona] might be imagining somewhere happy as the place she would choose to die.”

Mark accepts Carol’s view as viable. Carol relies on the text evidence in these lines from the fifth strophe “the effect of water / on light is a distortion” to reveal what she feels is the distorted view society can have of an individual. Mark paraphrases her view, “[T]hey [society] or we do not take the time to look beyond the surface of a person to see what that individual has to offer from the inside.” He compares Carol’s and Adrian’s views as being similar in that Adrian also sees, as Mark paraphrases, “a persona who cannot find her identity in society,” and “we, as society, have the tendency to neglect others but do not

realize the consequences of those actions.” Mark adopts these views, and adds a reason for the persona’s depression from his reading a biographical sketch of the poet. Mark asserts, “I see the poet coming from more of a feminist point of view because the persona was deeply depressed because of possible discrimination of the times.” Mark continues this line of reasoning: “The theme I discovered through the class is that of the feminist and the unimportance and neglect of women of that time period.”

Example 2: Seth with Julie and Mark

Seth summarizes Carol’s and Stanley’s views in expressing his disagreement with both. “Carol puts it into a perspective of how a society views a person, and how they should look beyond the surface to what lies beneath, so as to find ones true identity. Stanley’s statement agrees with this in the respect that the water distorting light is like that of our prejudices in society distorting the views on the true identity of an individual. They do not see death at all in this poem but rather a cover, the lake, over ones true identity. And I cannot fully agree with this for I see suffering, pain, and death in this poem.”

For Seth, the poem is “a metaphor for the persona’s emotional death” (R1, R2). Therefore, he also disagrees with Julie as he believes she views the death as a physical one; however, he misunderstands her interpretation. In Julie’s Reading One, she states, “I believe that this persona was not actually dead” and “[T]he persona had described this feeling as being drowned under a lake.” Seth paraphrases from her panel comments: “Julie takes it as a physical death, a suicide because she [the persona] was, ‘unnoticed, unimportant, and

not satisfied.’” Seth maintains his view that the drowning in the lake is a metaphor: “[I]ts not a physical drowning or a real lake, but the lake is a representation of all the tears she is drowning in from something tragic that has happened” (R1, R2).

Seth expresses his differing view from Mark’s interpretation that someone took the photograph unaware of the persona’s presence by stating “I don’t believe that this photograph is even a tangible object but rather something stuck inside the persona’s head.” Seth uses Adrian’s view for partial support: “Adrian seems to also agree with me that she is not really dead, but looking at something and trying to remember it.” Seth adopts a new point by accepting Adrian’s observation on text evidence that the persona is remembering a former time and place denied to her now: “Adrian also states something that I did not see in the first reading of this poem, and that is this [the photo] is a reflection of a place that she can’t get back too. He quotes Adrian from the panel discussion, “The hill is too steep to get back home.”

Example 3: Julie with Seth and Mark

Julie notes similarity in her own view and Carol’s identity interpretation, and she refers to text evidence for support in the lines “I am in the lake, in the center / of the picture, just under the surface.” She paraphrases Carol’s view in saying “The persona had been hiding her own identity by hiding under the surface.” Julie then connects the two views, “I saw something similar by saying that being under the surface meant being unrecognized by others. Yet they [the

two views] can tie together, because if you can not recognize your own identity, it would be hard for anyone else too.”

Similar to Seth’s misinterpreting Julie’s idea, Julie misunderstands Seth’s notion that the persona could be contemplating suicide, but not actually carrying through with it. Julie disagrees with the suicide idea and takes a literal view: “It sounds like the feeling of unimportance and bad memories could have made her do so, but the persona is actually looking at the picture after it was taken, so I do not believe it was a physical death in that perspective.”

Julie adds a new insight as viable to her Reading Two stemming from Mark’s comment in the panel discussion about the feminist issue, which she connects to Carol’s identity theme. She imaginatively projects that the persona might regain her identity “if she came above the surface and faced all these problems. . . . The persona was a woman and the times she lived through happened to be when women had no power or authority. . . .That might have been why she felt unimportant and possibly suicidal.”

Example 4: Marilyn

Marilyn changes her view after listening to the panel discussion. Originally, in Reading One, she had thought the poem depicted an accident and the persona was looking at a picture of the scene where it occurred trying to understand what had happened to cause “his” own death. Acknowledging that Seth and Mark “both have good points” concerning the suicide theory, she adopts a similar view and changes the persona’s gender to female: “[M]aybe

before this certain day, her life was just as it should be. Then, something suddenly happened that totally ruined, or ‘drowned’ her life.”

Example 5: Scott

Using imaginative projection in both readings, Scott believes that the persona could be thinking about a dream of the night before. He explains, “Maybe she is at a low point in her life and she is wondering if she dies would anyone miss her” and “Maybe she is foreseeing her own death” (R1, R2). Another possibility he puts forward is “Was she murdered or could she just not swim very well” (R1, R2). With this latter view, Scott is referring to an actual physical death, contradicting his previous view of her death being merely a dream. However, later in Reading Two, he once again offers the nonphysical death idea by referring to Seth’s statement about her contemplating suicide and Mark’s statement about her wanting to die at a place where she had been happy—the lake. Scott also paraphrases Mark’s notion of her being spiritually dead: “She might be spiritually dead and might as well be physically dead.”

Another facet to the theme Scott explores, but does state his agreement, is Adrian’s notion that the persona cannot figure out her meaning in life, the photo being faded represents her identity fading. As Scott says, “She can not figure out why life can cause so much pain. She can not figure out why she does not feel like living anymore” (R2). Finally, Scott maintains his original view from Reading One of the persona’s remembering a dream: “I seriously think that the persona is acting out a dream that she had” (R1, R2). He adds a personal experience relating to the fading photo: “At first some of the things in

the picture are not clear to her, then she makes something out of them. Just like when you are having a dream sometimes you do not understand why some things happen the way they do. Then it all falls into place” (R1, R2).

“Her Kind” by Anne Sexton

Reader-Response Theory: The Recursive, Cumulative Process

Example 1: Carol

In Reading One, Carol quotes from the first strophe, “I have gone out, a possessed witch, / haunting the black air, braver at night,” and in Reading Two she adds the next three lines in order to better accommodate her discussion for the reader. She points out that these lines dealing with the witch’s hovering above houses at night represent this woman’s feeling “above those who judge her” (R1). For Reading Two, she clarifies this idea by saying “This puts her in a position of being the judge over others, instead of the defendant. This gives her a sense of power that she lacks during the day.” Here Carol implies the traditional view of the witch as the defendant, an additional detail that clarifies her point.

Example 2: Stanley

Relying on text evidence and prior knowledge, Stanley interprets the second strophe as depicting “the tortures and executions that were inflicted on this group of misunderstood people” (R1, R2). Stanley uses imaginative projection in evoking a situation that is similar to the historical persecution of witches. He adds this new detail in Reading Two: “These days, society just

ostracizes those who are different and refuse to conform; in some cases, they may torment the individual by labeling him or pulling vicious pranks.” He further clarifies this point by referring to the current issue of school shootings: “The result of these types of actions was recently illustrated by a school shooting in California; the boy in question revealed his anger at his mistreatment by shooting his fellow students. Whether or not the boys that were killed by him had anything to do with that mistreatment has not been indicated, but they too were victims of his torment.”

Example 3: Kim

Kim also sees the persona as describing someone ostracized by society: “Because she too has been an outcast she compares herself to a ‘witch’ ” (R1). Kim provides a reason for the persona’s being depicted as an outcast besides the label of witch: “I think that perhaps the poet is talking about a woman mentally disturbed, and she is comparing herself to her” (R1). For Reading Two, Kim retains the same idea but incorporates prior knowledge about Anne Sexton’s life, linking the poet to the persona: “The poet’s mental illness and depression is definitely reflected in her work.” She later adds, “I think that the poet was being sympathetic toward mentally ill ‘women’ in this poem. She was being both sympathetic and had empathy for women like her.” Referring to text evidence from the first strophe “A woman like that is misunderstood,” Kim continues, “I think Anne Sexton is saying that she has been there, and that she had to struggle with being an outcast all her life. I think maybe this [the poem] is her way of dealing with her scars from being ridiculed.”

The New Rhetoric: The Social Construction and Negotiation of Meaning

Example 1: Carol with Stanley, Kim, and Marilyn

For both readings, Carol interprets the persona as being rebellious, as depicted in the second strophe. She points to text evidence, the word *survivor*, as supporting her idea that the persona has overcome suffering and ridicule: “[S]he has always fought past that and moved on with her life” (R1). For Reading Two, Carol adds, “She is a survivor, doing what she must to live her life to the fullest.” To support this view of the persona as rebel, Carol cites Alex’s statement in class discussion, “Women were breaking away from what they were supposed to do, or be.” Carol elaborates on this position: “I believe this breaking away allowed women to look at life with a whole new perspective. They were able to see a future that was not already predetermined by societal rules” (R2). Likewise, she quotes Stanley’s view for support, “Ideally, a person should not be afraid to die for their beliefs and should not allow society to force them to be anything other than what they want to be or already are.”

Carol sees the persona in three different ways. In addition to the rebellious woman of the second strophe, she believes the first strophe depicts the woman as a witch, or outcast, and as a housewife, or submissive woman: “I believe the persona is saying that she has at one time or another been all of these women” (R1, R2). Therefore, she disagrees with the view of the persona put forward by Marilyn, Kim, and Stanley “when they insinuate that the persona is portrayed as a witch throughout the entire poem” (R2). Each of her group members sees the persona as three facets of the same person in all three sections. Although Carol tolerates the other views as viable, “I do, however, see

where they are coming from,” she maintains her original view by saying, “I still feel the poem is describing three separate women.” She also defends Anne Sexton against Jimmy’s statement from class discussion: “The author is crazy and paranoid.” Carol responds in Reading Two, “I believe that Sexton’s mental illness did in fact affect her work, but I do not believe it did so in a negative fashion.”

Example 2: Marilyn with Carol, Stanley, and Kim

In Reading One, Marilyn views the persona as a witch: “[T]he witch has died and is telling the reader about her life,” based on the text evidence refrain “I have been her kind.” In her Reading Two, she changes her view of the persona after the group discussion. She accepts Kim’s idea that “the persona was comparing herself to a ‘possessed’ witch” rather than actually being a witch. Paraphrasing Kim, she states, “She thought that the persona had anger built up inside her, and that she maybe didn’t feel appreciated. The persona was probably made fun of a lot and ridiculed.” For further support, Marilyn paraphrases from Stanley’s Reading One, “[P]eople are often misunderstood because they look or act differently than most people.” Marilyn elaborates on this new view: “In all, I believe the persona was just trying to tell the reader that she was tired of being ridiculed and tired of all the people making her an outcast.” Furthermore, she inserts an ideological statement: “However, the reason why people make fun of others is because they are so insecure in themselves that they have to make someone else feel low in order for them to feel better about themselves.”

Example 3: Mark with Jimmy, Chris, and Howard

For Reading One, Mark defines the persona as having “multiple personalities” and “that is why she refers to herself in many different forms.” He sees her as fantasizing about being a witch, a nomad, and “someone famous who is the survivor of a horrible accident.” This accident idea is evidently a misreading of text that he maintains in Reading Two. Mark feels she is “depressed and mentally disturbed.” He basis the nomad identity on his prior knowledge and the text evidence of her living in a cave with elves: “We all know that elves are characters of fairy tales and so maybe she is trying to live out some fairy tale fantasy in her mental unstableness” (R1). Mark derives the famous survivor identity from the second strophe: “Here, she is envisioning herself as possibly famous or just a popular person in order to wave at the people in the villages. My belief is that she is fantasizing about being normal and being accepted, rather than an outcast” (R1).

Without indicating a change in view, Mark accepts Seth’s idea as viable from class discussion that the middle section of the poem represents “the persona as an outcast in a male-dominated society,” whereas Mark feels this section represents her escape onto “her fantasyland of elves” (R2). Yet Mark elaborates on Seth’s idea by referring to text evidence, the imagery of the cave: “Women in those days were not looked at as more than housewives.”

Likewise, Mark does not indicate whether he changes his interpretation of the second strophe by accepting Adrian’s view as viable: “She was an outcast, yet she stood strong for her beliefs.” Mark paraphrases Adrian’s view of the repeated lines “I have been her kind” as meaning “Throughout her life she has

fought for different things, for different beliefs and has given up her fight for each different battle.” Despite not indicating a change in view, Mark elaborates on Adrian’s idea by connecting it to his prior knowledge of Anne Sexton’s life: “This seems to reflect on the author. Anne seemed to have lost a lot of battles along the way. She finally gave up the biggest battle ever, life, and committed suicide.”

“Ego Tripping” by Nikki Giovanni

The New Rhetoric: The Social Construction and Negotiation of Meaning

For the discussion of this poem, I once again requested volunteers to form impromptu panels. Since there was no time constraint on this class, as was true for the last panel discussion, students made up three panels instead of two: Julie, Wendy, Paul, and Chris; Judy, Mark, Adrian, and Alex; and Jimmy, Carol, and Seth. The following are examples from class members who chose to do a Reading Two, with only Julie, Wendy, Paul, and Chris represented from the panels.

Example 1: Julie with Wendy, Paul, and Chris

In Julie’s Reading One, she views the persona as having a series of dreams that parallel the persona’s personality. “These dreams of people, listed in the poem, were all important people in history, or they were the mothers of these well-known figures. I think the reason why the persona dreamed of these highly known people is because in the non-dream state the persona was really arrogant, self-centered, and egoistic.” In reference to the line “I turned myself

into myself and was / Jesus,” Julie furthers this view by giving the persona a reason for this arrogance; that is, “dreams often reflect a person’s true inner feelings.” She observes, “In the dream, the persona had been the most important figure in the universe, Jesus. Though seeing past the dream, I believe that the persona wanted to be the most important person, and to be praised and loved.”

In the audiotaped panel discussion, Julie interjects a strong ideological view about the reference to Jesus: “When she [the persona] talked about being God, I didn’t like that because she thought she was comparing herself to God. And that’s [pause] that really pissed me off, but [pause] it kinda got me upset about it cause she’s not God, but she thinks she’s God [inaudible].”

Likewise, in the following class discussion, Wendy expresses agreement with Julie’s dream interpretation and her ideology. Wendy states, “The whole poem is just one big illusion of what may be or what could be or [inaudible] what is but it’s all thought [inaudible] as to reality. I just don’t feel these things are possible. . . . And it really ticked me off too, as it did with her [Julie], that [inaudible] a comparison, in a sense, was made to Jesus. . . . Well, if you’re Christian, then . . . there’s nothing above and beyond that even. There’s no way possible whatsoever that you can ever measure up, even making a reference, in a sense. That’s an insult to me cause it’s just you can’t ever [pause] He was the most important then and He still is and will be in the time to come. Any reference that you’re in any way equal to Him is a very big insult.”

For Reading Two, Julie maintains her view but with modification: “What I noticed after reading other student’s papers is that all of these different people

could have actually been just one, God.” She cites Chris’s view as viable: “Chris believed that god has taken shape into all these different people because he can form himself into anything he pleases.” In addition, Julie accepts as viable Wendy’s idea that “a mother had written this poem.” Julie rephrases Wendy’s interpretation: “It [the poem] may just have been an example of God’s great ego, or the ego’s of all the mothers who have a life to boast about.” However, with apparent contradiction, Julie disagrees with Alex’s view in class discussion that “this poet thought she had accomplished wonderful things as a mother because of *her* children and herself” [italics student’s]. Julie responds with an ideological statement, “How selfish! I love being a mother myself, but that does not mean I should need to have the ego equal to God’s greatness.” Therefore, she maintains her view that the persona is merely dreaming, or subconsciously experiencing this greatness, rather than actually believing in it.

Example 2: Wendy with Julie, Chris, and Paul

Julie’s interpretation of the poem as a series of dreams that reflect “inner feelings” helps Wendy explain two difficulties she had encountered: “I did not get this in the first reading but I can now see how the poem can reflect this. I did not believe that the things happening in the poem were capable by mortal man.” Another problem she had with the poem is the persona’s claim to be Jesus, but after reading Julie’s interpretation, Wendy states, “We can see past all of this as being part of feelings. . . . I feel we all want some part of that in our life, to be loved, and be important.”

“Two Hands” by Anne Sexton

Reader-Response Theory: The Recursive, Cumulative Process

Example 1: Alex

For his Reading Two, Alex adds a new detail not present in his Reading One in observing a connection between the two poems by Anne Sexton that the class studied. Concerning the literary conventions of structure and mood, he states, “Structurally I think they are built along the same lines. ‘Her Kind’ has two strophes and ‘Two Hands’ has three, but each presenting three independent lines of thought that create distinct separations in the plot. The mood of ‘Two Hands’ is very different from ‘Her Kind.’ The former leaves the impression that it could be moody and devoid of hope, but finishes on a high note. The latter is haunting and dark and ends in a haughty but depressing fashion.”

Example 2: Scott

Based on text evidence and prior biblical knowledge, Scott observes the metaphor of hands as representing Adam and Eve. He interprets the clapping in strophe one as meaning “they were married in God’s eyes” from the line “And this was no sin” (R1, R2). But Scott’s interpretation of the remainder of this strophe is a misreading of the text that he maintains in Reading Two. He imaginatively projects that the line “mute with the silence of the fishes” refers to “the time when Jesus fed the crowd with just a few fish” (R1, R2). Likewise, the line “quick with the altars of the tides” refers to “when Moses parted the sea” (R1, R2). Inexplicably, Scott includes in Reading Two, but does not

indicate as a correction of his misreading, Mark's view of the line "quick with the altars of the tides." Mark is referring to man's life span having an end, as the ocean tides come and go. Scott asserts, "All of these incidents show God's greatness" (R1, R2). No group member challenged this misreading as being extraneous to the poem's images of man and woman being created.

In both his readings of the third strophe, Scott again misreads the text, for a reader would have difficulty substantiating his interpretation, yet none of his group members challenged his view. He believes the strophe concerns the resurrection of Christ. He even misreads the Scripture by claiming the lines "you angel webs, / unwind like the coil of a jumping jack" refer to "the angel that was present when Jesus moved the stone away from the tomb. The jumping jack was Jesus moving the stone away from the tomb" (R1, R2). However, the Bible states the angel moved the stone. In the last paragraph of Reading Two, Scott indicates that the poem is biblically based, and continues to put forward his own knowledge base rather than what the poem's text actually states: "He [God] created man from dust. . . .Then he took a rib from the man and made the woman." The text reads, "From the *sea* came a hand" [italics mine] and "Up came the other hand." He ends Reading Two with an ideological statement unconnected to text evidence: "Something that one has to realize is that God will never turn his back on us."

The New Rhetoric: The Social Construction and Negotiation of Meaning

Example 1: Adrian with Chris and Paul

From Readings One to Two, Adrian changes his view of the hands coming together: "I believe that the applauding of the hands is symbolic of sex between a man and a woman . . ." (R1). Although in Reading Two he partially maintains the "intimate physical relationship" view, he also shows disagreement with his classmate who has a similar interpretation: "Paul says, 'The applause is a symbol of reproduction.' I originally agreed with him, but I do not anymore. After studying the poem further, I see that the applause represents the entire relationship. The emphasis is on the 'rightness' of the relationship rather than on whether or not the coming together results in reproduction."

Concerning strophe two, Adrian disagrees with both Paul and Chris in their interpretations of the different people. Paul sees the names as representing people in everyday life, as Adrian quotes, "The names used are not specific, but just names." Adrian maintains his view from Reading One: "Each is doing a solitary and ordinary activity." But he adds in Reading Two a degree of adherence to Paul's view: "I agree that the names are used as examples of universal *man* and *woman* [italics student's]. However, I do not agree with the view that the persona is taking the reader through ordinary life. It is true that these lines describe individuals doing everyday things. However, each activity is solitary." Adrian emphasizes that the people's activities are "solitary" because he feels these people reflect the relationship of the man and woman: "[T]heir relationship has become a lonely prison" (R2). He further maintains his view by disagreeing with Chris's interpretation of strophe two that "The persona

is trying to realize all the capabilities that man has.” From the audiotaped discussion, Chris describes these people as “different examples of life” representing that “we all have choices.” Adrian responds, “His statement is vague and mentions nothing about the intimate relationship between *man* and *woman*, which is the focal point of the entire poem” (R2).

In his Reading One response, Adrian contends that these lines from the final strophe “Unwind, hands” and “cup together and let yourselves fill up with sun” describe a relationship. He states, “The command is not to separate but to open up and come together with energy rather than sticking together too tightly.” He clarifies this response for Reading Two: “. . .the persona is telling the reader that when two hands (*man* and *woman* in an intimate relationship) do not allow each other some freedom from one another, the relationship becomes unhealthy. . . .The two hands must remember to alternate between coming together and opening themselves to the rest of the world, in order to keep the relationship healthy.” Adrian uses Alex’s comment from class discussion to support this contention that the applause in the final strophe is not literal but represents the relationship of the man and woman. Alex states, “The two partners are working together rather than against each other.” In response to Chris’s general interpretation of the theme, “Live life happy, be happy,” Adrian shows a degree of adherence: “I agree with Chris, but believe that he left something out. ‘Two Hands’ implies that in order to live life and be happy in an intimate relationship, the partners must continue to alternate between clasping and releasing.”

Example 2: Alex with Judy and Kim

Alex believes Mark's view from class discussion "accents" his own in supporting his idea that the line in strophe one "The hands applauded" concerns "how we as humans lived in harmony with nature, each other, and God." Mark contends the hands represent God, and Alex accepts Mark's alternate view as viable despite his belief that the hands represent man and woman. He practices rendering (Elbow, 1973/1991) in attempting to see this line through Mark's eyes, and he connects this view to his own. Alex states, "He [Mark] thought that the 'Two Hands' were the hands of God applauding what he had created. I think that if looked at in the context that God made everything perfect and that perfection was shown through the love and peace that was in the world before man fell this would make sense."

Alex adds another new detail in his Reading Two: "As we were discussing this in class it occurred to me, not only did the Lord give life to men and women, he gave identity (created in His image) and purpose (to rule the earth) to them as well." He focuses on the second strophe to support his new insight: "It gives a picture of what life is like without God." Here Alex is referring to the roaming people and claims the poet "paints a picture of normal people weighed down with the cares and burdens of everyday life. It is like they don't know and/or don't care where they are headed (they have no purpose or identity in their life)." For supporting his view, Alex paraphrases Judy's view that the people's roaming was "a consequence of being separated from God."

Example 3: Judy with Alex and Kim

From Reading One to Reading Two, Judy carries over her confusion about the hands image: “I don’t know if she [the persona] is talking about the man and woman or about God. The man and woman could be applauding because they are alive, or God could be because he is proud of what he has accomplished” (R1, R2). Despite this confusion, she interprets the text lines “The hands applauded. / And this was no sin. / It was as it was meant to be” by adopting two views of her group members: “I agree with Kim because she believes that this was a joining of man and woman before there was sin. I also agree with Alex. He states, ‘ The hands applauded speaks of how we as humans lived in harmony with nature, each other, and God.’” Judy uses these statements to support her ideological contention “We all know that God has a plan, and that everything that happens was meant to be” (R1, R2).

Judy continues her ideological statements for the second strophe in relation to the different people mentioned as “roaming the streets.” She states, “Maybe she [the persona] means all of these people are lost. They are just roaming around with no particular direction in their lives. The direction that we need is Jesus Christ. If we look to him, he will lead us where we need to go” (R1, R2). Along with the text evidence to support her view, she paraphrases from Alex’s Reading One: “Alex sees it as these people don’t know and don’t care where they are headed,” and “ . . . he believes that this is describing humanity’s fall from grace. . . . that she [the persona] is trying to remind us of how to regain favor in the eyes of the Lord” (R2).

Judy quotes Kim's statement about the prison metaphor, a new point Judy does not mention in her Reading One: "She [the persona] sees life as a prison for some and free for others." Judy elaborates on this point to further her ideology, using text evidence: "The persona says that some of us are in prison, and some are in the prison of their bodies. I think she means that the ones that are in prison of their bodies means they are sinners and are lost. They don't have Christ to make them free." Kim does not mention Christ in her Reading One with this connection, but she does include the Adam and Eve story and concludes that some people can deal with the despair caused by a sinful world, while others cannot.

Addressing the third strophe, Judy states, "I think she [the persona] means that we need to celebrate what God has given us" (R1, R2). She supports this contention through Kim's idea "to let go our feelings of despair and come together to rejoice" and through Alex's notion "to put aside our differences and keep an open mind, so we can live in true peace and harmony." Furthermore, Judy clarifies a point from her Reading One in response to the lines "Unwind hands" and "cup together and let yourselves fill up with sun." In Readings One and Two, she states, "I think she [the persona] means that we need to let Jesus come into our hearts, so he can fill us with perfect light." For Reading Two, she adds, "With our hands open we can receive the word of God and do good works for him, but if our hands are tied up we are unable to do anything." She derives this idea from Alex during class discussion: "Alex believes that when we have entwined hands we are unable to do anything but if we let them unwind there are many things a person can do."

Example 4: Kim with Judy and Alex

Kim adopts a new insight from Alex's view of the second strophe; she agrees with "Alex's whole concept that the poem is about humanity's fall from grace, and that in the second strophe 'comes the fall.'" She adopts Alex's view of the third strophe as well, as she quotes from his Reading One, "[W]e can live in peace and harmony." Kim elaborates, "In the last strophe I think the persona is trying to show the reader what we can do as human beings to regain peace and humanity." She furthers this idea by referring to text evidence in the line "Unwind hands" as meaning, "I think she is trying to tell us to forget about our differences." Although Kim does not give credit to Alex for this last detail, I believe she is influenced by his Reading One statement that "if we put aside our differences. . . .then we can live once more in true peace and harmony."

Kim uses imaginative projection in including another new detail for Reading Two that she gains from Anne Sexton's biographical sketch. She connects this detail once again to Alex's point about living in peace. Kim states, "She [Sexton] knew that if people would come together, and live in peace and harmony, rather than ridiculing others the world would be a much better place to live. . . .Yet she obviously couldn't find that inner peace, and she committed suicide. It's ironic, don't you think?"

Example 5: Seth with Carol and Jimmy

Seth disagrees with Alex's and Mark's views of the hand imagery from their class discussion but shows tolerance for them and maintains his own view. He disagrees with Alex's idea that the hands applauding in the last

strophe represent, as Seth paraphrases, “man working together.” And Seth disagrees with Mark’s idea that the hands in the first strophe represent “the hands of God,” rather than representing man and woman as Seth believes they do. He states, “While I can see these views as valid I do not fully agree with them. I still see the first strophe as a metaphor for the creation of man.”

For his discussion of the third strophe, Seth summarizes several views before affirming his own. He paraphrases Chris’s view of the line “Unwind hands” as meaning “having peace of mind, understanding how you cannot change what happened, and to leave your worries behind.” He paraphrases Alex’s idea that “the last strophe was about man turning back to God,” and “the second strophe showed man turning away from God.” Seth also includes Adrian’s idea that the hands image is “descriptive of the relationship between a man and a woman, and how if wound too tightly together will stop working together or ‘applauding.’”

But Seth maintains his original view for the third strophe as well: “Even after hearing and discussing all the views on this last strophe I still am staying with my original view that it is more of an allusion to the return of Christ.” He relates this idea to Sexton’s suicide: “She possibly wanting like Christ to be released from her earthly prison into something greater.” Therefore, he paraphrases and uses as support Jimmy’s interpretation of the text lines describing the people “roaming the streets” as if lost and the lines developing the prison metaphor, as both being “an insight to her own mind when she was thinking about committing suicide.” Seth’s interpretation here relates to his own statement about the prison metaphor of the second strophe: “So it seems

that all his [Christ's] life he was just waiting to die trapped in his body like everyone else on earth, but I also think the poet was alluding to the return of Christ saying that we are all stuck here on earth until he returns."

Example 6: Jimmy with Seth and Carol

Jimmy disagrees with the poet's interpretation of creation: "At first I saw the poet as trying to make a biblical reference, and messing it up." He takes issue with the lines in the first strophe "From the sea came a hand" and "Up came the other hand," as referring to the creation of man and woman. He accesses prior knowledge in saying "In the Bible man was not made from the sea, man was made from dust and God's spittle" (R1, R2). Likewise, he continues, "Woman came from man's rib." However, after hearing Mark's view during class discussion, he adopts a new interpretation, changing his view of the hands image: "He [Mark] said that the hands were that of God not that of man. And he thought that God was applauding for himself. After hearing this I can see this, in fact I see it as being a better reading of the poem."

Jimmy also has a problem with the second strophe prison metaphor, but views it differently because of Alex's influence. Jimmy does not agree with the poet's line "as Christ was prisoned in His body." He counters with an ideological statement: "I do not see this as being true either, because Christ chose to come to this world and take on human form so that we through him might be saved." After listening to Alex's view of strophe two from class discussion, Jimmy states, "Now I see the people described here as being people

who are away from God and feel imprisoned because of it. And I see the part about Jesus as being imprisoned as him wanting to be back in heaven.”

Furthermore, Jimmy indicates that he found no meaning in the third strophe and he especially questions the mechanics of the hands cupping and applauding. He poses the question: “So how exactly could the hands cup together so that they could be filled up with something yet applaud at the same time.” Once again, with Alex’s influence, Jimmy demonstrates rendering in being able to accept another view as viable. Jimmy states, “Now I still see all the afore mentioned flaws, but I also see possible meaning. Note the possible I still do not rule out no meaning I just like the way that Alex’s reading sounded. Seeing the poem from his perspective I see the unwinding hands as being the hands pulling away from sin. And I see the last lines ‘ and applaud, world, / applaud.’ as meaning that the world should praise God.”

Jimmy demonstrates tolerance for Alex’s interpretation, but emphasizes his adherence to his original view: “So although I totally agree with Alex’s reading of this poem I still disagree because I see the deep meanings as being more his thoughts than the thoughts of Anne Sexton.” Jimmy maintains his original view in this way: “However there are still many doubts in my mind that see ever wrote this poem to have any meaning other than her wanting to kill herself.” He elaborates using imaginative projection, “I think that he [Alex] probably thought more about spiritual meaning that Anne Sexton ever did. . . .if she saw great spiritual meaning I do not think that she would have wanted to kill herself. I think that she would have wanted to keep on living so she could tell others about God and his works.”

Example 7: Patty with Howard and Stanley

Patty indicates a degree of adherence to Alex's view of the hands as representing man and woman. She paraphrases his idea from class discussion: "The hands applauded meant the two hands working together." But while she maintains her own view that the hands belong to God, Patty expresses partial adherence to his notion. Accessing prior knowledge, she explains, "I agree with Alex's theory. I believe that the hands would be worthless if not together, but I believe the hands were of God's. God made the man and woman with his two hands, but Adam and Eve also helped each other. I also see the two hands symbolizing when Adam and Eve ate the apple. Eve was the first but Adam also ate the forbidden fruit therefore they were both punished for working together." In reality, she seems to be adopting Alex's interpretation, because she later adopts Adrian's view of strophe three that the hands represent a relationship: "I do believe the unwinding of the hands is about a relationship and how the hands were wound together."

Example 8: Scott with Marilyn and Mark

Scott misreads the text in the second strophe by at first seeing the people mentioned as the disciples: "The disciples went around the world telling the people about Jesus" (R1, R2). He probably makes this connection based on Christ being mentioned toward the end of the strophe. However, in both readings he puts forward another possibility more in line with some of his classmates' readings: "It could also be talking about everyday people" (R1, R2). Scott comments that the line "Levi complaining about his mattress" means

“how everybody complains about everything” (R1, R2). He supports this contention by paraphrasing Marilyn’s interpretation of the same line as indicating “society in general” (R2) in that people complain. He also adds a new detail to his Reading Two through paraphrasing Marilyn’s view of the prison metaphor as meaning each person suffers “self-imprisonment” yet “we are not alone” because “Jesus was in the same situation.”

Another addition of new details to Scott’s Reading Two comes from Mark’s interpretation of the first strophe as “an outline of God’s will.” Scott also adopts Adrian’s observation from class discussion that the poet spends more time describing the creation of the man than she does the woman. Scott then connects these two points in accessing prior biblical knowledge and interjecting his ideological view: “God created the man before the woman because the man is the dominant gender. He took the rib of man to make woman. In today’s world the man is supposed to be superior to the woman. God creating woman from man supports this theory.”

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify, describe, and demonstrate the meaning-making processes of college freshmen as they interpreted and discussed poetry. By identifying descriptive categories to represent the students' thinking processes both individually and communally, I have demonstrated how Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric can be practiced in the classroom. The meaning-making processes students used, as delineated by the categories in Table 2 of Chapter IV, emerged from their responses as I observed the thinking behaviors demonstrated in their compositions and in the audiotaped group work. As illustrated in these compositions and group work, progression from the individual construction of meaning to the communal construction and negotiation of meaning resulted in comprehensive readings of the poems. In studying Readings One (compositions individually constructed as initial responses to a poem) through Readings Two (compositions socially constructed, synthesizing the initial responses with the communal responses from group and class discussions), professors and researchers can observe how students recursively and cumulatively constructed their interpretations by rethinking initial responses and by incorporating other views. The meaning-making processes inherent in these theories demonstrate how students interpret poetry and how theory informs practice.

Particularly of interest are both the variety of categories that illustrate the meaning-making processes, as delineated in Table 2 of Chapter IV, and the viability of the interpretations, as exhibited in the student examples from Chapter IV. These categories and examples demonstrate the quality of student thinking and rethinking in their interpretation of poems as they constructed Readings One, exchanged views in group discussion, and then refined their work to construct Readings Two. Moving through these steps in interpretation, students demonstrated more comprehensive readings in exploring meaning more in depth, mainly because of having the opportunity to reconsider a reading and to be influenced by peers. Professors and researchers can compare these categories and examples to those encountered in their previous teaching or research in order to gain better awareness of the thinking behaviors of students. We, as professors, do not normally have the privilege of glimpsing into the work of students in classes other than our own; therefore, I have provided abundant examples in covering the nine poems selected to illustrate what students can achieve when allowed to think for themselves and to construct meaning as an interpretive community.

Freshman Composition 1020 is basically a writing course with an introduction to literature as a component. Consequently, my aim was not to produce literary scholars comparable to the professionals, but rather to allow students to become readers of poetry and writers about poetry on their own terms, with myself “moving out of the way” (Dias, 1996, p. 79) and not putting my own competence on display in the “performance model” (Tompkins, J., 1990, p. 659). To elicit comprehensive readings of the poems for my study, I set

up an environment that allowed students to engage with poetry without being constrained by prescriptive teaching, although I provided instruction and guidance in the small-group and class work and in my written comments for their compositions. When we look at meaning making as a lived-through experience occurring in the reader's mind rather than in an objective external reality, we see "language as an experience rather than as a repository of extractable meaning" (Fish, 1970/1980, p. 99). Therefore, a reader's connecting with the poem in a meaningful way is the main focus rather than a critical analysis of the literary text. As Fish (1970/1980) relates, "The fact that this method [focusing on the reader rather than the text] does not begin with the assumption of literary superiority or end with its affirmation, is, I think, one of its strongest recommendations" (p. 88).

Practice Illustrates Theory

The Categories of Meaning-Making Processes: Reader-Response Theory

As apparent from the Reader-Response category Parallel Associations for Reading One (see Table 2 in Chapter IV), my students connected with the poems more in terms of their own knowledge, experience, imagination, and beliefs rather than in terms of literary study. Students relied on the category Text Evidence only in so far as it supported their views derived from the lived-through experience. Reader-Response Theory enabled students to develop meaningful interpretations in terms of their own lives. I rephrase Ciardi and Williams' (1975) description of the reader's experiencing a poem "How does a poem mean?" (p. 1) to read "How does a reader make a poem meaningful?"

(Tompkins, S. L., 1997, p. 317). From a New Critical approach, a reader can dissect a poem and reconstruct it in terms of Text Evidence: imagery, diction, metaphor/simile, symbol, structure, allusion, and theme. But the lived-through experience is the transaction that evokes relevant meaning to the individual (Rosenblatt, 1985).

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) characterizes the exploring process in the event of reading as “self-ordering and self-corrective” (p. 11); Iser (1974/1980) views this process as “anticipation and retrospection” in filling textual gaps to form a consistent pattern (p. 56). I describe the process as “recursive and cumulative” (Tompkins, S. L., 1997, p. 317) as readers rethink and reflect on their interpretations in an ongoing manner. The variety and quality of the student interpretations were possible because they were free to use their imaginations in exploring potentially viable readings. They had the opportunities of living through the experience of the poem and identifying with the ideas presented by accessing the four subcategories of Parallel Associations.

Accessing the subcategories Prior Knowledge and Personal Experience served to help students connect with the topic of a poem or its literary conventions in their first encounter. As Holland (1975/1980) believes “interpretation is a function of identity” (p. 123), students recreated a poem by imposing their own emotions and learned coping mechanisms for making sense out of life. For example, some students immediately recognized the allusion to Vietnam in “Facing It” and recalled experiences of relatives involved in the war. Likewise, the allusion to the creation story from Genesis in “Two Hands” evoked the biblical concept of purity, sin, and redemption. Furthermore, students were

able to comprehend the concept of encouragement, as depicted in “Saint Francis and the Sow” because of the simple human need to be uplifted.

Students relied on Imaginative Projection to fill the textual gaps. They included possibilities beyond the text by developing scenarios to explain situations not explicitly described in the poems, nevertheless, giving a persona character and life beyond the poem to make sense of the present moment. In a similar manner, students inserted Ideological Statements, oftentimes using god-terms (Burke, 1967), to relate certain ideas in poems to their own religious or moral beliefs.

In the categories of Reader-Response Theory for both Readings One and Two, my students transformed their individual responses to the same poem as the exploration progressed. After rethinking their initial interpretations in Readings One, for Readings Two students clarified their original views by refining or elaborating on initial points from Readings One (Clarify Original View), and they added details not included in Readings One to develop richer readings (Add New Detail). Students also demonstrated maintaining original views with little or no modification (Maintain Original View) or substantially changing them after they read about and listened to the views of fellow students (Change Original View). As part of the recursive, cumulative process, students corrected misreadings because of rethinking text evidence or being influenced by their group members. On the other hand, they sometimes maintained misreadings despite the influence of group and class discussion (Maintain or Correct Misreading).

The issue of misreadings is not so difficult to address when using a reader-response approach. Similar to other theorists and researchers, I focused on the reader and the event of reading both in individual and communal responding. Operating from the postmodernist view that an objective reality does not exist, Fish (1970/1980) makes the reader's experience of a text the object of study rather than evaluating the text itself, which he believes does not contain the meaning. Rosenblatt (1978/1994) views the lived-through experience of a reader's connecting with a poem as a transaction, an "event in time" (p. 12) wherein the reader activates the text. Iser (1974/1980) identifies this event as the "convergence of text and reader" that creates a "virtual dimension" (pp. 50, 54) as a "living event" (pp. 54, 64). Holland (1975/1980) believes the reader's "identity re-creates itself" from the work (p. 124). And Bleich (1978/1980) sees the meaning of a text as located in the reader's mind not in the text. Therefore, I focused on my students' thinking behaviors in their exploration of poems, that is, on their meaning-making processes—meaning building and consensus building—rather than on their finding the ideal interpretation of a poem. According to Rosenblatt (1978/1994), "In the light of some illusory unspecifiable absolute or ideal reading, all readings are failures" (p. 143).

But the work-as-experienced being the focus of investigation does not mean that poetic elements are not important. As Rosenblatt (1978/1994) recommends, "[T]he reader should not project ideas or attitudes that have no defensible linkage with the text" (p. 14). These ideas are what Richards (1929) calls "mnemonic irrelevances," or misleading influences outside the poem's

context (pp. 13-14). However, I believe students can include their personal responses, evoked memories, or ideology as part of their readings, as long as they make sure to base the interpretation on the text evidence. Soles (1995) corroborates my contention that students can produce a combination of personal response and interpretative response for their readings.

As amateur readers, students bring both strengths and weaknesses to the act of reading as well as extraneous material. But as “informed readers” (Fish, 1970/1980, p. 86-87) in varying degrees, they share “interpretative strategies” that provide boundaries for interpretation (Fish, 1976/1980, p. 183). Culler (1975/1980) admits that not all “competent readers” will agree on an interpretation, but they still impose certain expectations or limits for acceptable readings (p. 114). Kaiden (1998) demonstrated in her study how students became aware of misreadings in the plenary session.

Admittedly, mistakes are part of the reading event; however, I had anticipated that informed readers in “interpretive communities” (Fish, 1976/1980, p. 182) would refine their readings by arguing their points of difference and agreement and by providing new insight so that few misreadings could survive. As evident from the representative examples, I did find a few misreadings of text, and of other students’ readings, in my own study—misreadings that did survive despite exposure to other views.

The Categories of Meaning-Making Processes: The New Rhetoric

The discourse communities in the classroom were semi-directed small groups of three to four students and the whole-class plenary session. I

discovered that most students were informed readers but in varying levels of exposure from their past instruction in poetry. Of the thirteen students (72%) responding to the pre-questionnaire's item three, concerning the number of years of previous study in poetry, five reported four to five years experience, seven reported one to three years, and one reported no previous study. From question number four concerning the types of instruction experienced, four students indicated that usually the teachers discussed meanings of poems rather than students, five indicated experience with class discussion while four claimed little or no discussion of poems, three reported writing about poetry while five indicated writing poems themselves, and four reported working in groups. Therefore, the audience for each writer/speaker was an approximation of a universal audience; in effect, each member was "an incarnation of the universal audience" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958/1969, p. 37), sharing interpretative strategies in varying degrees and having adherence to particular views.

Through rendering (Elbow, 1973; 1991) or decentering (Kroll, 1984), students took on the perspectives of their peers and escaped adherence to their own views for a time. In experiencing these other life worlds (Gadamer, 1975/1986), or views of poems, students interchanged ideas not for the purpose of finding immediate answers, but rather for evaluating and reflecting on possibilities of meaning. As the subcategories for Points of Agreement indicate (see Table 2 in Chapter IV), students demonstrated their agreement with group members or classmates by including in their Readings Two points from other students that supported or clarified their own (Agree and Connect).

They adopted other viewpoints that they recognized as viable possibilities (Agree and Adopt), or they demonstrated only partial agreement to them (Degree of Adherence). Sometimes their accepting a perspective as viable did not necessarily mean their adopting it, but rather indicating that this alternate perspective was possible as well as their own (Accept as Viable). Finally, they modified or completely changed their interpretation because of accepting an alternate view in lieu of their own (Change or Modify).

In arguing their Points of Difference as democratic discourse communities comprising a plurality of views, the students attempted “to get as close to the truth as possible” (Perelman, 1979) by making known their reasons for disagreement, either in the group discussion or in the Readings Two, and sometimes by pointing out erroneous thinking (Disagree with Reason). But they also practiced dissensus (Trimbur 1989), that is, deferral of consensus so that a mutual exchange of ideas was possible in the ongoing conversation. Students demonstrated “an aspiration for agreement” (Perelman, 1979, p. 15) by not imposing absolute truths, or right answers, on each other, for to reach the absolute agreement of a universal audience would preclude further discussion (Perelman, 1979). They did not, in my observation of the audiotapes, demonstrate dominance or exclusion of certain member voices (Clark, 1994), as the interpretations were examined (Disagree with Tolerance, Disagree with Respect). Although some members were more vocal than others, each member was given a turn to express his or her view. However, in their Readings Two, students sometimes did not include references to every point made by group

members but rather selected only those relevant to their own points of agreement or difference.

As individuals with varying degrees of competency and intensity of opinion comprise the universal or paragon audience, each individual is a particular audience, or “incarnation of the universal audience” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958/1969, p. 37), and capable of comprehending or increasing adherence to other interpretations of a poem even if adopting only one. I observed students expressing disagreement but demonstrating tolerance for alternate views while preferring their own. And by interchanging agency, or self-empowerment (Ewald & Wallace, 1994), and deference, deferring personal view (Wyschogrod in Clark, 1994), students maintained equal relations within the community in that they favored neither consensus nor difference exclusively. They did not regard differences as obstacles to be overcome (Crosswhite, 1996), nor did they equate cooperation with agreement (Clark, 1994). When discussing their points of difference, students maintained social cohesion by displaying loyalty to their group members; that is, respect for others’ views was more important than finding an objective truth (Rorty, 1982). However, in their Readings Two, students sometimes indicated disagreement more emphatically than in the group work, most likely because Readings Two were read only by me.

Consequently, their consensus building was a “cooperative search for truth” by a particular, concrete audience (Crosswhite, 1996, p. 143; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958/1969) with culture-specific ideologies. However, I did not observe the “ideological disabilities” Crosswhite (1996, p. 195) presents as

obstacles to constructing meaning. The ideological stances students assumed, stemming from their culture, home environment, or education, did not cause conflict within the groups. As the poems did not elicit indisputable answers or opinions from the students, my students approximated the ideology-free universal audience by being open-minded, tolerant, and sympathetic to each other's views (Crosswhite, 1996). From question three of the post-questionnaire concerning suggested changes in methodology, one student recommended that I include poems eliciting more controversy.

Comparison to Other Studies

I designed my study with some influence from other researchers. In her study of reader response, Langer (1993) observed that meaning resided in her reader participants who were guided by the text, prior knowledge, and past experience in moving in and out of envisionments, or text-worlds. She noted the recursive and cumulative manner of the participants as they struggled with "ideas, images, questions and hunches" (p. 6) in moving through four types of envisionments, changing their perspectives in an ongoing process. In my study, I observed students entering the life world (Gadamer, 1975/1986) of a poem through accessing the major categories of Text Evidence and Parallel Associations in a recursive, cumulative process. In other words, students were exploring *how* the poem *means* to them especially through the subcategories of Prior Knowledge, Personal Experience, Imaginative Projection, and Ideological Stance. Students continued engagement during the small-group work and whole-class discussions as they moved in and out of the text worlds of others,

reading about and discussing each other's views. The exploration and consensus building culminated in Reading Two—Langer's "final envisionment"—that was the most comprehensive reading achieved at this particular historical moment.

Langer (1993) characterized her participants as high-rated or low-rated readers and found that both types did not often rethink or reflect on their reading experiences, thus not reaching the third and fourth envisionments. In contrast, I have included in my study the social construction and negotiation of meaning along with reader-response so that medium to weak achievers had the advantage of experiencing other perspectives in the small-group work and whole-class discussions. Through the negotiation of meaning and the cumulative effect of producing Readings One and Two for three poems over time, my students more often reached Langer's third and fourth stances of rethinking and reflection.

The responses that Earthman (1992) studied—gap filling, text repertoire (extratextual reality), and multiple perspectives—were evident in my students' initial meaning-making processes as well as in their further responses during group work. I also observed students' making imaginative connections, recognizing extratextual reality, and perceiving alternative perspectives through their Readings One, classroom work, and Readings Two. My major category Parallel Associations corresponds to gap filling but delineates this process further with the subcategories Prior Knowledge, Personal Experience, Imaginative Projection, and Ideological Stance. My major category Text Evidence compares to text repertoire by including literary conventions and

allusions to historical/social context. Earthman found that freshmen tended to have difficulty comprehending a text when text signals were few and difficulty recognizing literary conventions or references to the historical/social context. In dealing with multiple perspectives, she observed that freshmen resisted revising their first impressions even after being prompted to see another view.

In contrast to her study, my addition of meaning as being socially constructed greatly helped my students to fill in gaps when meaning was not explicit, to recognize allusions and literary conventions, and to rethink first impressions. Working together as discourse communities, my students supplied for each other, along with my guidance, the information necessary to develop comprehensive readings of the poems beyond the initial responses. When students maintained their original views, they did so after being exposed to other perspectives. For the subcategories of Points of Difference, I observed students rethinking and reflecting on their original views as they promoted a preference for their own views. They pointed out erroneous thinking in other views (Disagree with Reason), they showed comprehension of other views, (Disagree with Tolerance), and they displayed deference for maintaining social cohesion (Disagree with Respect).

I accept Dias' (1996) hypothesis that readers can build meaning from poetry without teacher direction. For his study, this hypothesis applied to both initial and communal responses in the group work during which Dias, as researcher, did not provide instruction. In my study, the Readings One, my students' first independent responses to the poems, especially illustrated this hypothesis. Subsequently, my students built on these first responses through

group/class discussions and Readings Two. In my view, their independence was enhanced by my guidance during group work and my comments on their compositions. Consequently, I modified Dias' undirected small-group discussion to semi-directed discussion, both for the small group and the plenary session, because I defined myself as part of the learning community and the professor whose purpose was to guide and instruct. However, I emphasize that my role in this purpose was mainly nondirective.

Another procedure of Dias' (1996) study I modified was the RAP sessions, which involved individuals responding aloud to poems in the presence of the researcher. Dias also used a responding aloud method in the undirected group work, wherein students were not permitted to write notes. Instead, I employed VAWPs, Verbal And Written Protocols, because I believed writing is a vital part of responding aloud. I wanted my students to record important ideas as they discussed the poems in the small groups and plenary sessions. Capturing their thoughts in flux would better enable them to build their comprehension in preparation for writing Readings Two, which counted as 75% of the unit grade. As noted in Chapter III, I found that my students had difficulty taking discussion notes as compared to the ease of writing down passages and ideas from the Readings One. I still believe in the VAWP method, but realize that I must allow more time for instruction in note taking techniques.

Similar to Earthman's (1992) finding that freshmen adhere to their first impressions of a poem, Dias (1996) observed that without the influence of other readers, an adolescent reader would rely on that initial encounter to determine meaning. However, Dias also noted that students gradually became less

defensive of their own views and more open to other perspectives once exposed to the group sessions. Kaiden's (1998) investigation of social interaction also revealed that a socially interactive environment enabled students to build and refine interpretations of a literary work. These findings corroborate my contention that socially constructing meaning is vital to the process of building interpretation and producing comprehensive readings.

The Fishman and McCarthy (1995) study refutes the expressivist-constructivist distinction in demonstrating that expressivist writing can accommodate the goals of a social-constructivist classroom. I adopted this same combination by employing both the expressivist writing from Reader-Response Theory for my students' Readings One and the communal construction of meaning from the New Rhetoric for their Readings Two. I believe that meaning making begins with the personal voice in isolation but then builds further as part of a multivocal community. As Fishman's students moved from personal viewpoint to communal, they learned to tolerate multiple perspectives, to identify with others' views, to clarify or modify their beliefs, and to achieve social cohesion through trust.

I observed that these same communal behaviors emerging from their study were also evident in the behaviors of my students. My subcategories under Points of Agreement and Points of Difference corroborate these behaviors. My students used others' viewpoints to clarify or support their own and to alter their interpretations. They accepted alternate views as viable or showed partial agreement with them. When disagreeing with other perspectives, they exhibited tolerance and respect for the originators to maintain social cohesion.

On Fishman and McCarthy's (1995) continuum of liberal and communitarian viewpoint extremes, I used a liberal emphasis in terms of students' earning grades, or achieving independent ends. And the communitarian emphasis was evident in their cooperation and commitment to group inquiry. Unlike Fishman, I made grading a part of the process and did not efface my authority as instructor. I insisted that my students move from personal response and social discourse to academic discourse for their Readings Two by their incorporating dialectical reasoning from the class sessions and by their discussing the poems as literature, with references to literary conventions. I could not, as did Fishman, rely solely on the intrinsic rewards of students' personal expression and commitment to shared inquiry in motivating them to do their best work.

Conclusions

I believe I have achieved the purpose of my study by identifying, describing, and demonstrating my students' meaning-making processes as they interpreted and discussed the poems. In delineating the categories to reflect these processes, I have illustrated how Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric work in combination to enable students to develop comprehensive readings of poetry. By writing interpretations independently and then participating in a communal discussion, students have the opportunity of writing in the expressivist mode for Readings One and in the social-constructivist mode for Readings Two, the latter requiring a synthesis of ideas similar to that accommodating research. Accordingly, students rethink and

reflect on their initial readings to further their understanding of the poems over time, producing fuller, richer second readings than if required to write only one composition on a poem without the influence of other perspectives.

As a result of this study, I have acquired more awareness of the possible thinking behaviors of students and of how students make poems meaningful, both personally and communally. In developing my categories for the meaning-making processes inherent in Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric, I became cognizant of the different ways students could relate to a poem and to each other in discourse communities. The variety of categories and the viability of interpretations represent the quality of student thinking during their construction of meaning. Having these categories of meaning construction for future use will enable me, as well as other professors or researchers, to better understand student work. Critical thinking can be difficult to assess, but with these guidelines, I can target more clearly exactly what behaviors students are displaying. In addition, being aware of the interpretive processes students use will aid me in my teaching poetry interpretation as I can help students similarly become aware of them.

In my former practice of using only class discussion when exploring poetry, I found that not all students would be engaged with the work. I contend the reason is that I did not require them to write an initial response to the poem; therefore, they did not take the time to think about it in depth before class. While in class, very few students would take notes on what was discovered in a whole-class discussion. The only information that students regarded as important was what I had to say about a poem; several would write

that down. I did not witness students transacting with a poem, having a lived-through experience, genuinely identifying with ideas in the poem to the extent I observed in my current study.

The theory-driven method I chose for this study served to focus the students' attention on critically thinking and writing about a poem before discussing it. In this way, the group/class discussions were more productive in preparing students for rethinking their interpretations and for developing a second, more comprehensive composition. I rarely noticed an unengaged student because each already had an interpretation to contribute to the discussion (Reading One) and each was recognized as an equal voice in the communal effort of interpretation. In my former method of teaching, I observed that students would essentially reiterate in their writing the interpretation of a poem that I provided; thereby I was preventing them from exploring, experiencing, and identifying with the poem to construct their own meanings.

In the pre-questionnaire, item number four required the student to describe the type of prior instruction in poetry. Four students indicated that usually the teacher discussed the meaning of poems. One student stated, "We never had any discussions on the poems. The teacher would tell us the meaning and we would remember that for the test."

Implications

When teaching this course in the future, I am considering some possible changes for better accommodating the students' needs. The time frame of three twenty-five minute segments was difficult to manage because of late starts.

Tardy or absent students would interfere with the group formation, and my returning and discussing previous work took more time than anticipated. To use group work time more effectively, students could photocopy the Readings One for each group member so that they could mark important passages without having to take notes. I noticed that the notes on Readings One were not elaborate because students did not have enough time to make them so. This arrangement would allow more time for group discussion and note taking on the conversation, more time for class discussion since group work would not run over, and more chances for me to listen to points being made and offer guidance. In addition, students would have the actual Readings One to work from for developing their Readings Two.

During the unit, a student suggested that the class could also read Readings Two as group work. I see now it is important that students read the final product of their endeavor so that they can observe how others used their ideas. Perhaps during this group work, more controversy would be present when focusing more on points of difference, since Readings Two sometimes reflected a tendency to disagree without the need for social cohesion. Another possible change is to broaden the conversation to include the views of professional critics in the social construction of meaning.

This method of combining Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric can be applied to other genres. Creating a first response to a short story, novel, or play enables the student to engage with the work through accessing parallel associations (prior knowledge, personal experience, imagination, and ideology) as well as through using text evidence. Subsequently, the student synthesizes

this initial response with the communal responses of classmates to create a comprehensive reading of the work. The major difference is that more time would be needed to reread a longer work as compared to rereading poetry in one sitting; consequently, students could initially respond to a story, novel, or play by specified divisions for each class. During group and class discussions over an extended period, students can take notes to build toward a second reading that is a composition which covers the entire work.

Because of my category development, I now have more awareness about the variety of ways students relate to poetry and to each other in discourse communities. The next step seems to be sharing this knowledge not just with colleagues but also with students so that they can metacognitively be aware of their own strategies. If students are more conscious of the thinking processes they use, they might be able to improve their understanding of poetry. In my explanation of the theory base to my classes, I can also include the kinds of meaning-making processes that are possible. Since every setting is different, perhaps the next group of students will demonstrate some of the same categories but also somewhat different categories.

In conclusion, Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric work in combination as a theory base for instruction. By identifying, describing, and demonstrating the meaning-making processes of college freshmen in responding to poetry, I have become more aware of *how* students make poems meaningful. In being able to more clearly define the thinking behaviors of my students, I have gained a better understanding of my students' work and of how I can teach poetry interpretation. In addition, making students aware of the

possible interpretive processes they can use, both individually and communally, might help them to improve their understanding of poetry. This purpose could be demonstrated in another study.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

FORM B

IRB # _____

Date Received in OR _____

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

I. IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT

1. Principal Investigator: Sandra Lee Tompkins
Mailing Address: P. O. Box 434, Madisonville, TN 37354
Phone Number: 423-442-2001, work/423-442-6635, home
E-mail Address: tompkins@hiwassee.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. C. Glennon Rowell, Dean, College of Education
Mailing Address: 341 Claxton Complex
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996
Phone Number: 865-974-2201
E-mail Address: crowell@utk.edu

Department: Theory and Practice in Teacher Education
2. Project Classification: Dissertation
3. Title of Project: Theory Becomes Practice: Combining Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric in Describing the Meaning-Making Processes of College Freshmen as They Respond to Poetry
4. Starting Date: January 16, 2001
5. Estimated Completion Date: March 1, 2001
6. External Funding: NA

II. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the meaning-making processes of college freshmen as they interpret and discuss poetry. In attempting to explain these processes, I will employ Reader-Response Theory (a literary theory) and the New Rhetoric (a rhetorical theory). The reader-response focus is on the individual student's interpretation of a poem; the new rhetorical focus is on students discussing their interpretations in class. I will read the students' first compositions wherein they individually construct meaning, and I will observe students in class as they communally construct meaning and negotiate their interpretations to write up later in a second composition. By studying the meaning-making processes inherent in these theories, I can gain an understanding of how students learn to interpret poetry and how theory translates into practice.

This project is being conducted in partial fulfillment for a doctoral degree at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, the results of which will be included in a doctoral dissertation.

III. DESCRIPTION AND SOURCE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

My research site is a two-year college located in a rural Tennessee town. I am a full-time faculty member teaching freshman composition and American literature at this institution. I have secured written permission to use my classes in the study from the academic dean and the English department chair at this college. The members of my committee have approved my prospectus, and I have obtained approval from my faculty advisor, the Departmental Review Committee, and the department head at The University of Tennessee.

The participants in the study will be students taking Freshman Composition 1020, which includes a unit on introduction to poetry that will last for a six-week period. I intend to use participants from one or two intact classes, depending on spring enrollment. I would like to have about 15 participants, whether all from one class or the classes combined, if together they approximate this total. These students generally have different levels of academic ability, and they come from diverse backgrounds in terms of socio-economic level and ethnicity.

IV. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

I plan to use the methods of qualitative researchers in my investigation. These procedures include participant observation, a collection of artifacts of student writing, field notes from classroom work, written and audiotaped protocols from small-group work, purposive sampling of artifacts and protocols, questionnaires, and member checking.

I intend to act as a full participant observer, being both researcher and professor, for my own classes. I choose a setting that is nonclinical, since I am not investigating students' responses out of the normal context of their learning experiences. The research will involve actual assignments that students normally complete in my freshman composition course. My purpose is to observe the meaning-making processes inherent in the theory base within naturally occurring events. Therefore, I do not intend to include case studies or student interviews, which would place students in a clinical environment where they would receive special attention over those not chosen and where they would be required to devote extra time and effort.

As researcher, I will observe students' individual and communal construction of meaning; as professor, I will provide guidance, instruction, feedback, and evaluation of their written work. The students will be fully aware of my role as researcher and their role as participants in the research. I will clarify that the writing assignments and group discussions are course requirements. The only departures from their normal class routine will be questionnaires and audiotaped discussions for my research. Together, as professor and students, we will employ metacognition in coming to an understanding of how readers construct meaning and how they communicate it through writing.

I will use maximum variation sampling in targeting both typical and divergent data. I project that the data obtained will have transferability because students of different abilities and diverse backgrounds are typically found in freshman classrooms. I will collect samples from my students' compositions and select audiotaped protocols from the small-group discussions to illustrate the processes studied. I will attempt to develop categories of response and student profiles from my data that might be similar to those I have encountered in other research studies.

To help me in understanding my students' responses to poetry, I will administer pre- and post-questionnaires for participants to confidentially report their past experience and instruction in poetry and their current experience from my class. They will word-process their answers (in paragraph form) outside of class and return them to me. I will have the students place their completed questionnaires in an envelope without my being present in the classroom to assure confidentiality. Lastly, my students will act as member checkers in verifying my understanding of their interpretations of poems in the small-group work. As member checkers, they will confirm my repetition of their points made in class so that I can be sure I have understood them correctly and have recorded my field notes accurately. Students may also comment on the underlying theories as we all experience the processes under investigation.

V. SPECIFIC RISKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES

I do not expect the participants to encounter any risks greater than those ordinarily part of a typical college classroom, since they will be experiencing actual assignments and class activities that I normally provide in my

composition classes. Participation is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty. A student can discontinue participation at any time. Furthermore, participation or nonparticipation in the study will in no way influence a student's grade for the poetry unit. The written work of those not participating or those withdrawing will not be used in my study. Furthermore, nonparticipants will be grouped separately and not audiotaped. The original work of students will be returned to them during the normal class routine after grading so as not to disrupt the learning process. Xeroxed copies of their ungraded compositions and the transcribed audiotapes of group work will be analyzed by me for reporting in the dissertation. To assure confidentiality for the students, pseudonyms will be used in the transcriptions of audiotapes and in the writing of my dissertation. Once I have transcribed the audiotapes, I will erase them. If members of my committee wish to review the xeroxed copies of student writing, I will provide copies with student names and any other personal information blacked out. In my attempt to maintain confidentiality, I cannot guarantee that students will not discuss their work outside the classroom with other people. However, students sharing their classroom experiences with others is part of the normal process of learning. At the conclusion of the study, copies of student writing without identifiers, transcriptions of audiotapes, questionnaire responses, and field notes will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet in my faculty office at my institution indefinitely.

VI. BENEFITS

The written assignments and the small-group and whole-class discussions about poetry can help students to develop a comprehensive understanding of poetry and confidence in their abilities as readers and writers. Students will also have the opportunity to experience how theory informs practice as they study their own learning processes in constructing meaning both individually and communally.

VII. METHODS FOR OBTAINING "INFORMED CONSENT" FROM PARTICIPANTS

I will explain the dissertation project to my students, answer any questions they have, and require volunteers to sign an informed consent form prior to their beginning work for the class. I will obtain parental permission for any student under eighteen years of age. A copy of the signed consent form will be provided to each student. All signed consent forms will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet in 341 Claxton Complex, at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, during the period of this research and for three years following its completion, at which time they will be destroyed.

VIII. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATOR TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Education—B. A. in English/Drama from Allegheny College, Meadville, Pennsylvania, 1972; M. A. in English from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1985; Lyndhurst Fellowship, 1986-87; current status, ABD for the Ph.D. in Education at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Teaching experience—fourteen years (two years at the high school level and twelve years at the college level); currently, associate professor of English at Hiwassee College, Madisonville, Tennessee. Research experience—one published study in *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, December 1997; three courses in qualitative research at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville: Introduction to Qualitative Research in Education 560, Ethnographic Research Methods in Education 660, and Special Topics 695: Naturalistic Inquiry.

IX. FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT TO BE USED IN THE RESEARCH

I will use a classroom at my institution, tape recorders supplied by its library, and a xerox copier in the faculty work area. I will securely store student work, audiotapes, transcriptions, questionnaire responses, and field notes at my home or faculty office in locked file cabinets as I work with the data. Upon completion of the study, these items will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet in my faculty office at my institution indefinitely.

X. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

By compliance with the policies established by the Institutional Review Board of The University of Tennessee the principal investigator subscribes to the principles stated in "The Belmont Report" and standards of professional ethics in all research, development, and related activities involving human subjects under the auspices of The University of Tennessee. The principal investigator further agrees that:

1. Approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board prior to instituting any change in this research project.
2. Development of any unexpected risks will be immediately reported to the Research Compliance Services Section.
3. An annual review and progress report (Form R) will be completed and submitted when requested by the Institutional Review Board.
4. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for the duration of the project and for at least three years thereafter at a location approved by the Institutional Review Board.

XI. SIGNATURES

Principal Investigator: Sandra Lee Tompkins

Signature _____ Date _____

Student Advisor: Dr. C. Glennon Rowell

Signature _____ Date _____

XII. DEPARTMENT REVIEW AND APPROVAL

The application described above has been reviewed by the IRB departmental review committee and has been approved. The DRC further recommends that this application be reviewed as:

OR
☒ Expedited Review – Category(ies): _____
☐ Full IRB Review

Chair, DRC: Dr. Lawrence J. Coleman

Signature _____ Date _____

Department Head: Dr. Lester N. Knight

Signature _____ Date _____

Protocol sent to Research Compliance Services Section for final approval on (Date) _____

Approved:
Research Compliance Services Section
Office of Research
404 Andy Holt Tower

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B

GUIDELINES FOR READING AND WRITING ABOUT POETRY**Reading poetry is a process of exploration.**

A reading of a poem is a composition that reflects your personal response as you live through the experience in the poem; the composition also reflects your thinking process in interpreting the significance of the poem. In giving a reading, you are engaged in meaning making, bringing your own prior knowledge and experience to make the poem meaningful in addition to recognizing how the poetic elements contribute to the poem's theme(s).

Meaning making can be socially constructed.

The knowledge and experience other members of the class bring to the poem can become part of your own understanding.

The process of exploration is recursive and cumulative.

A reader constructs meaning as he or she moves back and forth through the poem, recalling previous knowledge about the subject, encountering new information, making associations, and modifying interpretation. The reader can modify interpretation by rereading, reflecting, and accumulating meaning over time through different reading events, which are individual readings of the poem at different times as well as reading the poem again in the group discussions. During the social construction of meaning, members of the group (discourse community) bring their own views together and argue their points of difference and points of agreement in moving towards consensus about viable readings—possible interpretations for the poem that can be defended.

Reading One and Reading Two: Format Guidelines

You will read and respond to ten poems assigned, providing one reading for each poem. As our poetry unit progresses, you will select three of these poems for which you will write a second reading. For the second reading you will incorporate the views of other students that you recorded as notes from the small-group work and whole class discussions.

Both Reading One and Two must be word processed, using 12-point type (no larger than the type on this page), double spacing, and one-inch margins top and bottom/left and right. Your readings should follow the standards for well-written compositions that you learned in Freshman Composition 1010.

At the top right-hand corner, single space and place your name, date, poem title, and reading number (One or Two). For subsequent pages, place your last name and page number in the upper right-hand corner.

After finishing the heading, switch to double spacing, and begin your composition. Reading One should be 1½ pages and Reading Two, 2½ to 3 pages.

When quoting more than one line from a poem, use the slash / with a space on either side of it to separate the different lines. Always use the present tense when discussing or writing about a poem.

Example from “Ethics” by Linda Pastan

Linda Patan expresses the theme of this poem in the last three lines: “I know now that woman / and painting and season are almost one / and all beyond saving by children.”

GUIDELINES FOR THE READINGS

Reading One: Read the poem several times at one sitting. In your composition, describe the imagery—what you see happening in the poem—including as many details as you can picture. Notice whether the images form a pattern. Also notice the diction (word choice) to determine what significance certain words have in the poem. Directly quote from passages to illustrate your findings. In addition, provide examples of other poetic elements as you receive instruction: metaphor, simile, symbol, allusion, structure, meter, rhyme, and sound. You may include any personal response you might have as you live through the experience of the poem; for example, the subject of the poem could remind you of some person or event in your own life.

Reading Two: Again read the poem several times in one sitting. Select passages from Reading One that you believe are still valid and describe any additional details, insights, poetic elements, or changes in your thinking or personal response that you discover. As meaning is also socially constructed, this reading must include observations from classmates given in your small-group or whole-class discussions. Acknowledge their contributions to your understanding of the poem by mentioning their names (first names only) as you relate their views to your own in negotiating your points of difference and points of agreement to arrive at a comprehensive interpretation for the poem.

Example passage:

John sees the persona in “Ethics” as a sad woman. He states, “This woman seems really sad because she can’t find any joy in the painting.” John bases this view on the woman’s repetition of how dark the scene is. I disagree with

this interpretation, for the diction of the poem does not relate any emotion other than frustration as seen in the words “restless” and “half-heartedly.” But I do agree with Tammy’s idea that the woman could be using sarcasm to express this frustration with how children are taught, especially when the persona states, “all beyond saving by children.”

APPENDIX C

Consent to Participate in a Research Project

I am conducting this research project to complete the requirements for my dissertation as part of the degree program for the Ph.D. in Education at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the meaning-making processes of college freshmen as they interpret and discuss poetry. In attempting to explain these processes, I will employ Reader-Response Theory (a literary theory) and the New Rhetoric (a composition theory). By studying the meaning-making processes inherent in these theories, I can gain an understanding of how students learn to interpret poetry and how theory becomes practice.

The duration of the study is a six-week unit on introduction to poetry as a part of the course Freshman Composition 1020 during the spring semester 2001. Your participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty, and you can discontinue participation at any time. In addition, participation or nonparticipation in the study will in no way influence the grade you earn for this unit. If you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the project, I will not use your work for this unit in the dissertation.

I do not expect any risks to you, the participants, greater than those ordinarily part of a typical college classroom, since you will be experiencing actual assignments and class activities that I normally provide in my composition course. I will be careful that my study of your work does not interfere with the guidance and instruction I ordinarily provide as your instructor.

As students in Freshman Composition 1020 fulfilling the course requirements for the poetry unit, you will write one composition about each poem we study and a second composition for selected poems after you have discussed the poems with classmates in a small group. During the small-group discussions, you will write notes from the interpretations of classmates to incorporate in this second composition about a poem. I will return both compositions to you during the normal class routine after grading is completed.

As participants in this research project, you will confidentially complete a pre- and post-questionnaire to inform me about your past experience and instruction in poetry and your current experience in my class. The other activities associated with this project are part of the normal routine for this unit on poetry, that is, writing compositions and participating in small-group discussions. The only other departures from routine besides the questionnaires will be my taking notes on your group discussions and my audiotaping some of these discussions.

For my research project, I will make xerox copies of your writing before grading so that I can make a close study of the meaning-making processes after I return the graded compositions. The grades you earn for the compositions are not a part of the study. These copies of your writing will be kept securely in a locked file cabinet at my home or faculty office. If members of my doctoral committee wish to review the xerox copies, I will provide copies with student names and any other personal information blacked out.

Another part of the research project is my observing and taking notes on the small-group discussions as you negotiate the meaning of poems. I will be careful that my note taking does not interfere with the guidance and instruction I normally provide in the classroom. Several of these discussions will be audiotaped so that I can further study your interactions at a later time. I will place those not wishing to participate in the study in a separate group, which will not be audiotaped. I will erase the tapes once I have completed the transcriptions, in which I will use pseudonyms to assure confidentiality. Furthermore, I will use pseudonyms in writing about this research in my dissertation, both for the compositions and the audiotaped group work.

At the conclusion of the study, questionnaire responses, copies of student writing without identifiers, transcriptions of audiotapes, and my notes from observing class discussions will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet in my faculty office indefinitely.

If at any time you have questions about this research project, you can contact me by E-mail (tompkins@hiwassee.edu), by phone (423-442-2001, ext. 1840), or by making an appointment to see me (BLC Suite 1, Office A).

Signing this consent form will indicate that you agree to participate in the study and that I may use the data from your work for this unit in my dissertation. In addition, you give consent for my presenting the dissertation project at conferences and in journal articles.

A copy of the signed consent form will be provided to each student. All original signed consent forms will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet in 341 Claxton Complex, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, during the period of this research and for three years following its completion, at which time they will be destroyed.

I give my consent to participate in this research project.

Signature

Date

Principal Investigator: Sandra Lee Tompkins
Dissertation Title: Theory Becomes Practice: Combining Reader-Response
Theory and the New Rhetoric in Describing the Meaning-Making Processes of
College Freshmen as They Respond to Poetry

APPENDIX D

Preliminary Poetry Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to provide background information on your experience with poetry so that I can understand your views about this genre and become aware of your needs in preparing my instruction.

Please word-process your answers to the following questions, being careful to number each one separately. Write in complete sentences and provide at least one paragraph for each answer.

Type the date and course/section number in the right-hand corner.
DO NOT include your name.

Please return this questionnaire by _____.

1. Describe your feelings about poetry.
2. Name any poets or poems you read and enjoy and explain why you like them.
3. For how many school years have you been required to study poetry as you progressed through elementary, middle, and high school?
4. Describe the class activities and type of instruction you experienced in learning poetry in elementary, middle, high school, or in college. Did you experience teacher-directed discussions and/or small-group work? Any other kinds of activities?
5. Describe your experience in writing about poetry. What kinds of writing assignments were you required to do? For example: Journal responses and/or essays. Any other types of writing?
6. How would you rank your confidence in reading and interpreting poetry?
Very High, High, Average, Low, Very Low.
7. Do you read poetry when not required to do so for a course?

Post Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to provide information on your experience with poetry in this course so that I can understand your present view of poetry and your view of the theories that support our study of poetry.

Please word-process your answers to the following questions, being careful to number each one separately. Write in complete sentences and provide at least one paragraph for each answer.

Type the date and course/section number in the right-hand corner.
DO NOT include your name.

Please return this questionnaire by _____.

1. Describe your current feelings about poetry.
2. Name poets or poems you have read and enjoyed in this class and explain why you like them.
3. Describe your experience with the small-group work, class discussions, and my instruction for this poetry unit. What did you enjoy most? What changes do you suggest for the next time I teach this course?
4. Describe your experience in writing about poetry during this unit (Readings One and Two).
5. Describe your view of Reader-Response Theory and the New Rhetoric as in how these theories influenced your understanding of poetry.
6. How would you rank your confidence in reading and interpreting poetry at this time? Very High, High, Average, Low, Very Low.
7. Will you continue to read poetry when not required to do so for a course?

APPENDIX E

The Poems

“A Blessing” by James Wright

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies
Darken with kindness.
They have come gladly out of the willows
To welcome my friend and me.
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness
That we have come.
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.
There is no loneliness like theirs.
At home once more,
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.
I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,
For she has walked over to me
And nuzzled my left hand.
She is black and white,
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,
And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear
That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.
Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped out of my body I would break
Into blossom.

“Saint Francis and the Sow” by Galway Kinnell

The bud
stands for all things,
even for those things that don't flower,
for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;
though sometimes it is necessary
to reteach a thing its loveliness,
to put a hand on its brow
of the flower
and retell it in words and in touch
it is lovely
until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing;
as Saint Francis
put his hand on the creased forehead
of the sow, and told her in words and in touch
blessings of earth on the sow, and the sow
began remembering all down her thick length,
from the earthen snout all the way
through the fodder and slops to the spiritual curl of the tail,
from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine
down through the great broken heart
to the sheer blue milken dreaminess spurting and shuddering
from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking and
blowing beneath them:
the long, perfect loveliness of sow.

"The Unknown Citizen" by W. H. Auden

(To JS/07/M/378 This Marble Monument Is Erected by the State)

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.
Except for the War till the day he retired
He worked in a factory and never got fired
But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)
And our Social Psychology workers found
That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.
The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day
And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.
Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,
And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.
Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare
He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Installment Plan
And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,
A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.
Our researchers into Public Opinion are content
That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;
When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war, he went.
He was married and added five children to the population,
Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation.
And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.

Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

"anyone lived in a pretty how town" by e. e. cummings

anyone lived in a pretty how town
 (with up so floating many bells down)
 spring summer autumn winter
 he sang his didn't he danced his did.

Women and men(both little and small)
 cared for anyone not at all
 they sowed their isn't they reaped their same
 sun moon stars rain

children guessed(but only a few
 and down they forgot as up they grew
 autumn winter spring summer)
 that noone loved him more by more

when by now and tree by leaf
 she laughed his joy she cried his grief
 bird by snow and stir by still
 anyone's any was all to her

someones married their everyones
 laughed their cryings and did their dance
 (sleep wake hope and then)they
 said their nevers they slept their dream

stars rain sun moon
 (and only the snow can begin to explain
 how children are apt to forget to remember
 with up so floating many bells down)

one day anyone died i guess
 (and noone stooped to kiss his face)
 busy folk buried them side by side
 little by little and was by was

all by all and deep by deep
 and more by more they dream their sleep
 noone and anyone earth by april
 wish by spirit and if by yes.

Women and men(both dong and ding)
 summer autumn winter spring
 reaped their sowing and went their came
 sun moon stars rain

“Facing It” by Yusef Komunyakaa

My black face fades,
hiding inside the black granite.
I said I wouldn't,
dammit: No tears.
I'm stone. I'm flesh.
My clouded reflection eyes me
like a bird of prey, the profile of night
slanted against morning. I turn
this way—the stone lets me go.
I turn that way—I'm inside
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial
again, depending on the light
to make a difference.
I go down the 58,022 names,
half-expecting to find
my own in letters like smoke.
I touch the name Andrew Johnson;
I see the booby trap's white flash.
Names shimmer on a woman's blouse
but when she walks away
the names stay on the wall.
Brushstrokes flash, a red bird's
wings cutting across my stare.
The sky. A plane in the sky.
A white vet's image floats
closer to me, then his pale eyes
look through mine. I'm a window.
He's lost his right arm
inside the stone. In the black mirror
a woman's trying to erase names:
No, she's brushing a boy's hair.

"This Is a Photograph of Me" by Margaret Atwood

It was taken some time ago.
At first it seems to be
a smeared
print: blurred lines and grey flecks
blended with the paper;
then, as you scan
it, you see in the left-hand corner
a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree
(balsam or spruce) emerging
and, to the right, halfway up
what ought to be a gentle
slope, a small frame house.

In the background there is a lake,
and beyond that, some low hills.

(The photograph was taken
the day after I drowned.

I am in the lake, in the center
of the picture, just under the surface.

It is difficult to say where
precisely, or to say
how large or small I am:
the effect of water
on light is a distortion
but if you look long enough,
eventually
you will be able to see me.)

"Her Kind" by Anne Sexton

I have gone out, a possessed witch,
haunting the black air, braver at night;
dreaming evil, I have done my hitch
over the plain houses, light by light:
lonely thing, twelve-fingered, out of mind.
A woman like that is not a woman, quite.
I have been her kind.

I have found the warm caves in the woods,
filled them with skillets, carvings, shelves,
closets, silks, innumerable goods;
fixed the suppers for the worms and the elves:
whining, rearranging the disaligned.
A woman like that is misunderstood.
I have been her kind.

I have ridden in your cart, driver,
waved my nude arms at villages going by,
learning the last bright routes, survivor
where your flames still bite my thigh
and my ribs crack where your wheels wind.
A woman like that is not ashamed to die.
I have been her kind.

“Ego Tripping” by Nikki Giovanni

(THERE MAY BE A REASON WHY)

I was born in the congo
 I walked to the fertile crescent and built
 the sphinx
 I designed a pyramid so tough that a star
 that only glows every one hundred years falls
 into the center giving divine perfect light
 I am bad

I sat on the throne
 drinking nectar with allah
 I got hot and sent an ice age to europe
 to cool my thirst
 My oldest daughter is nefertiti
 the tears from my birth pains
 created the nile
 I am a beautiful woman

I gazed on the forest and burned
 out the sahara desert
 with a packet of goat's meat
 and a change of clothes
 I crossed it in two hours
 I am a gazelle so swift
 so swift you can't catch me

For a birthday present when he was three
 I gave my son hannibal an elephant
 He gave me rome for mother's day
 My strength flows ever on

My son noah built new/ark and
 I stood proudly at the helm
 as we sailed on a soft summer day
 I turned myself into myself and was
 jesus
 men intone my loving name
 All praises All praises
 I am the one who would save

I sowed diamonds in my back yard
 My bowels deliver uranium
 the filings from my fingernails are
 semi-precious jewels

On a trip north
I caught a cold and blew
My nose giving oil to the arab world
I am so hip even my errors are correct
I sailed west to reach east and had to round off
the earth as I went
The hair from my head thinned and gold was laid
across three continents
I am so perfect so divine so ethereal so surreal
I cannot be comprehended
except by my permission

I mean . . . I . . . can fly
like a bird in the sky . . .

"Two Hands" by Anne Sexton

From the sea came a hand,
ignorant as a penny,
troubled with the salt of its mother,
mute with the silence of the fishes,
quick with the altars of the tides,
and God reached out of His mouth
and called it man.

Up came the other hand
and God called it woman.
The hands applauded.
And this was no sin.
It was as it was meant to be.

I see them roaming the streets:
Levi complaining about his mattress,
Sarah studying a beetle,
Mandrake holding his coffee mug,
Sally playing the drum at a football game,
John closing the eyes of the dying woman,
and some who are in prison,
even the prison of their bodies,
as Christ was prisoned in His body
until the triumph came.

Unwind, hands,
you angel webs,
unwind like the coil of a jumping jack,
cup together and let yourselves fill up with sun
and applaud, world,
applaud.

VITA

Sandra Lee Tompkins received her Bachelor of Arts in English from Allegheny College, Meadville, Pennsylvania, in 1972. After working in publishing and advertising for several years, she returned to academia to earn her Master of Arts in English from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, completing the degree in 1985. During the 1986-87 academic year, she was awarded a Lyndhurst Fellowship from the College of Education at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, to obtain teacher certification in secondary education. After teaching in the high school for two years and one year at The University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, she took a position at Hiwassee College, Madisonville, Tennessee, in August 1989. She taught study skills and developmental English for the first two years and subsequently has taught freshman composition and American literature at this institution, reaching the present tenured rank of associate professor of English. In August 1993, she entered the Ph.D. program in education at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and received the doctorate in December 2001.

She has two published articles: "How Does a Reader Make a Poem Meaningful? Reader-Response Theory and the Poetry Portfolio" in Teaching English in the Two-Year College, December 1997, and "Is Learning Really a Result of Teaching? An Exploration of Alternative Theories and Structures for Effective Classrooms" in Tennessee Education, Fall 1994.