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A Didactics of Cultural Readings

ABSTRACT

This article makes a case for the effectiveness of using imitation-style teaching as a way to introduce how to write theoretically informed pieces of literary or media criticism to undergraduates. By making a case for the relevance of teaching this form of criticism in the undergraduate classroom, as well as exploring exactly how imitation-style teaching can be used to teach this skill, this article argues that teachers can fruitfully study closely with students pieces of literary criticism in the undergraduate classroom. The article argues that this teaching practice is able to live up to the idea of "transparent performance expectations," one of didactician Hilbert Meyer's 10 central criteria for good teaching.

KEYWORDS

cultural reading, close reading, transparent performance expectations, imitation, literary studies

INTRODUCTION

In 2008 literary scholars Randy Bass and Sherry Lee Linkon wrote that "[m]ost literary scholarship interrogates texts through the lens of theory [and that] a dialogue between theory and textual evidence lies at the heart of this enterprise" (Bass and Linkon 2008, 250–51). In that same year, literary scholar Rita Felski noted that the "practice of close reading is tacitly viewed by literary scholars as the mark of their tribe" (Felski 2008, 52). These comments point out two norms that profoundly shape the field of literary studies, but, in terms of teaching, it seems that the interrelationship between these two ambitions represents what some scholars—within the field of Decoding the Disciplines—refer to as a "bottleneck." The fact that one aspect of academic competence is an ability to discuss a field's scholarly norms provides ample motivation for teaching this connection to undergraduates.

Historian and didactics scholar David Pace (2021) argues that it is pivotal that teachers explore so-called "bottlenecks to learning," which he defines as "those places in courses where significant numbers of students have difficulty performing essential tasks" (2). Given how close reading is a central norm in the field and how it is commonplace to examine "texts through the lens of theory," in Bass and Linkon's (2008, 250) words, we are looking at two skill sets that many teachers and scholars see as pivotal to the field but which can be difficult for novice undergraduates to master, especially when they are trying to live up to both of these goals at the same time.

The purpose of this article is to discuss how university instructors can teach students how to explore the technicalities, intricacies, and nuances of textual expression (i.e. how to do close reading) while, at the same time, connecting this endeavor to the import of insights and vocabularies from other scholarly fields, such as sociology or human geography (i.e. to use theory in analytical work). This teaching practice should facilitate an understanding and appreciation of the connection between form and content in a way that shows students how readings of texts can productively be informed by vocabularies culled from other academic fields. Put briefly, I will argue that the principles of imitation-

style teaching and learning offers a promising answer to how university teachers can productively teach the interrelationship between, on the one hand, employing theory and, on the other hand, doing close reading.

Originally championed by literary critic I.A. Richards in the UK and forwarded in the US context by the New Critics, close reading refers to the detailed scrutiny of textual detail including "the use of concrete, specific examples from the text itself to validate our interpretations." This tradition has come to shape literary studies as a whole to the point that close reading "has been a standard method of high school and college instruction in literary studies for the past several decades" (Tyson 2006, 135).

Felski argues that close reading permeates literary studies in its various forms: "Academic fashions come and go, but sharply honed attentiveness to nuances of language and form is still held, by most scholars and teachers of literature, as an indispensable sign of competence in the field" (Felski 2008, 52). Felski's central point here is that while literary scholars may have different approaches to the study of literary texts, they all share this "mark of their tribe." In other words, having a "sharply honed attentiveness to nuances of language and form" is central to being competent in this field. It is a *sine qua non* of studying literature.

Over the years, English studies has come to encompass cultural studies and media studies, but close reading nevertheless continues to loom large in the field. Richard Hoggart, a central figure in the foundational discussions about cultural studies, once wrote, "unless you know how these things [literary texts] work as art, even though some-times as 'bad art,' what you say about them will not cut very deep" (Hoggart 1970, 257). This argument for the importance of understanding the literary properties of a work shows that his vision for cultural studies also embraces close reading as a central concern. In other words, what was once a New Critical idea is now an idea that informs several of the subfields of English studies. In this way, Felski is right in remarking that close reading "simply is [. . .] what we do around here" (Felski 2008, 52).

In this article, I aim to show how we can productively teach the connection between close reading and the analytical use of theory in the undergraduate classroom. I argue how one may illustrate this point to students by sometimes focusing classroom work not on the (literary or audiovisual) texts that represent the object of one's field of study, but rather on discussing literary criticism or television/film criticism in a way that rhetoricians call "imitation." To this end, I draw on German didactician Hilbert Meyer's concept of *transparent performance expectation*, which is one of his 10 criteria for good teaching. Meyer's basic yet crucial point is that students need to be able to decipher what their teachers expect of them, if they are to perform well in any educational setting (Meyer 2005, 109–15). Therefore, the middle part of this essay is an example of a reading of Langston's Hughes 1926 poem "I, Too"[1] read through the lens of transnationalism. The final part of the article discusses how classroom activity can benefit from studying such a piece of literary criticism in an effort to show students what it is we, as teachers, expect of their exam papers. What I am proposing here is to demonstrate what I call a didactics of cultural reading. This didactics focuses on teaching textual analysis in a way that is attentive to the close reading of textual minutiae, while also being founded in a cultural concept imported from outside traditional literary studies or media studies.

Hilbert Meyer (b. 1941) is a German teacher and didactics scholar who, among other ideas, is famous for his 10 principles for good teaching, which were originally developed for primary school teaching but which, in my view, are also relevant for more advanced learning environments. It is not just his concept of transparent performance expectation that is relevant to university instruction. He also

calls for teachers to provide content clarity in the sense that teachers should be clear in communicating what the learners have to do in a given task, and he advises teachers to vary teaching activities (Meyer 2005, 109–15).

The arguments I set forth in this article mainly extend from Scandinavian and German scholarship (especially that of Christian Kock and Hilbert Meyer). I believe that this scholarship addresses concerns that have also been examined in the field of Decoding the Disciplines as proposed and developed by David Pace (2017, 2021), Christiane Metzger and Andrea Brose (2020), Kristina MacPherson (2015) and others. Pace explains how he and other scholars developed the field of Decoding the Disciplines because they wanted to better understand the challenges that students were facing. They found that some teachers become "so accustomed to performing the basic tasks in their disciplines that crucial steps in the process have become invisible to them and, thus, are not taught" (Pace 2021, 2). It seems that the connection between close reading and theory-driven interpretation can easily become "invisible" in teaching, making it a key "bottleneck" for many undergraduate students. We should therefore devote explicit attention to this exact challenge. This would be a way of attending to the challenge that Peter Riegler refers to as "curse of expertise," which arises "when teachers have automated important discipline-specific thought patterns to such an extent that they cannot explicate them" (Riegler 2020, 5).

Imitation exercises are fruitful in explicating writing norms in classroom discussions. This could, for instance, include discussing how a well-written piece of literary criticism succinctly sets up a quote, or how it introduces and later discusses another scholar's argument, or how it argues a point that is satisfying in terms of taxonomic levels, or something else entirely. Being well-versed in the imitation-style way of reading may even equip students with the skills needed for deciphering the written conventions of a scholarly discipline, even if their teachers do not fully succeed in communicating these norms and expectations adequately. This can be a way of "making explicit what students must learn to do to overcome" as Pace argues (Pace 2021, 2).

Paul Gutjahr notes that "failure to understand the basic project of literary analysis is a major bottleneck to student success" (Ardizzone, Breithaupt, and Gutjahr 2004, 50). The potential of this approach can be that if students become good at decoding literary criticism (or any form of scholarship for that matter) using the "imitation way," they can potentially become able to challenge and ask their teachers in-depth questions that will give way for productive discussions that can clarify the ideas and norms in the field that might otherwise remain tacit knowledge. Imitation exercises can become a concrete opportunity to discuss the tacit norms in the field with students, which can lead to discussions of how the scholarly norms of a field are intertwined with the norms of writing in that field.

THEORY-DRIVEN READINGS

There must, of course, be a point to incorporating theories or insights from other fields into the study of literature or film. The motivation for incorporating such theories is the added payoff of opening textual analysis up to considerations that otherwise would be difficult to unfold. The purpose is to open up dimensions in texts that are difficult to articulate without bringing to the text a vocabulary or conceptual distinction that is not in the text to begin with. This "imported vocabulary" affords the possibility of exploring otherwise non-obvious routes of inquiry. Such theoretical insights allow the analytical drive to come from a conceptual, rather than an observational, starting point.

A good example of "applying" theory to a text is media scholar Erlend Lavik's (2014) use of Bakhtin's scholarship, which he uses to explore how *The Wire*'s realism is intertwined with its dialogic

form. The strength of Lavik's use of Bakhtin lies in how he shows how the serial engenders a world of contradictory perspectives. Lavik argues that a dialogic text's presentation of points of view that contradict each other helps viewers develop a better understanding of themselves and other people. Noting that it is not interesting to conclude merely whether a text is dialogic or monologic, Lavik points out that the payoff of such an analysis lies in the attentive observations required for such an analytical approach (Lavik 2014, 153–54). Lavik's analysis opens up our understanding of this serial in a way that is almost only possible to arrive at by exploring the text through Bakhtin's ideas alone.

But that much is to be expected, given the fact that Bakhtin's thoughts are supposed to be applied to texts; his theories are textual theories and, in that sense, Lavik's use of Bakhtin here only serves as an example of what the application of theory may yield. It is an example of the productiveness of applying a theoretical vocabulary in the close reading of a text. This example thus only takes us one step of the way; theory is useful in informing close reading. But what about the productiveness of using a theory that is not a textual theory?

Literary scholar Bent Sørensen's application (2015) of Marc Augé's concept of non-places to Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* (1991) is a productive point of reference here. Non-places are places like shopping malls and airport terminals that do not give a feeling of place. They do not provide "the scene of an experience of relations with the world on the part of a being essentially situated 'in relation to a milieu'" (Augé 1995, 80). With this theoretical argument as a starting point, Sørensen notes how the characters of *Generation X* are employed at generic non-places like lobby bars and shopping malls, and that the "condo units they inhabit in their time off work are also non-places, pre-furnished housing-units rather than homes" (Sørensen 2015, 96). The narrator even believes that "where you are from feels sort of irrelevant these days" (Coupland 1991, 4). Sørensen, however, argues that "place is not so easily done away with, since it leaves this residue of having to be mentioned" (Sørensen 2015, 98). Sørensen fuses an attention for textual detail with a theoretical interest from Augé, resulting in a reading that is able to extend further than if Sørensen not used Augé's anthropological insights.

Though Lavik and Sørensen demonstrate some of the strengths of exploring a text through a specific textual or cultural lens, there are, of course, other, less successful, applications of theory in readings of literary or audiovisual works. Lavik argues that academic textual analyses are premised too often on "applying" a theoretical concept on a text—"by force, if necessary"— in the hope that some of the prestige associated with the highbrow intellectual (e.g. Foucault) will rub off on the object of analysis (Lavik 2014, 156). Media scholar Steen Christiansen (2004) argues that such readings come with a certain pitfall. When students "apply" insights from theoretical texts to the fictional texts that often are the subjects of their papers, the result is sometimes that the text in some way verifies the theory, which makes for a rather reductionist form of readings:

> Analysis must always be more than a testing ground for theory, or a form of verification which shows that the theory was correct. This way of using theory can only be acceptable from students who are learning how to use the codes of theory and analysis, and of texts themselves. Such a way of using analysis would stultify it; drain it of any value it possesses. (Christiansen 2004, 232)

In other words, it is crucial for teachers to communicate to students that a theoretical inspiration can help open up a text. But it is also of vital importance that their analytical argument extends beyond showing that the fictional text in question shares some common ground with some cultural theory.

In a similar fashion, American studies scholar Frank Kelleter (2014) argues that there is no analytical outcome in seeing how one text "mirrors" the point made by a theorist such as Foucault. He suggests that readings that identify how a theoretical text by a thinker like Foucault and a narrative text function on the premise that one offers a philosophical truth and the object of analysis plays "out the philosophy's maxim as story" (Kelleter 2014, 52). Kelleter argues that this form of analysis needs to attend to "the terms and conditions of this affinity" (Kelleter 2014, 52). It needs to explore the textual details that go beyond "a form of verification which shows that the theory was correct" as Christiansen argues (Christiansen 2004, 232).

To find such intellectual similarities between the content of a work of literature and the thoughts of a theorist is only interesting if it is qualified and elaborated by sophisticated close reading. Pointing out similarities in the way that Christiansen and Kelleter describe may well represent a fruitful starting point of analysis. But it is only by connecting these general observations to the practice of close reading that such claims can become analytically interesting. Here Lavik and Sørensen's readings serve as good examples of how an overall theoretical starting point can be qualified and made interesting through close reading.

Lavik makes a good methodological point about the use of theory for interpretative purposes when he writes that it makes more sense to think of Bakhtin's notion of polyphony as a paintbrush rather than a text processing program: "The use value is not given beforehand and is not the same for all uses, but depends on the skills of the user" (Lavik 2014, 154). In other words, the "application" of a theory does not yield anything by itself, but it is contingent on the critic's analytical craftsmanship. This argument is particularly relevant for discussing how we, as teachers, communicate to students what we want our students to do when they "apply theory to texts." I believe this can fruitfully be done through a teaching style based on the principles of imitation.

IMITATION STYLE TEACHING, CLOSE READING, AND TEXTUAL PRODUCTION

Classical rhetorical didactics contains four elements: the student's natural talent (*natura*), the advice offered by rhetoric (*ars*), practical exercises (*usus*), and reading good writing with the intent purpose of learning about reading and writing (*imitatio*) (Kock and Onsberg 2009, 251–52). It is this fourth category that I believe is productive in trying to unpack for our students the expectations we as teachers have of them and their papers. The productiveness of this concept is linked to how we should create a strong(er) link between teaching how to analyze texts and how to write such analyses. According to rhetorician Christian Kock, much teaching fails to link analytical classroom work with the students' ongoing work of improving their writing skills. It becomes the teacher's task to ensure that students are able to take the skills and insights they acquire and train in the classroom and put them to use in their written work. Imitation teaching can help link students' acquisition of analytical skills with the written presentation of them. This form of teaching links the skills and insights from literary or media analysis with the craftsmanship and genre understanding of academic writing. This, in other words, is a way of responding to this bottleneck in learning.

Indeed, Kock argues that classroom work geared towards imitation-style teaching is a possibility for teachers and students to draw connections between oral and written work. Connecting written work

with classroom discussions is highly central to this teaching approach. The core principle of imitation teaching is that students—through reading and discussing a particular text—focus on what they can learn from that text in relation to becoming more accomplished writers themselves. It is thus something different than the thematic or poetological reading of literature where a classroom discussion explores particular texts with the intention of understanding their "message" or form. Imitation does not focus on the content of the texts in question but rather on how successful the texts in question are in conveying that content. And seeing as students are more likely to write more critical essays than short stories and poems in the course of pursuing an English degree, it certainly makes sense that time is spent delving more closely into what the virtues are in writing literary criticism (Kock 2013, 104).

It then follows that teaching, according to the principles of imitation, can be one way of living up to Meyer's notion of transparent performance expectations, which stress the importance of enabling students to be able to figure out what teachers expect of them. Meyer qualifies this term by distinguishing between how well teachers communicate the task they give students and how well the teacher is able to communicate the norms with which the teacher will assess student performance. According to Meyer, this makes for more fair assessments of students' performance, because the students know in greater detail the criteria by which their writing will be assessed. The time students spend on writing essays becomes more productive when they are able to decipher the standards correctly that their writing will be assessed with. In this way, teachers will potentially enable students to maximize the learning output of the time they put into writing their papers. Students will be able to focus their intellectual energies on the task at hand, potentially leading to a more productive learning environment. Students are more likely to commit to an educational experience when they feel that they are not misled in their efforts to perform well (Meyer 2005, 112). This, then, can facilitate students' gradual process of deciphering what codes are in the specific academic community that they, in a sense, are being gradually admitted into during the course of their university studies.

This effort, however, comes with strong implications for what we as teachers mean when we say that we are teaching our students to become better writers. Kock argues that one tradition of understanding the activity of "writing" focuses more on writing down, which is to say that writing is seen as the "mere" textualization of ideas and arguments the writer already has arrived at through previous reading and thinking. In this sense, writing becomes the materialization of a mental product that existed prior to the actual task of writing. This surely represents a reductive view of writing that does not allow for considering how a writer's thinking develops as she puts pen to paper. Writing, then, is reduced to the more "superficial" aspects of academic writing, like orthography, punctuation, the proper use of referencing literature, etc. Kock argues that it is possible to conceive of writing in such narrow terms. But he also notes that that view on writing relegates an array of writing skills—that any undergraduate in the humanities needs —to a no-man's-land of teaching, neither picked up in the textual analysis classroom or in courses on academic writing (Kock 1998, 66–67). In Kock's view, then, some of the skills of writing literary analysis fall between two stools. Some skills are not integrated in the literary/media studies classroom and are often not covered by courses in academic writing, which has its own curriculum to cover regarding paragraphing, topic sentences, referencing systems, argumentative coherence, etc. It is for these reasons that I believe that imitation style teaching can be very fruitful in the first year literary/media studies classroom.

I aim to show how we can teach how to do cultural readings using imitation-style teaching in the undergraduate classroom. I do this with an example reading of Langston Hughes' short poem "I, Too" (1926) that takes its theoretical cue from the concept of transnationalism.

Below is the example of a paper that could be used to discuss in an imitation-style exercise. I have numbered the paragraphs in order to make my subsequent discussion of the piece easier to follow for the reader. I include such a long example so that I can discuss sentence-level details, as well as comment on the paragraphing and the structuring of the overall argument. More specifically, this has to do with commenting on the fact that while some paragraphs focus less on the transnational angle, they nonetheless still contribute to the overall argument.

--- EXAMPLE READING[2] ---

**Looking In, Looking Out:
A Transnational Reading of Hughes' "I, Too"**

(1) In recent years, the transnational turn in American Studies has helped scholars attune to the various ways that American culture has been and continuously is shaped by cultural influences from outside the United States (Sørensen 2009, Pease 2011). For a prominent example of this approach one could look to how Mary Dudziak's Cold War Civil Rights (2001/2011), a study of the transnational dimensions of the civil rights movement, has helped recontextualize how racial relations in the U.S. were intertwined with how the U.S. was perceived from abroad in the post-WWII era. Such approaches highlight the interconnectedness of diverse developments in different parts of the world.

(2) Read through such a transnational lens, applicable in both cultural-aesthetic studies as well as historical ones, an interesting semantic layer emerges in Langston Hughes' famous poem "I, Too" (1926). Extending from this transnational approach, one can read the poem as an exploration of how America's relations with the outside world, e.g. Europe, may partially influence ideas of racial relations within the U.S. Through the use of a register signaling familial ties (brother) and that of a home (kitchen, table), Hughes' poem accentuates a perspective of racial relations as being akin to familial relations within a shared household. But at the same time, it highlights how issues concerning racial relations may become more poignant when an outsider (company) becomes involved.

(3) The poem, written by, to some, one of "the most eloquent American poets to have sung about the wounds caused by injustice" (Rampersad & Roessell 1995, 3), only discretely intimates that race is the issue at hand here (darker brother). However, the near-identical wording of the first and last lines points to the poem's dreams of inclusion and espouses its fundamentally integrationist or inclusionist agenda; from merely supporting and believing in America (to sing) to actually being included in (to be) that very category (American) makes all the difference for the speaker of this poem. Thus, read in its suggested racial context, the poem suggests that the social recognition of African Americans is the issue at stake here. This idea is furthered through how the poem develops imagery suggesting the notion of a house or a home. To Richard Gray, this makes the speaker "the generic racial figure who is excluded from the American family, the table of communion" (Gray 2004, 677). James de Jongh, approaching the poem from a different angle, notes that "[i]t has been the longstanding practice of African American verbal culture to transform literal spaces into topical spaces for rhetorical and figurative purposes" (de Jongh 2004, 65). Keeping with this tradition, two locales, respectively, represent the unwanted second-tier status (to be sent to the kitchen) and the dream of being included (to be at the table) and these places, as mentioned, hint at a language register that connotes "house" or even "home."

(4) Furthermore, remembering that the speaker is a "darker brother" the poem suggests that the relationship between these poetic personae (I, they) is a familial one, which, again, creates the notion of a family bond, despite the fact that there is a discursive construction of "I" vs. "they". Therefore, while the poem constructs the relationship both as one of conflict (I, they) and of familial bonds, it ultimately points to a communal way of thinking. An unjust and dysfunctional family, but a family nonetheless. Then, considering how the first and last

lines explicitly express the issue of American identity, it would seem fair to say that this "family" is to be understood as the American population.

(5) The poem's critical stance on its then-present as well its hopes for the future is hinted at through a basic yet central grammatical feature; the fact that the third of and fourth stanzas are written in the future tense while the rest of the poem is written in the present tense. The stanzas written in the future tense express the hope for a better future. However, both in the second stanza (written in the present tense) and the third stanza, the third line reads "When company comes" suggesting that both at present, when the poem was written, as well as in the future, the acceptance and acknowledgment of the speaker (and the group s/he belongs to, the reader may infer) is (to be) decipherable in how this "household" projects itself to "company."

(6) A literal interpretation would construe these lines as referring to the social-historical fact that blacks employed in upper-and-middle-class households were, indeed, sent to eat in the kitchen and consequently were out of sight to houseguests (Ritterhouse 2006, 42). As noted earlier, however, the poem espouses an integrationist politics through the connotations of family and it seems that such a politics can be read as referring to a wider social context; for if one understands "the family" of the poem to be the American population, it follows that "company" would be foreigners visiting the U.S. or looking at the U.S. from afar. By understanding the "home" of the poem as the U.S. as a whole, "company" comes to signify outsiders from, say, Europe.

(7) Herein lies the core of the transnational reading of the poem. In stanza two, when the poetic speaker is sent to the kitchen, he expresses confidence in how his (group's) situation will change in the future: "But I laugh/And eat well/And grow strong." However, in stanza three "Nobody'll dare/Say to me,/"Eat in the kitchen,"/Then." That nobody will dare send the speaker to eat in the kitchen suggests that recognition of this group of people will come from a change in power relations within the U.S. The recognition of African Americans is thus closely linked with how the U.S projects itself to the outside world. How these different developments are related causally, however, remains unsaid.

(8) Hughes thus pondered how the world outside the U.S. might aid the struggle for improving the social standing of African Americans. His repeated use of the phrase "company" suggests that he imagined foreigners taking an interest in his struggle could help him and his peer group. As an example of how far back African Americans sought allegiances outside the U.S. in their struggles, Mary Dudziak points to how "Frederick Douglass sought support for the abolitionist movement in Great Britain, arguing that slavery was a crime against 'the human family,' and so 'it belongs to the whole human family to seek its suppression.'" Later on, both Ida B. Wells and W.E.B. DuBois also tried to gain support for their causes abroad (Dudziak 2011, 6-7). As such, Hughes' poem's way of imagining the outside world as a player in creating change has several real-world links in American history.

(9) It seems that, in Hughes' poem, when African Americans are successful in being able to stay at the table "when company comes" – not through benevolence, but through a strengthened position in society – the integrationist hope of this poem is fulfilled. To include African Americans in the image that U.S. projects of itself to the outside world would then be to be "at the table/When company comes." The way of presenting the U.S. as a multiracial family in an international context invokes a politics in which notions of loyalty and confrontation are interlinked and this, in turn, forms the underlying political tension within the poem. Hughes turns a fact of social history into a metaphor of cultural seismography related to international reputation and social uplift, and suggests how these elements may be threads in the warp and woof of a politically and culturally brighter future for African Americans.

<div align="center">--- END OF EXAMPLE ---</div>

READING PRIMARY OR SECONDARY TEXTS

While much teaching of literature pays close attention to the texts under scrutiny, it also makes sense to spend time in the classroom examining works of literary criticism. Students in English programs are mainly expected to produce analytical texts and not, say, poems or short stories (except for maybe in classes on creative writing). This calls for a closer focus on the virtues and challenges of presenting analytical arguments in writing. I therefore propose that, say, a class or two in courses devoted to

introducing the fundamentals of either literary analysis or media analysis could be devoted to analyzing closely pieces of literary criticism, like the one included above.

Some teachers devote the last class of a course to repeating and emphasizing for students the requirements of their impending exam, and such classes seem highly suited to using this approach to reveal what their evaluators/teachers expect of their exam papers. This approach connects the requirement of academic writing and close reading in an interplay that may well be fruitful to students' learning experience. Such a class can, in the most positive scenario, help students take what they have learned about the course's academic content and translate that insight into the practical realities of sitting down and writing their papers.

That is not to say that other classes should not focus, in a more traditional manner, on the exploration and interpretation of the texts that are the focus of such courses. But I maintain that much can be gained from drawing strong links between the practice of analyzing texts on the one hand and gaining insights into how such analysis is presented in academic writing on the other hand. Because students are expected to become skilled writers of literary or media criticism, it makes sense to discuss the virtues and intricacies of that genre. In that way, we may be able to facilitate Meyer's notion of transparent performance expectations (Meyer 2005, 109–15). By reading and discussing in detail works of literary criticism, we invite students into the fold of our academic community.

Rhetoricians Signe Hegelund and Kock (2003) note that students' difficulty with writing academic papers sometimes is "task definition," which is to say that their troubles lie not with their writing abilities or their motivation, but with their (lack of) "understanding of the genre of the academic paper" (Hegelund and Kock 2003, 75). As Hegelund and Kock point out, students—even academically accomplished ones—often "find themselves lavishing high hopes and hard work, only to receive the dampening response that they are trying to do the wrong thing" (Hegelund and Kock 2003, 75). By showing them in a rather concrete manner how a piece of criticism, for instance, makes a persuasive argument, uses quotations from the text under scrutiny, and moves from analytical observations to interpretative conclusions, we can maybe articulate more transparently what we as teachers of literary or media analysis expect of them.

To Kock, the central aspect of imitation-style teaching is the activity of discussing what any text— regardless of genre—does well. What does a specific article do well? What does a particular poem do well? In imitation-style teaching, the learning outcome is that students get the chance to discuss what a specific text does well and, then, figure out what they may learn from this text in terms of becoming more accomplished writers themselves (Kock 2006, 69). An added advantage of this approach is that it reduces the gap that sometimes exists between, on the one hand, reading literary texts and, on the other hand, producing written work that explores those texts. This point is connected to Kock's argument that any competence the student has—in literary analysis and historical insight—is only fully developed when that student is able to communicate that skillset convincingly in both writing and in oral discussions.

In order to facilitate this form of writing instruction, I believe that there is much to be said for focusing both on working with students' awareness and their meta-awareness. By awareness I refer to how students become aware of how the reading of "I, Too" builds on a theoretical terminology and how it connects that perspective with elements of close reading. By meta-awareness I mean that they should hopefully be aware of the fact that they—in such an imitation-inspired analysis of this reading— approach the text as an example that can be mined for productive ways of presenting an academic

argument by connecting analytical observations with a theoretical angle. I believe that imitation is a productive way of helping students acquire such a meta-awareness. Indeed, when a class discussion does not focus on a literary text, but on a piece of literary criticism, we as teachers are giving our students a good opportunity to discuss how one, in a very practical way, can construct a good argument in a piece of criticism.

Discussions of the above reading could productively point to how the piece—in paragraph three—conforms with the standards of academic writing: It cites existing literature (here by Richard Gray and James de Jong) that have analyzed the poem already. Students are expected to follow in this tradition and it therefore makes sense to dwell on how the paper first acknowledges other scholars' contribution to the discussion of the poem, and only then points out how it adds a new dimension to the discussion. Paragraph eight shows how a succinct reading can connect an analytical observation with a social-historical context.

This paragraph represents a chance to discuss with students one aspect of contextualization. Intellectual historian Mikkel Thorup discusses how the practice of contextualization requires a wealth of knowledge: "To write about Machiavelli, one should know much about the Renaissance, about conditions in Florence, the condition of Italy, and the inspiration from Roman thinkers" (Thorup 2013, 102). The fact that this piece of literary criticism is informed by both theory (transnationalism) and historical context is a chance to discuss with students how the different subfields of English studies—e.g. history, literary studies, media studies, etc.—are able to inform each other. This points out a direction forward for their learning goals in a degree program, such as English studies, that encompasses several diverse scholarly traditions.

It is unfair, however, to expect that undergraduates could perform this form of contextualization. Teachers should therefore point out that this style of contextualization is above and beyond what we expect in their first forays into producing readings of literature, film, or television serials. We need to make the learning goals surmountable for our students, which calls for teachers to provide adequate levels of scaffolding. Psychologists Jeanne Nakamura and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2009) point out that students facing a highly challenging task without having the necessary tools to perform well can be expected to experience a state of anxiety. They explain that if "challenges begin to exceed skills, one first becomes vigilant and then anxious; if skills begin to exceed challenges, one first relaxes and then becomes bored" (90). Such a state of anxiety is in no way conducive to a good learning environment.

Instructors who embrace a form of imitation-style teaching should be mindful of this challenge. If and when we instruct students to look to accomplished writers and scholars to "'read off' their writing skills, we should stress that this form of contextualization or this standard of writing is not what we require of them in their first essays at the university level. That assurance is important when we point out their long-term learning goals. This form of reassurance could potentially, and hopefully, reduce the form of student anxiety that Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi identify. This is essential in terms of making it possible for them to manage the transparent performance expectations that we show them. In other words, we want to help them manage the frustrations they may well feel when encountering the academic requirements of scholarship at a professional level. This is why we should provide students with adequate forms of scaffolding while still being very clear about where we want them to go in their learning experience.

Kock advises us to show best practice to students. He argues that the conservatory teacher surely teaches her students the best way of phrasing a particular note or chord in a piece of music. Parallel to

that, literary and media studies teachers should not shy away from suggesting a better way of phrasing a particular thought or argument. English studies teaching entails teaching writing skills in some shape or form.

In relation to the reading of Hughes' poem, one could, for instance, discuss with students to what extent and how the paper aspires to create a strong through-line. Here, one could note how the first paragraph establishes a theoretical frame and then ties that overall idea to the Hughes poem. From that starting point, the paper then explores this argument in greater detail. While it is somewhat straightforward to explain that a text needs to be cohesive and coherent, it requires much elaboration and discussion to teach students how a text can live up to those standards.

Here, it makes sense to discuss with students the fact that not all of the paragraphs focus on this transnational angle. This, for instance, is true of paragraphs four and five, which do contribute meaningfully to the overall agenda of the piece, but they do diverge from the transnational angle. The last paragraph, however, returns to the transnational argument which represents an effort to tie the piece together. Discussing the piece in detail with students like this opens up for an imitation style learning experience. In this way, this brief work of literary criticism can give the classroom a chance to discuss how to maintain a consistent through-line in one's argument, though one sometimes veers off the main road from time to time. Several paragraphs diverge from this overall argument, but they each offer bits of close reading that connect with the transnational reading.

By pointing out these aspects in this piece of literary criticism, we can lay the necessary groundwork for discussing some fundamental elements of theory-driven readings. The theoretical perspective is a form of '"gaze" in the sense that it highlights some aspects of the text at the expense of other aspects. There is thus both a payoff and a drawback to theory-driven readings. We explore in great depth some elements of the text while we ignore other aspects. Lecturers know this, but it is central, to call back to Pace, that these "crucial steps in the process [do not] become invisible" (Pace 2021, 2) to students. To make our performance expectations transparent to students, we need to discuss these aspects openly.

The fact that all approaches highlight some aspects of a text and downplay other elements is, of course, an issue that can, and should be, challenged and discussed in a classroom setting. Such discussions can qualify the scholarly and intellectual groundwork (for instance, in relation to discussions pertaining to theory of science) that academic work should extend from. Students need to learn to deal with these considerations in order to qualify their academic writing.

Furthermore, theory-driven reading allows students to carve out a strong through-line in a piece of literary criticism a strong through-line. In their initial attempts at writing literary or media criticism, students have a lot to live up to in terms of adhering to academic norms of, say, citing and engaging with existing scholarship, of reaching a satisfactory level of abstraction, and, hopefully, of starting to develop a more elegant style of writing. At this introductory level, it will often be enough that they "analyze and interpret a text" without advancing a specific argument about that text. But later on, they do need to be able to develop and present a persuasive argument about how to read a literary text or film in a new way.

Theory-driven reading is helpful in this endeavor because it facilitates writing a piece of criticism with a strong through-line. In other words, it can help give students' analytical groundwork a sense of direction, which can help them make a case in their analysis rather than "just analyzing" a text. The starting point for this approach is that we do not make an open inquiry into the text when we write a theory-driven piece of literary criticism. We might have a somewhat prejudice-free reading of a text

when we first encounter it, and students need to learn how that first encounter is not where the analytical writing starts. The student needs some sense of direction in their analytical writing, even if in a rather vague form initially.

This calls back to Kock's argument that I mentioned earlier, namely that writing should be viewed not as "writing down" but rather as a back-and-forth process in which ideas appear during the writing process (Kock 1998, 66–67). Thinking of academic writing in these terms connects to how hermeneutical insights can be achieved through a sustained interpretative inquiry of a text. Doing an imitation-oriented reading of the piece on "I, Too" can facilitate this learning experience.

CONCLUSION

English studies programs need to provide students with a strong footing in the approaches that are central to the discipline, such as literary history, literary theory, the poetics of literary expression, and a competence in the scholarly norms of making a persuasive argument in this field. The knowledge that is central to a field of scholarship is sometimes referred to as "vertical knowledge." Students can also benefit from delving into the insights provided by other fields of scholarship, meaning they develop a familiarity with "horizontal knowledge." This form is that wealth of knowledge that lies "outside of the subject – it is the knowledge not directly related to the problem or situation we face" (Byrge and Hansen 2015, NP). In the case of English studies this could, for instance, be a familiarity with a concept, such as transnationalism, or an anthropological concept, such as non-places. A general familiarity with a wealth of horizontal knowledge can open students' eyes to seeing texts in new ways. Intellectual historian Johannes Sløk articulates a similar point when he argues that an extensive general knowledge is a prerequisite for asking more interesting questions (Sløk 2008, 9). The point is that you can only come up with the idea of making this form of theoretically informed reading of Hughes's poem "I, Too" if (1) you know the poem and (2) you know the central ideas regarding transnationalism.

I believe that by teaching how to make and present convincing cultural readings through the principle of imitation-style teaching, we can give our students a good starting point for merging vertical and horizontal forms of knowledge. In that way, they will be able to make their own original readings of texts that contribute with new insights. And, seeing that students that major in English studies are expected to arrive at new and interesting insights in their masters' theses, I believe that this style of teaching is a good way of showing our students how to produce new knowledge instead of "merely" reproducing established insights. By showing students what we want of them in a rather concrete way, we enable them to live up to the discursive conventions of our field. Thus, exercises in imitation hopefully make transparent the expectations we have of their writing.

Even though some students taking classes in textual criticism during their undergraduate degree will not end up specializing in, say, English studies or comparative literature, they will nonetheless be able to take with them a constructive reading strategy for learning how to adhere to the writing norms of a scholarly discipline. The imitation-style way of reading scholarly texts—in whatever field—helps them know when they are living up to the disciplinary requirements in their field. In that sense, both English majors as well as other students can use the skills acquired through a course geared towards imitation-style teaching to help them decode the disciplines they navigate within. In this way, they will be better equipped to honor the performance expectations they encounter.

David Pace's starting point for helping develop the field of Decoding the Disciplines was hearing a colleague challenge how teachers discuss and assess students' performance. Craig Nelson, Pace's colleague, had pointed out:

> that most of what we call teaching is really sorting. Students who have been "pre-educated" are praised and judged to be worthy, whereas those who arrive with more minimal preparation are dismissed as lazy or stupid. Teaching, by contrast, would involve actually giving students the tools that they need to succeed in our disciplines. (Pace 2017, xi)

Pace's point is that teachers, at least, consider how some students' underperformance is a result of a lower level of "pre-education" or informal socialization compared to students from other socio-economic backgrounds. Overcoming this obstacle entails unpacking for such students the explicit and implicit requirements of the fields they are being trained in. This is how we remain focused on teaching as opposed to merely "sorting." In literary studies, this entails keeping in mind Gutjahr's crucial point that I cited earlier: "failure to understand the basic project of literary analysis is a major bottleneck to student success (Gutjahar in Ardizzone, Breithaupt, and Gutjahr 2004, 50). This is at the heart of both Decoding the Disciplines and Meyer's concept of transparent performance expectations; making sure that students are able to decipher the requirements of the field. In Pace's words this means "actually giving students the tools that they need to succeed in our disciplines."

The purpose of imitation-style teaching is to make it easier for our students to become members of their academic field of choice. This does not mean that they should not be welcome to challenge the norms of the field, for instance, which, in this case, might be Felski's assertion that the "mark of the tribe" is close reading. But this does mean that they know the standard by which their papers, projects, and exams will be assessed. Imitation-style teaching can help them decipher the discipline(s) in the program they have enrolled in and that, in turn, will help them learn the ropes of an academic field. Ultimately, this is a goal for most post-secondary education programs and I propose that imitation-style teaching can help facilitate this process.

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NOTES

1. The poem was originally titled "Epilogue" when it was published in 1926 but it is more often referred to as "I, Too" today. I therefore refer to the poem as "I, Too."
2. The formatting of the example reading deviates from CMS style, the style of *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, to match the original text.

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