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Innovation in Education: Renewed Perspectives Through Writer's Conferences, Literary Theory, Supplements to the Western Literary Canon, and Representations of Fiction through Film

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Framing Narrative: A Look into New Perspectives

Teaching and learning both require tremendous growth. One is never finished learning, and one is never finished learning how to teach. As an educator, I hope to instill in my students that learning is a journey of discovery, and a journey without a set destination in mind. In my classroom, I see close to 150 students walk through my door, sit in my desks, and look to me for knowledge, skills, and guidance to success. Each student brings with them different skills, diverse backgrounds, and a unique perspective to my classroom's four white-washed walls. However, each individual, of those 150 diverse faces, has one thing in common: the potential to achieve greatness. As an educator, my job goes far beyond teaching students the conventions of academic writing, exposing them to literary greats like Fyodor Dostoevsky, or enabling them to think critically about the characterization of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. My job affords me the opportunity to help my students recognize their fullest potential.

This philosophy that learning is a journey would be ludicrous if I did not embody that philosophy every day. Pursuing my Masters of Arts in English was a natural next step after I finished my undergraduate studies. I had been teaching for a year already but felt the need to challenge myself academically again. I was driven by the nagging question "How can I be a better teacher?". As educators, it is natural to question our methods and best practices and desire to deepen our content knowledge; we are all driven by the need to better serve our students. An MA in English will help me to better serve my students. Situated again as a learner, I developed necessary skills, such as how to further develop my writing pedagogy, how to directly teach close reading, and how to read student writing as a reader, that will enhance the learning environment in my own classroom.

The works included in this portfolio reflect my philosophy of teaching and learning as a journey requiring substantial growth. Throughout my studies and coursework in the MA program, I found myself continually challenging what I knew, what I thought I knew, and how I approached reading, writing, and teaching. These four works demonstrate a shift in perspective, an innovation, in my approaches to writing, reading, and teaching both writing and reading. "Increasing Student Agency in Instructor-led Writer's Conferences in Upper-level High School English Courses" is the first piece in my portfolio that demonstrates a shift in perspective regarding writing instruction. This piece was written for ENG 6040: Graduate Writing and originated as a research proposal for the study of writer's conferences at the high school level. Revised as an article, this piece expresses the need for writer's conferences at the high school level and provides pedagogical strategies to increase student control and engagement during the conference to make implementing them easier and less time consuming for the instructor. This piece includes substantial research on the subject of writer's conferences and includes my own initial findings and experiences during conferences after the implementation of the pedagogical suggestions. I chose to write about and research writer's conferences because they are an aspect of process writing pedagogy that I use with every process writing assignment. With nearly 150 students, these initial conferences were tedious and time consuming. Thus, I faced two choices: change my approach or abandon conferences. This article demonstrates my change of approach to conferences within my writing instruction and poses suggestions for other writing instructors to make writer's conferences both productive and manageable.

P.T. Barnum once said, "Literature is one of the most interesting and significant expressions of humanity." Literature allows students to escape their own world and experience the perspectives of other characters in other lifetimes. The ability to read literature, relate to it,

and grow from it is invaluable, and as an educator, I am the facilitator of that journey. It is my goal as an educator to allow my students to experience humanity and grow as important members of society. Most of my literature instruction revolved around skills-based instruction: how to find metaphors and analyze them, how to understand characterization and plot sequence, and how to think about literature in the same way that I did. However, this closed many doors and abandoned many pathways that students could have taken on their learning journey. Rather than focusing on skills and teaching students what to think, I changed my approach to literature to focus more on allowing students to discover how to think and how to view literature through numerous lenses in order to experience the uniqueness of the expressions of humanity that P.T. Barnum mentioned.

Continuing the theme of shifts in perspectives when teaching, my second piece, "F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby and the Dandy, the Flaneur, and Intricacies Beyond Characterization: An Argument for Increased Theoretical Perspectives in High School English Classrooms," focuses on deepening student understanding of literature through literary theory. High school English teachers are asked to wear many hats and juggle many balls including teaching both literature and writing while navigating state mandated standards and testing; therefore, this second project shifts focus from writing instruction to literature instruction. This project was originally written for ENG 6070: Literary Theory and was a theoretical analysis of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby.* This project applied literary theory from Charles Baudelaire to deepen the understanding of Fitzgerald's complex characterization. The use of Baudelaire's literary theory helped to explain the overlapping character types and motivations. The revised piece signaled a new perspective in teaching literature, one that focused on encouraging students to view literature through multiple lenses rather than a repetitive skills-

based pedagogy. This project demonstrates a need for theoretical literary instructions in high school classrooms. Using F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* as an example text, I revised the original from solely a literary analysis to an article that highlights the benefits of literary theory and argues for the inclusion of it in high school English classrooms. The article includes research on the benefits of literary theory at the high school level and pedagogical suggestions for how to design curriculum that centers around literary theory. Ultimately, from this project, I realized how much high school students can be underestimated. Literary theory was not something that I was taught until I was a sophomore undergraduate English Education major in the honors program. However, if teachers understand exactly how much their students are capable of understanding and achieving, high school education will be more enriching and will better prepare students to navigate the academic discourses and expectations of higher education. Finally, by giving students a toolbox of literary theories through which to view literature, they will be better equipped to understand the numerous representations of humanity.

For those with the freedom to choose literary texts, choosing what works of literature to include in a curriculum is one of the most taxing decisions to make. The Western Literary Canon provides of list of great texts that continue to be taught in classrooms across the United States. However, as society and culture change, students change as well. In order for students to understand the expressions of humanity presented in literature, students must be able to grasp onto and relate to at least one aspect of the literature. "Issues with the Canon: An Argument for Adding Diverse Literature in Classrooms," my third piece, presents an argument against a sole reliance on the literary canon for curriculum design. This project was written as a critical theoretical analysis for ENG 6090: Teaching Literature. Using literary theories from David H. Richter's *Falling Into Theory*, this piece addressed the challenges with the formation of the

Western Literary Canon highlighted by social and cultural changes. This project presents a new perspective on literature curriculum design, one that does not rely strictly on canonical literature and includes contemporary literature and works by diverse authors. The revisions of this piece focused heavily on understanding fully the theoretical works that drove the piece and explaining the challenges with the literary canon. It ultimately argues for supplementing canonical literature with contemporary and diverse pieces of literature to expand student understanding of representations of human experience within literature. While this piece did not change directions or purposes, like the previous two projects, it underwent a large amount of work on shaping the argument for clarity, cohesion, and flow. The original piece struggled to create a clear definition of the literary canon and did not fully articulate the disadvantages of relying solely on canonical literature for English curriculums.

While the final piece, "Femme Fatales: Representations in Fiction and Film," does not directly address the teaching of literature as the previous pieces do, it is a representation of an innovative approach to teaching literature. This piece evolved from a literary analysis of two different representations of the Victorian Femme Fatale. This piece originated as an analysis in an English Seminar focusing on the fatal woman in Victorian Literature. One of the final works studied in the course was the 2017 film *Lady Macbeth* which was a film adaption of *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk.* In an analysis of the 1865 novella *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk* by Nikolia Leskov and the 2017 film version *Lady Macbeth* directed by William Oldroyd, this piece discussed the different representations of the fatal woman. The revised version of this piece took the analysis of the two pieces and situated it within the genre of the Victorian Femme Fatale and the Victorian time period. While the original assumed an audience of readers who have read and watched the two pieces, the revised version sought to expand the analysis to meet the needs of

readers who may not have read or watched both representations. Additionally, the revised version sought to clarify, strengthen, and reorganize the argument by adding historical and cultural contexts of the femme fatale trope and the cultural implications of the two very different representations. The representations within the novella and the film differ vastly largely due to the influences of Victorian patriarchy and modern representations of women. This innovative approach to literature and representations of characters creates opportunities for new discussions of the literature. Frequently, teachers show a film as a follow-up to a piece of literature. This project demonstrates the analytical conversations that can arise from incorporating different representations of literature. By viewing literature through a new lens, students can begin to understand cultural influences. Understanding the correlation between literature and film creates new opportunities for analysis within the literature classroom.

As this pathway on my learning journey comes to an end, I am left with the knowledge that learning and teaching are messy processes, but they are messy in the vein of toddler finger paintings: productive, joyful, and satisfying. At the end of the process, we should all be left with something we are so proud of that we would hang it on the refrigerator door. While instilling the value of lifelong learning into my students is an ongoing process, I am now confident in my abilities to communicate the value of education, writing, and reading and initiate my students into the growth necessary to be successful. The pieces included in this portfolio are examples of the educational perspectives that I have grappled with, changed more than once, and will return to and likely continue to adapt as I pursue the messy process of lifelong learning and growth alongside my students.

Increasing Student Agency in Instructor-led Writers' Conferences in Upper-Level High School English Courses

Introduction and Statement of Purpose

After grading another set of disappointing research papers, I could not grasp where I had gone wrong. The ideas my students discussed in class as they brainstormed and researched were not translating to their writing; their writing lacked organization, creativity, and originality. It appeared that my students could brainstorm, discuss with peers and myself, and verbally present creative and in-depth responses, but this creativity and level of depth that resonated so powerfully in their verbal discussions simply was not showing up in the same way in their writing; their writing lacked the same level of engagement and thinking that I was seeing in their verbal discussions. During discussions, students appeared comfortable challenging their ideas, responding to my and their classmates' comments and questions regarding their ideas, and even changing their approach to an issue. However, their writing lacked deeper analytical thought and did not address larger themes presented in the class. Perhaps this disconnect was occurring because the teacher was having to deliver lessons to thirty students at once that are supposed to cover every element of writing no matter where the student's understanding is on an individual level. At some point in the writing process, a disconnect happened that left my students' writing underwhelming and basic.

As a teacher, addressing how to connect ideas and evidence back to a thesis statement with one student, while addressing how to form a complete sentence with a subject and a verb with another, seemed impossible in 42 short minutes. The vast array of areas for needed growth was overwhelming. With such diverse needs, how could any one teacher meet each student where they are with their writing abilities? Whole group, lecture-style writing instruction simply was not working for me; I continued to read unoriginal, underdeveloped essays, and so I decided to change my approach to writing instruction. In order to foster the depth and individuality in my

students' writing, I had to meet them with my instruction where each of them started with their skillset. I had to make the writing process more individualized to make it more meaningful and contextual for each student.

Plagued by overwhelming state mandated testing and standards, increased class sizes, decreased instructional time, and a lack of training and professional development, writing instruction can be inauthentic and unoriginal (Applebee 16). Teachers do not feel prepared to teach writing, and students are not prepared to write beyond high school classrooms (S. Graham 1). Thus, writing instruction in high school English classrooms has become increasingly difficult, limited to five paragraph essays, and focused surface level skills and errors despite teachers' desires and efforts for effective and relatable instruction (S. Graham 1). High school students are increasingly underprepared for writing in higher education and beyond. While thirty individual students sit in the seats in front of the instructor, one approach to writing is given in the form of whole group instruction and often in the front of the classroom in lecture style lessons in hopes that students will be able to relate to and retain that information despite their academic background, strengths, and weaknesses. Thus, writer's conferences—one-on-one meetings with students during the drafting phase done frequently and with much success at the undergraduate level—became a way to meet every student exactly where they were in their writing journey; I could help John with writing complete sentences while also helping Tony develop nuanced connections to his thesis statement. Conferences offered the ability to foster personal and meaningful relationships with students and motivation in even my struggling writers.

Writers' conferences, an area that is rarely studied at the high school level, allow for instructors to individualize writing instruction with one-on-one interactions with students, to create authentic relationships with students, and to meet the needs of vastly different levels of

writers in the classes that sit in front of them. Writers' conferences revolutionize writing education and student-teacher interactions by creating the opportunity for genuine individual instruction and interaction. Without the integration of writers' conferences, writing instruction could continue to lack the depth and diversity necessary to meet the needs of each individual student.

Instructor-led writers' conferences differ vastly from student-led writers' conferences and student-initiated peer editing and can be detrimental to increasing student agency of the writing process if they do not encourage the student's voice during the conversation. When inundated by teacher feedback, conferences can present seemingly unachievable expectations that can overwhelm novice writer's voice and development by presenting lengthy expectations that the student must follow in order to receive a high, or even passing, score. During one-on-one conferences, instructors should view student rough drafts through the lens of a reader rather than an instructor who is grading a finished product and allow students to interact with their writing and learning processes in order to help develop student agency. According to Sara Phillips and Robin Griffith, prominent researchers of writing pedagogy, "Teachers hinder or help in building student agency through the ways they interact with students […] Student agency increases when students feel there is a relationship between how they participate and what happens in their writing" (28). Therefore, instructors must decidedly make space for novice writers to engage with their writing during the writer's conference. Teachers can help students develop a sense of agency by acknowledging and building off of student ideas and comments during conferences in order to fully engage the student not only during the conference but also in the writing process. Therefore, the conference should be more student-focused and student-led in order to develop the agency that will help students understand what is valuable in the writing process.

Due to time constraints and pressures to offer detailed feedback, conferences can become very one-sided conversations. In my own initial attempts of writers' conferences, I found myself overwhelming the student with every possible correction, from grammar to flow and structure, that I could fit into the 10-minute conversation, and the student never spoke a word, only occasionally nodding and scribbling corrections furiously. My initial conferences were simply critiques of the novice writer's work with little or no exchange between the student and the instructor or the student and their own writing and focus too little on content and meaning (Phillips and Griffith 32). That approach to conferencing has the potential to be a destructive moment for the novice writer's ideas, self-esteem, and confidence as the instructor highlights the structural issues, grammatical mistakes, and, occasionally, the content and ideas without addressing the writer's true concerns with the piece nor their areas of necessary growth as a writer (Phillips and Griffith 32). Increasing student agency and power in these, occasionally, instructor-dominated discussions will allow for students to more fully understand the writing process, the development of ideas, and will help the instructor to better meet the individual needs of each of their students. Pedagogical suggestions—such as requiring students to bring three content-specific questions regarding their draft to the conversation and asking open-ended questions about the draft to prompt the student to discover the solution to an issue—will require students to become more active participants in their learning process.

What I am arguing for is an increase in student agency and empowerment during writer's conferences in order to harbor students' creativity, control, and ownership of the writing process. By presenting pedagogical suggestions to implement more successful and student-centered conferences, I argue that increasing student agency in instructor-led writers' conferences will lead to more meaningful conferences, more substantive revisions after the conference, and better

retention of the writing conventions discussed during the conference time. Formal research with IRB approval, including observations, recordings of the conferences before and after implementation of the pedagogical suggestions, and interviews with the student participants after the conferences, is necessary to help explain the current status of writers' conferences, student agency, as well as instructor influence over novice writers' development of ideas and to provide concrete support for the pedagogical adjustments that allow for students to increase their control of their learning of the writing process and help make writer's conferences more manageable for high school teachers with large class sizes. Despite not having IRB approval for data collection and inclusion of specific qualitative data in this study, the pedagogical suggestions were implemented in order to begin to develop the effectiveness of writer's conferences using these suggestions, and the initial findings of informal research—conducted as a part of a graduate course that I took surrounding writing pedagogy— of the implementation of the pedagogical suggestions is included here to serve as an early example of successful writer's conferences at the high school level.

Writers' Conferences: A Current System with High Hopes but Low Performance

Writer's conferences have been idealized for their ability to meet diverse learners' needs, especially when university enrollment balloons adding an influx of varied levels of academic preparation and diverse ethnic backgrounds; thus, "these challenges made clear the shortcomings of whole-class instruction, and teachers of composition turned to conferencing as a way to meet students' individual needs. This turn however, was countered by the working conditions for the faculty: too many students, too little time" (Lerner 187). According to prominent writing researcher and scholar Neal Lerner, throughout history, especially in key times of diverse student enrollment in colleges across the United States, such as during the 1950s and 1970s, writers'

conferences became an outlet for individualized education (187). While ambitious, writers' conferences became the way in which instructors combated the traditional lecture-memorization-recitation approach to education that only created monotony and surface level understanding. However, faced with increased enrollment numbers, conferencing, in its current instructor-dominated form, was rendered impossible. Frequent practice, feedback, and revision are evident in current classrooms; however, meaningful interactions regarding that feedback is where writers' conferences fall short: "The essentials of the laboratory method are commonplace in our classrooms, yet frequency has always been a function of the time we have to offer feedback" (Lerner 204). The current process of writers' conferences, that relies almost entirely on instructor-driven conversation and instructor feedback, does not allow for instructors to interact in meaningful ways because of the number of students enrolled and the time required to give detailed feedback and in-depth interactions regarding the novice writer's work. The responsibility for meaningful interactions during the conference falls too heavily on the instructor's shoulders as instructors are expected to find areas of necessary development, address them with the student, and guide them to a strategy to correct the issue; because of time constraints and increased class sizes, this approach to conferences is rendered impossible. Consequently, writer's conferences too frequently focus on surface level features of writing, "fix-its" (Phillips and Griffith 32). Because of the time required to provide meaningful feedback to each novice writer, instructors can focus more heavily on surface-level errors in order to provide some feedback for each student. In this execution of writers' conferences, students rarely participate in self-reflection, self-evaluation, or the use of academic discourse; teachers overwhelm students by telling students about their writing instead of facilitating the agency required to improve it (Phillips and Griffith 32). Therefore, a new approach to writers'

conferences could help the conversations about writing be more productive and successful and create more retention of the writing instruction. By requiring students to become critical readers of their own work, through identifying areas that they see as lacking development or confusing, and to participate actively in the writers' conference, writers' conferences can morph from the unsuccessful and frequently frustrating conversation about merely surface-level errors to a productive and successful interaction about content and ideas within the writing.

The Instructor's Role in Creating Student Agency Through Writers' Conferences

The instructor plays a key role in the atmosphere of the writers' conference and the fostering of student agency during designated writing time. The decisions teachers make, the Discourse used in writers' conferences, and the way teachers speak to students all impact the social context in which students learn to write, the relationship between the writer and his or her audience, and the finished writing product (Phillips and Griffith 27). In order to foster students' creation of a sense of agency, instructors must approach writing conferences and even written feedback on pieces of writing with specificity, details, and depth (Bardine 241). Instructors must be mindful when providing feedback to ensure that it is edifying to the student's learning process and beneficial for the student. Abandoning rubrics with lengthy and generic requirements is a first step to creating individualized and meaningful comments on a student's piece of writing (Wilson 64). Rubrics, with strict requirements, are often ideological in their treatment of student writing. This pressure, stemming from rubrics presenting writing as requiring perfection in all aspects, creates an unattainable and impersonal interaction between student and instructor and student and their writing. Therefore, feedback must be detailed and specific enough to communicate areas of necessary improvement while guiding the student towards how to improve their writing.

Specific instructor feedback, academic praise, self-evaluation, and academic discourse all aide in a student's construction of agency and identity. Academic praise, specifically, helps students to develop self-confidence and an effort mindset that helps them to see setbacks and challenges as opportunities for learning and growth (Hale 651). "Teachers can reinforce ownership and understanding of their own strengths by having them describe the teaching point in their own words" (Hale 655). By having the student define the strength in their writing, the instructor is harboring the sense of agency that allows students to identify strengths and facilitate the execution of that strength in other areas of writing; additionally, "students appear to learn more and pay more attention to those comments that praise their work or make them feel better about what they have done" rather than only vaguely highlight errors (Bardine 241). Academic praise benefits student writing because students are presented with aspects of their writing that were done well in hopes that those skills will transfer to other writing assignments. Additionally, by presenting strengths of the writing, students will be empowered and rewarded for their efforts. Academic praise benefits also the teacher-student relationship because "it can also affect how invested students are in the conference and how open they are to receiving feedback about or discussing how to improve their writing" (Hale 655). Praise for students' efforts and strengths in writing creates a confidence that many students may lack when it comes to writing, and this confidence following academic praise can help foster their ability to make corrections and revise their weaknesses in their writing. Additionally, one of the threshold concepts of writing according to Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs is that writing is a process and all writers have more to learn; writing is not perfectible (15). By helping students to recognize their strengths along with their weaknesses, students can begin to understand that writing is a process that requires revisions and corrections in order to be successful, even if they do not consider

themselves “good writers.” Therefore, teacher’s decisions regarding the types of comments discussed in writers’ conferences can help to increase student agency, especially during the revision phase. Academic praise helps students understand and replicate strengths while also creating meaningful relationships with the instructor.

Teacher’s decisions regarding the emphasis of writers’ conferences also help to increase student agency in writing. Focusing on self-evaluation and student strengths and using academic discourse can allow for students to become critical readers of their own writing and then create meaning from their mistakes and negotiate that meaning in writers’ conferences because “using the common Discourse of the curriculum to evaluate and negotiate meaning around writing supports student agency to readily evaluate their work (Phillips and Griffith 31). Therefore, the instructor’s strategic choices can facilitate a more active student role in writers’ conference, alleviating some of the instructor’s responsibility to create meaning and foster more substantive revision following the conference.

Writers’ Conferences: Creating Ownership through Social Aspects of Writing and Choice

Composing and writing instruction are not isolated from the social aspects of learning; in fact, interacting with the social aspect and influence of writing can foster a sense of ownership and control and motivate struggling writers to further connect to the composition process. Integrating social interaction in the brainstorming phase allows for students to develop critical thinking skills as they develop ideas and create connections amongst sources and those ideas; “Interaction in small groups is desirable because it leads to clashes of points of view that encourage children's development of individuality, creativity, and ability to think. When they are free to accept or reject someone else's idea, they mobilize the totality of their knowledge to evaluate it” (Long and Bulgarella 171). This ability to think critically about their own ideas in

the brainstorming and early drafting phase fosters a sense of ownership and control over their writing which serves to motivate even struggling writers because “social interaction is desirable not only for the development of individuality, creativity, and ability to think but also for the learning of technical aspects of writing. There are two parts to this learning: the construction of technical knowledge and that of motivation for excellence” (Long and Bulgarella 171). Therefore, social interaction and writing can motivate struggling writers towards a desire for excellence thus creating more productive conferences. By framing writing as a social activity during which writers can employ their cultural backgrounds, collaborate with classmates, discuss ideas prior to even the drafting phase, and ask questions about their and other student’s drafts, struggling writers become empowered through a more low-stakes environment for writing and development. Social interaction and collaboration helps to scaffold students and create more learning opportunities.

Further, writer’s conferences and the social aspect of writing helps to increase the performance of students, especially language learners. Language learners are supported with language use, academic discourse, and composition during writers’ conferences through scaffolded interactions with their teachers (Gilland 305). Discussion, even quick one minute “check-ins” with novice writers, can increase student negotiation with material, ownership, and revision based upon teacher feedback (Gilland 307). Allowing students the opportunity to negotiate their writing and progress and then practice using the academic discourse specific to the discipline, even just a short one minute “check-in,” will foster student agency and control over that academic discourse. As English Language Learners become initiated into the academic discourse, opportunities to practice using the discourse and monitor their progress in valuable in their growth as students and writers.

Pairing collaboration with choice is another way to create ownership, and another strategy for instructors to create this sense of ownership is to allow students to choose their topics within the framework of a writing assignment. In order to harbor this sense of ownership over writing assignments, "I knew that the students and I would have to shift the lens through which we normally viewed writing" (Mancina 32). This shift in focus was one from instructor-led and "impose[d]" writing assignments to one of student-led with more freedom and student control. While allowing students to make more choices in their writing and interact with each other "many students stated that the ability to make choices helped them to realize the many opportunities they had as writers" (Mancina 35). By giving the students a voice in the writing process, Mancina empowered her students through writing. Choice and freedom within writing assignments allow students to incorporate their backgrounds and interests, their primary discourse, into their academic discourses. Fostering this freedom of choice and agency creates empowered and engaged students. Kathryn L. Flannery explains the importance of this freedom and "the importance of the teacher's silence, of the teacher getting out of the students' way, of teachers and students unlearning the dutiful "good student" response in order to learn to write, and each writer making space for surprise, wonder, and the expected" (702). Teachers must begin to view students as active participants that can be in control of their learning and writing processes; teachers must become facilitators to student discovery of meaning, and allowing student choice, in terms of topic or subject matter, can begin to move the teacher into the facilitator role and the student into a role of control over their writing and interest in their learning and subject matter.

Further, student agency in regards to topic and the writing process increases students' performance and sense of connection to the subject. The context of the classroom and writing in

the classroom must be changed in order to give responsibility back to the students and give them ownership over the writing process and finished products of that process (Flannery 703). By increasing student choice and freedom within assignments, students become more active participants in their learning processes. Therefore, control over the writing process must be given back to the novice writers, and teachers must negotiate the conventions of academic writing with students to increase ownership and scaffold them in the creation of meaning in order to increase student agency in writing (Gilliland 306). Overall, the instructor should begin to approach the writing conference as more of a facilitator rather than an instructor. This facilitator role will allow students to make connections to the writing topics, increase social interaction with their peers and the writing process, and become more engaged with the writing assignment. This facilitator role coupled with more control over writing topics will help the students create ownership of and connections to the writing assignment.

Writers' Conferences and Student Agency: An Opportunity to Develop Identity through Social and Learning Differences

Writers' conferences that help to increase student agency and control not only help to develop writing strengths and a sense of ownership in their writing but also harbor creation of identity. Writers' conferences that harbor student agency help to give students a voice. Writing is an outlet for self-expression and self-discovery; "Writing helps us grow as an individual, and promotes reflective, critical thinking" (R. Graham 361). Writers' conferences that increase student control allow for a strong voice within the piece of writing and increase rhetorical agency because "the writing studio space [a small collaborative group setting] is a resource to help students develop a sense of rhetorical agency, as it can be a space where students find and further develop learning strengths and practice those strengths as part of their writing processes" (Kim

182). As students participate in writers' conferences, they are allowed to make mistakes, learn from those mistakes, and then develop new skills from what they learned. The writing process is a messy process that allows students to develop their strengths and discuss their weaknesses, and writers' conferences are more relaxed and one-on-one approaches to writing instruction. Jay Dolmage expresses the benefits of allowing students to connect with their voice and their choices and decisions in what Kim calls a messy writing space:

> these classrooms often have desks in rows making communication difficult. These ill-constructed spaces push students toward clean, straight, and cohesive products; whereas my studio space encourages students to make mistakes and reflect on what they learned without consequence. In a messy space, the focus is on "allowing students to recognize within the 'products' of writing the interplay of their own voices with others, of their own words with the means of communicating them, of the politics of each and every writerly choice they make." (qtd. in Kim 147)

Writers' conferences create a more relaxed, open environment for students to create, to make mistakes, to revise, and to learn how to be better writers; however, through this space the writers' conferences also allow for a unique opportunity for students to begin to construct a sense of self as a writer and as a student. Writing is not isolated in one classroom, one setting, one audience, or for one purpose; therefore, teachers must begin to help students visualize a new set of roles and possibilities for themselves as writers (R. Graham 363). By increasing student agency in instructor-led writers' conferences, instructors can demonstrate "the possibilities for selfhood that writing offers as a way to describe who they are and how things are with them and their world" (R. Graham 363). Writers' conferences that increase student agency lead to an increase in student identity and encourages students to imagine who they are as students as integral

components of their communities and their society (R. Graham 363). Increasing student agency and control of the writing process can help to alleviate the pressure on instructors to create meaningful interactions about the student's piece of writing, create critical readers and thus more focused writers. Writers' conferences also allow students to connect and develop their identity and overcome learning challenges.

Methodology

Despite not having IRB approval, I implemented writer's conferences in a high school classroom and informally studied the results of the conferences and pedagogical suggestions as one aspect of a graduate course surrounding writing pedagogy at the high school level. The conferences took place during the drafting phase of a comparative analysis writing assignment, and the instructor was the same for all three classes. The pedagogical recommendations suggested below were implemented in my twelfth-grade English classroom and were successful in creating conferences that empowered students to become active participants in their learning and writing processes. Students spoke more frequently during the conference by asking questions, expressing ideas, and elaborating on the instructor's ideas. Students also demonstrated an ability to construct meaning and apply suggestions from the conference to both the writing they were presently working on and later writing assignments. Many students expressed that they have never participated in a writer's conference in their high school career and frequently would receive rubrics with feedback about their writing and never move further with the piece with revisions or self-reflective writing. My initial findings seek to demonstrate how accessible writer's conferences can be for instructors, despite increased class sizes and decreased instructional time, when students are empowered to be the guiding voice in the conversation.

Application of Theory

Writers' conferences are rarely studied at the high school level; therefore, this study focused largely on high school seniors both in regular track and the College Credit Plus (CCP) program, which presents collegiate level curricula and provides an opportunity to earn college credit for Composition I and Composition II while still in high school. This study aimed to demonstrate how—by making specific instructional and curricular choices during writers' conferences—instructors of these upper level secondary English classrooms can increase student agency and control of these writers' conferences to offset some of the responsibility of creating meaningful interactions during these conferences, motivate struggling writers and challenge high level writers through social action writing, allow students to understand their strengths as a writer and learn from those strengths, and develop a sense of self through writing and talking about their writing.

Writers' conferences, in my experience, were best implemented in the drafting phase of the process writing assignment. This timing allowed students who were not participating in conferences that day to continue drafting, conduct peer reviews, edit, and revise their writing, once their conference had been completed. Conferences were always paired with a specific peer review guidelines sheet for other students to be completing while other conferences were conducted. During the scheduling for the process essay timeline, specific days, sometimes up to three class days, were set aside to conduct conferences, and students signed up for a time slot on one of those three days; this sign-up process allowed students who thought they would need more time to draft to take that time and sign up for a later conference, and students who thought they would need more time in the revising phase to sign up for an earlier conference time. In order to combat procrastination, I set reasonable drafting goals throughout the drafting phase to help students stay on track. For example, by the class period following the initial assignment

discussion, the students were expected to have selected a topic and begun to draft their thesis statement or research guiding questions. These drafting goals allowed for me to quickly check progress of all students, even read early drafts if I wished, and kept the students on a timeline that was manageable. This timeline also ensured that the students came to the conference with a completed draft.

During conferences, it was important for me to post the schedule of the conferences in a very visible location in order for students to recognize the order and be prepared to come to me for their conference time promptly. Without the posted schedule, I initially found that students would take their time bringing their paper up to me, or getting it back from a peer reviewer, wasting valuable time. Additionally, I posted a timer so that the next student would know roughly when their conference would begin. For example, if Sarah's conference was scheduled for 11:00, and Billy was after Sarah, he would know that his conference would begin at roughly 11:10. Preparedness is very important in order to continue the flow and timeliness of the transitions between conferences.

Further, during conferences I focused on one or two areas of the writing piece that I call focus area skills. For example, during one of the earlier writing pieces, I would focus on the student's writing developing a strong, specific, and arguable thesis statement or transition words and phrases between paragraphs. Focusing on one or two specific areas of the writing is important to streamline the conference process and focus the discussion instead of trying to offer feedback on every single aspect of the writing. Additionally, by focusing on one or two specific writing skills, this allows the instructor to read specific pieces of the essay rather than reading and digesting the entire piece as a whole. Focus area skills should build upon each other,

meaning that if the first essay focuses on developing a thesis statement, that skill is expected in the following writing pieces.

Finally, during conferences, I focused on the student's voice and their concerns with the writing piece. Every conference begins with the student discussing how his or her writing process has gone. Opening the conversation with the student's voice allows the student to begin taking ownership of the discussion, and it allows the instructor to provide guidance on the specific areas that the student recognizes are areas of weakness. If the student does ask any questions or point out any areas of weakness, the instructor should ask about the student's execution of the focus area skills, even if done well, in order to provide the student with the opportunity to begin speaking. Encouraging the student to begin finding areas of necessary growth and to ask questions about those areas prompts the students to begin developing the agency and critical thinking necessary to reread and revise their own writing with more confidence as a writer.

Managing Common Problems

Ultimately, there were still challenges with conducting writer's conferences in classes with 28-30 students. Inevitably, students will come unprepared to the conference. I have adapted to this challenge by giving the students two options: discussing their drafting (as much as they have completed) or coming back before/after class for another conference when they have more completed. By allowing the student to choose, it requires them to be responsible for their conference and allows them to decide which option is best suited for their writing style. Some students need help with drafting and idea generation, so some opt to discuss their beginning ideas and then come back for another conference when they have a completed draft.

Another challenge is meeting learner needs in the timeframe of the conference. Some students require more guidance and feedback during the conference, and the conference could run over on time, thus taking time away from another student. To avoid this, for those students who need additional instruction, I stop the conference at the designated time, but I return to their writing during a planning period or before/after school and provide them some written feedback to help them further develop their writing.

Finally, one of the largest challenges that occurred during writers' conferences was a lack of student engagement; frequently, the students wanted to simply sit, maybe take notes, and consume what I had to say. Students were passive learners when I wanted them to become active participants in the process. To combat this, I began each class period with a brief journal entry and began asking every student to share their thoughts on the particular journal prompt, even if it asked what their favorite book was that had been adapted into a movie. The goal was simple: to get them talking. As the year progressed, we discussed more nuanced and complicated journal prompts, such as how Meursault is characterized as an existentialist or an absurdist in Albert Camus' *The Stranger*. These more analytical questions allowed the students to discuss answers that they weren't entirely sure of, express confusion, and ask questions as we discussed the journal prompts. By requiring them to speak to me and to their peers every day, they began to be comfortable using their voices when discussing their learning processes. After implementing the philosophy that everybody must share, the conferences began to be more productive, and the students became much more actively involved.

Discussions and Conclusions

In my initial attempts of writer's conferences, the conversation lacked focus and largely depended on me as the instructor to highlight areas of needed growth. However, after requiring

students to come to the conference with three content specific questions, the conversations started with, and were more directed by, the student. I began each conference by asking the student to describe their writing process up to this point. This required the student to participate in the conversation right from the beginning and created a voice for them in the conversation. After the student described his or her process with the draft so far, I asked them to read one of their content specific questions. This allowed the student to direct the conference to the areas that they recognize as needing development. As we continued to discuss the draft, I made it a point to ask open-ended questions to prompt the student to discover how they could develop their draft. Ultimately, the goal of the conference shifted following the implementation of the pedagogical suggestions from trying to fit as many corrections and comments into the conversation to trying to facilitate the student's ability to think critically about their writing and the confidence and power to ask questions and create meaning from the conversation.

Facilitating this critical thought and power over their writing did many things for me as an instructor. First, I spent less time in conferences. With 28 students per class period and only 42 minutes per period, conferences required a great amount of time. However, when I wasn't the one reading, or rather skimming, the entire paper and cramming in every possible correction, when I wasn't solely responsible for creating a productive conversation, the conferences became more focused and more productive in a shorter amount of time. I spent roughly five minutes per student rather than 10-15 minutes per student, and the conversations were arguably more productive because the conversation was focused on specific aspects of the draft rather than the entire piece. Second, my students began to reread and revise their drafts with a more critical eye. As I asked them open-ended questions that prompted them to discover the solution to an issue, they began to see those areas and the solutions on their own without my prompting. The

recurrent issues, such as transition phrases and introductions to quotes, that I saw in the first round of conferences were not the focus of the conference, or even issues, in the second assignment draft. It appeared that by facilitating the critical thought necessary to correct issues, students were able to execute that critical thought in a later draft without the prompting. Finally, these writer's conferences allowed me to individualize my writing instruction on a much deeper level. With such high student populations per class, it can be difficult to meet the needs of lower-level writers while also challenging the higher-level writers. One-on-one conversations allowed me to meet the needs of all of my students and develop their writing from where they started when they arrived in my classroom. Without effective pedagogical approaches, writer's conferences can become stressful interactions during which instructors are solely responsible for offering critique and corrections; however, after implementing the pedagogical suggestions, students became the driving force of the conversation, expressed their needs as writers, and developed the critical thinking skills necessary to identify and correct mistakes in later assignments.

Overall, these pedagogical recommendations seek to increase student agency during writers' conferences. In a world dominated by testing, standards, increased enrollment, and diverse learner needs, writers' conferences became nearly impossible because of the demand on instructional time and teachers' inability to individualize writing instruction in the face of increased enrollment. By increasing student control during writers' conferences, it will decrease the responsibility of the instructor to create meaningful conversations about writing, increase student ownership and engagement with writing, and allow students to take a more active role in their learning. Further, writers' conferences that foster student agency will help the students develop the ability to see gaps in their writing and critique their draft to make substantive

revisions. Finally, these pedagogical recommendations seek to make conducting writers' conferences more accessible even for instructors with full classes.

Writers' conferences, using the pedagogical suggestions that I have provided, serve to build novice writers' confidence, develop an ability to think critically about their own writing, minimize the work involved for already overloaded instructors, and meet the vast needs of diverse learners that enter high school or collegiate classrooms and are required to take entry level composition courses. Writers' conferences and these pedagogical suggestions for implementation of the conferences will provide an easier path to differentiating writing instruction while still making necessary connections and relationships with students that would not be possible without one-on-one instruction and feedback.

Neal Lerner explained the circumstances of failed writers' conferences throughout history with increased enrollment coupled with immense diversity among learners in the classroom; however, the approach to writers' conferences in the educational eras that he analyzed demonstrate a one-sided, overwhelming reliance on the instructor to create meaning during the conversations (196). As more high schools move towards dual-enrollment or college credit plus programs and more high school students seek to take advantage of earning college composition credits while still in high school, these pedagogical suggestions seek to make conducting writers' conferences easier and more productive for the students in such a way as to significantly decrease the pressure placed upon instructors to create meaning during the conferences. By increasing student agency and ownership of the writing process, students will be empowered to be critical of their own writing. Ideally, novice writers will ultimately be capable of guiding their own writing through the writing process, and writers' conferences can be simplified to one-minute check-ins, described in Gilliland's analysis of writers' conferences, in which the

instructor simply checks for progress as the students create the meaning. These pedagogical suggestions empower instructors to take the passenger seat and let the novice writers take control of their writing process and the creation of meaning throughout the drafting phase, and then, even despite increased enrollment and diverse learner needs, such as Lerner described, writers' conferences can be successful in creating skilled writers capable of understanding their strengths and weaknesses and critiquing their own writing to create a polished final product.

Recommendations for Additional Research

With IRB approval, formal research could replicate, verify, and provide qualitative data as examples of successful writer's conferences. I would recommend conducting exit interviews with the students that participated in the conferences to gauge how successful they felt the conference was (see Appendix B for sample interview questions), recording the conferences, and surveying students both before and after the conference to gauge their opinions of the success and meaningfulness of the conference. Additionally, I recommend recording the conferences before and after implementation of the pedagogical suggestions to analyze how much time the student spent speaking and how much time the instructor spent speaking. Additionally, the data could be analyzed to create an understanding of how much of the interaction, led by the student, is meaningful interaction, including asking questions about their writing, providing ideas to correct errors, or developing new ideas for the content of the writing. This information would help to demonstrate how much of the conversation is instructor-dominated. After the pedagogical suggestions are implemented, I anticipate that the student will begin to develop a greater sense of self-efficacy in regards to their writing and speaking about their writing. Finally, student work samples would greatly benefit the discussion of effective writers' conferences. By including and evaluating student work samples, it would provide insight into the changes students made after

the conference and how they implemented the skills developed in the conference in other writing assignments.

Writers' conferences are not widely conducted at the high school level; therefore, further research is necessary into the ability to successfully implement writers' conferences with larger course loads. Analyzing the writing and responses of students of different writing abilities, and even students with learning disabilities, before and after conferences would be beneficial to the overall effectiveness of the differentiation within writers' conferences. This could be done by tracking student progress with work samples and interviews over the course of a semester or academic year. Based on the results of my informal study, I anticipate that writers' conferences, when they are conducted with the goal to increase student agency and critical thought, will demonstrate an increase in writing performance for all levels of learners.

Appendix A

Pedagogical Suggestions for Increasing Student Agency in Writers' Conferences

1. Prior to beginning the conference, require students to write down 2-3 specific questions regarding the *content* of their writing. Then begin the conference with their questions. Requiring students to take an active role in critically thinking about their writing will empower them to ask questions regarding their work and give them the opportunity to focus on their true needs, even if they are afraid to speak up in a whole class setting.
    a. *For example, John Doe might write, "I am struggling to find similarities between the rhetorical article and the fiction piece for my comparative analysis. How can I pair them together to flow well?"*
2. When you must prompt students to find the solution, ask open-ended questions that the students must think critically to answer. Never ask yes or no questions during a writers' conference.
    a. *For example, avoid questions such as "Doesn't the word 'devastated' sound better in that sentence than 'disappointed'? Instead, ask is there a more impactful word that would add emphasis to that sentence?*
3. Do not focus the conversation during conferences around the grading rubric. This will lead to more authentic and student-focused conversations. Instead, focus your attention on the piece of writing as a reader. Respond authentically as a reader.
    a. *For example, if the student's writing had a tendency to jump around and lacks cohesive transitions, you may ask the student "how did you get here? I did not follow your thought process." Or, you may simply tell them "I'm confused here."*

By responding as a reader would, instead of pointing to a rubric and saying "you lack transitions," the conversation will allow for more positive teacher-student interactions and more productive feedback.

4. After the student asks their questions regarding the content of the writing, ask them to suggest a solution or talk through the way to correct the issue before offering any feedback of your own. It may be second nature to immediately give them the answer, or even ask other prompting questions to lead them to the answer, but agency in writing stems from discovery. Allowing students to talk through the issue will give them the opportunity for discovery.
    a. *For example, you might respond to John's above question with, "Okay, talk through the central themes of both texts."*
5. When giving feedback on writing, focus on one area of the holistic rubric rather than overwhelming the student with feedback that varies from all aspects of the rubric. Choose one or two focus areas that specifically address content, logic, and the connection of ideas. Grammar and mechanics are secondary items that can be addressed during an editing phase; there is not time to mark and comment every single missed comma, run-on sentence, and spelling error. These issues could also be addressed during peer editing or through online tools such as Grammarly.com.
    a. *For example, focus on how the students connect textual evidence as support back to their thesis statements. A guiding question could be: how does your evidence support your topic sentence and prove your thesis statement.*
6. Create a learning environment in the class that is low stakes and allows for mistakes by sharing your own struggles with writing, allowing for discovery to stem from mistakes,

praising student strengths, encouraging students to speak, answer questions, and express confusion, and by demonstrating that writing is a process in which multiple drafts with editing and revisions is natural and part of the process.

a. *Low stakes writing environments allows for students to create meaning from the writing process and the conference process by making mistakes, learning from them, and discovering meaning within those mistakes without fear of imperfection, judgement, or poor grades. Low stakes writers' conferences and initial drafts will help to boost novice writers' confidence as they draft and continue to write.*

Appendix B

Student Interview Questions after first writers' conferences, prior to implementing pedagogical suggestions, and after second writers' conferences

1. What did you take away from that writers' conference?
2. How do you think that writers' conference benefitted your writing skills on this essay? What about your writing skills overall?
3. On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate your confidence and empowerment with your writing after the conference?
4. What feedback did you find to be the most useful to you?

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F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and the Dandy, the Flaneur, and Intricacies Beyond Characterization: An Argument for Increased Theoretical Perspectives in High School English Classrooms

Introduction and Statement of Purpose

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is a common canonical text that is taught in high school classrooms across the United States. This text is a staple of American Literature courses and is often a required text for Advanced Placement tests and essays. With powerful themes such as the American Dream, the culture of the United States in the 1920s, dissatisfaction with wealth and love, and society and social class, this text's relevance to students and contemporary culture maintains its status as an English curriculum staple. However, many classes are delving into only the mere surface of the intricacies of this text. By approaching this text with critically and theoretically focused learning outcomes, this famous text can continue to be challenging and influential for students. Rather than simply scratching the surface of the nuanced meanings in the text, students will be able to read prominent theoretical works, apply them to the text, and then expand their discussions of the text to their realities outside of the classroom. Using F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, I will demonstrate and argue for the addition of theoretical texts into high school curriculums. Adding theoretical texts and critical and theoretical learning outcomes to high school curriculum may seem too complicated, complex, or challenging given the over emphasis on standardized testing, lack of professional development or education in theoretical applications to literature, and complexity of the theoretical texts. However, by using *The Great Gatsby* as an example, I will show that theory can not only be added to curriculum, but it can enhance the skills that are already being taught in high schools across the United States and help students to not only meet but to master the standards associated with literature.

Fitzgerald's mastery of immersing readers into this fictional world is created through his characterization and the complexity of his characters. While high school curriculums frequently discuss how the characters are described and what components create their complex personalities, theory is rarely applied to these discussions, and the characters motivations are either briefly glossed over or not discussed at all. Therefore, applying theory to this text would create another layer of complexity and nuance to the text and allow for readers to understand the character's motivations, the treatment of other characters, and the characters formation of identity. Applying Charles Baudelaire's concept of the dandy and the flaneur to Fitzgerald's elaborate network of characters will highlight the complexities within these characters and their motivations. Fitzgerald creates numerous complex characters that epitomize Baudelaire's ideas of the dandy, the flaneur, and even an intricate mixture in which both concepts, despite being seemingly opposite, overlap to create internal and external conflicts. These characterizations provide insight into not only the characters' personalities but also their motivations, actions, and treatment of other characters, and highlight deeper intricacies such as fetishes, strong female characters, and challenges of creating identities, at work within the text.

The Great Gatsby: An Example of an Analysis with Theoretical approaches to Characterization

Charles Baudelaire explains his idea of the dandy and the flaneur in "The Painter of Modern Life" (799). The concept of a dandy and a flaneur explains a type of a character and their interactions with the society around them. Baudelaire explains the concept of the dandy as a person who does not aim at love as a "target," cares little for his own money, and desires to "create for oneself a personal originality" (Baudelaire 799). A dandy gains what he desires not from money or capital but from the decadence from others. Contrastingly, a flaneur is "a

passionate spectator" of society (Baudelaire 795). According to Keith Tester, "The flaneur is the secret spectator of the spectacle of the spaces and the places of the city" (7). Therefore, a dandy "finds joy in astonishing others and never being himself astonished" and the seemingly opposite flaneur moves around within the society observing others and critiquing the society around them (Baudelaire, 799). On the surface, these two character types appear to be vastly different; however, Fitzgerald demonstrates in *The Great Gatsby* that characters can have qualities of both. This compilation of qualities from both the dandy and the flaneur creates internal conflicts and allows for the reader to analyze the motivations behind each action in order to understand their behaviors, dealings with money and wealth, interactions with other characters, and their true identities.

Jay Gatsby: Not Solely Dandy

Jay Gatsby is a prime example of a character that on the surface appears to exhibit only the qualities of a dandy. However, upon further analysis of his actions and interactions with other characters, the reader begins to realize how many traits of a flaneur Gatsby embodies. First, Gatsby exemplifies very dandyish characteristics because of his disregard for his immense wealth. His house and house parties are lavish and awe-inspiring. Nick Carraway, the narrator, describes the opulent preparations made for one of Gatsby's parties, "By seven o'clock the orchestra has arrived, no thin five-piece affair, but a whole pitful of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and cornets and piccolos, and low and high drums" (Fitzgerald ch. 3). The extravagant musical arrangement required for one of Gatsby's parties demonstrates one of the primary factors of a dandy: a disregard for wealth. While Gatsby participates in the capitalistic society in which he lives, he is not concerned with his own wealth. Baudelaire explains this dandyism, "he [the dandy] would be perfectly content with a limitless credit at the bank" (798).

Simply, Gatsby throws lavish parties for the decadence of the guests around him. For example, in chapter 3, Lucille tore her dress at one of Gatsby's parties, and she stated, "[...] he asked me my name and address - inside a week I got a package form Croirier's with a new evening gown in it" (Fitzgerald ch. 3). Gatsby gains enjoyment from the decadence and lavishness of others. Therefore, by purchasing another dress for Lucille, he demonstrates his need for the decadence of others and a lack of concern for his own wealth. Further, Gatsby's immaculate parties that draw guests in hordes, "on weekends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight," demonstrates his desire to draw attention (Fitzgerald ch. 3). Most importantly, Gatsby demonstrates his wealth without being concerned with the status of his wealth, and he draws attention to himself by creating these extravaganzas to which people simply attend without invitation or personal relationships with Gatsby.

Further, Gatsby is always performing. Whether it be at his own parties or constructing his life from lies and criminal activities, he is constantly creating his life and persona. According to Baudelaire, dandyism "is first and foremost the burning need to create for oneself a personal originality" (799). Gatsby creates his life from casting aside his past as James "Jimmy" Gatz to his lavish parties at which he creates his own society and world in which to attract Daisy. His entire life is a construction fit to his liking, and he performs to his construction. Gatsby even arranged to buy the house that he lives in so that Daisy would be just across the bay in order to gain her attention and affection. Gatsby's performance and his parties draw attention to himself and allows him to depart from the norms of the time period. Gatsby appears to be in a world all his own. Baudelaire states, "Dandyism appears above all in periods of transition, when democracy is not yet all powerful, and aristocracy is only just beginning to totter and fall. In the

disorder of these times, certain men who are socially, politically, and financially ill at ease, but are all rich in native energy, may conceive the idea of establishing a new kind of aristocracy" (799). Gatsby created a new aristocracy for himself in order to meet his goal of finding Daisy. Every aspect of Gatsby's life, his house, parties, two motor boats, Rolls-Royce, servants, helps him to perform and create his new aristocracy, "In drawing attention to and flaunting his wealth, Gatsby creates both a role for himself to perform and the stage upon which to perform it" (Mintler 119). His ostentatious flaunting of his wealth and status creates a performance of his life and his dandy qualities.

Contrastingly, Gatsby's parties draw attention to himself, but he never fully immerses himself into the action or movements of the partygoers. He exhibits very flaneur behavior by moving amongst the crowds of partiers without ever engaging with them. Baudelaire explains the flaneur as someone who appreciates being at the center of the world without being the center of attention (795). Gatsby invites hundreds of people into his home without knowing them or making himself accessible to them. He creates for himself this world in which he can be the center, but then he removes himself to remain hidden from that very world that he created. "It was testimony to the romantic speculation he inspired that there were whispers about him from those who found little that it was necessary to whisper about in this world" (Fitzgerald ch. 3). Gatsby's seclusion and distance in his own home and at his own party allows the reader to see a flaneur quality in his very dandyish exterior. Gatsby himself admits that he finds himself among strangers at his parties, "You see, I usually find myself among strangers because I drift here and there trying to forget the sad thing that happened to me" (Fitzgerald ch. 4). Gatsby feels himself to be among strangers at his parties because he does not engage with the people who spend countless hours at his house; he simply moves among them and around them. According to

Tester, “The flaneur waits to be filled because, in himself, he is utterly empty […]” (8). Gatsby is throwing these parties to escape the sad things that happened to him and to also hopefully reconnect with a lost love, Daisy. Gatsby’s attachment to Daisy and love for her also demonstrates qualities of a flaneur. According to Baudelaire, a dandy “can nevertheless survive the pursuit of happiness to be found in someone else — in woman” (799). Gatsby’s happiness lies in finding Daisy, his long-lost love, and obtaining her love by throwing these lavish parties. Baudelaire states, “the dandy does not, however, regard love as a special target to be aimed at” (799). Therefore, Gatsby’s motivations, all for love, that are behind his actions reveal that he is not simply the dandy he appears to be on the surface; he demonstrates the qualities of a flaneur when his true motivations are revealed.

Gatsby’s motivations for these extravagant parties demonstrate that he is more complex than a simple dandy or flaneur; particularly these dandy and flaneur characteristics motivate how Gatsby treats the women around him. First, Gatsby is throwing these lavish events in order to hopefully attract the attention of one woman; thus, he is very much a flaneur. He is motivated by his love for this woman, so he seeks her attention in the only way he can hope — incredible parties. However, Gatsby’s parties objectify Daisy as a trophy to be obtained, coveted, and displayed. Gatsby’s life is centered around being validated by Daisy despite having not known her or heard word of her in a very long time. Gatsby displays Freud’s definition of a fetish. Freud defines a fetish as “a substitute for the woman’s (the mother’s) penis that the little boy once believed in and — for reasons familiar to us — does not want to give up” (Freud 953). Stating that the fetish is a replacement for the mother’s missing penis is more simply explained by saying the fetish is an object that the man holds onto to fulfil an emptiness in his life. Thus, the fetish makes the man feel whole. Freud argues that fetishes are born from a fear of castration

after realizing the mother does not have a penis. Interestingly, Gatsby's mother is never mentioned throughout the novel; the only information given about his parents and background is that his parents were poor, unsuccessful farmers who lived a life that Gatsby chose to completely abandon. Thus, Gatsby's abandonment of his parents, past, and background created within him a hole in his life that he filled with both his pursuit of Daisy and, ultimately, Daisy herself. Gatsby stated in the novel, "You see, I usually find myself among strangers because I drift here and there trying to forget the sad thing that happened to me" (Fitzgerald ch. 4). While, he is frequently among strangers and drifting to forget the sad things that happened to him, Gatsby has created for himself an outlet, his parties and pursuing Daisy, from which to fill the emptiness in his life. Daisy, in the novel, creates a wholeness for Gatsby. His entire life is situated in order to gain her attention and rekindle the relationship that he had with her. Therefore, Gatsby's flaneur fixation on his love affair with Daisy and his dandy reveling in parties and disregard for his immense wealth creates out of Daisy a fetish in which he finds wholeness and replaces his lack of family, background, and history.

Nick Carraway: Intricate Complexities of both Dandy and Flaneur

Nick Carraway is the narrator of the novel, and all the events of the novel are viewed through the eyes of yet another intricate mix of both dandy and flaneur characteristics. While he is the narrator of the novel, Nick is an observer of the action. Baudelaire describes the flaneur as, "solitary, gifted with an active imagination" (796). He does not draw attention to himself or catalyze much of the action. Upon first glance, one might consider Nick to be purely flaneur. First, Nick Carraway came from a "prominent, well-to-do people in this Middle Western city for three generations" (Fitzgerald ch. 1). However, Nick chose to remove himself from that prominence and his father's successful hardware business in true flaneur fashion. According to

Baudelaire, “it is an immense joy [for the flaneur] to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home” (795). Nick has chosen to live in a modest house, despite his family’s money, in an area that is surrounded by millionaires. He left his family home to reside amidst the movements of the wealthy. His house was in the “less fashionable” West Egg, and it was nestled between “two huge places that rented for twelve or fifteen thousand a season” (Fitzgerald ch. 1). Nick’s ability to disregard his family’s wealth for a more modest, secluded lifestyle defines him as a flaneur. Nick prefers his privacy rather than engage with the wealthy individuals of whose company his family prominence could afford him. Nick’s physical removal from the events of the East Egg and his preference for observing characterize him as an outsider, a flaneur. He frequently watches the events of Gatsby’s parties from his residence without immersing himself in them.

Keith Tester simply defines “flanerie” as “the activity of strolling and looking” (1). Tester explains the actions of the flaneur as simply moving amongst people and seeing the interactions around them. However, Baudelaire states that a flaneur is more than someone who simply watches others; he states, “He makes his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distil the eternal from the transitory” (796). Baudelaire states the flaneurs are looking for something more in everyday movements; in their “journeying”, they are critiquing the world around them (796). Ultimately, Nick is invited to one of Gatsby’s parties, and while he engages somewhat with the guests that he is around, he never truly immerses himself in their world. He prefers to observe their interactions. For example, Nick, from his home, observes the servants cleaning the aftermath of the weekend of partying, “And on Mondays eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and

scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before" (Fitzgerald ch. 3). Despite Nick's invitation, he cannot help his nature to observe others. Baudelaire defines the flaneur as the "perfect spectator," and even when Nick is invited to and immersed in the party, he maintains his role as a spectator (795). Nick prefers to move through the parties and watch the interactions, and thus Nick appears to be solely a flaneur.

However, Nick is a much more complicated individual than solely a flaneur, and even more complicated than Gatsby himself. Nick does not truly immerse himself with Gatsby's parties, but he is intrigued by the dandyish lifestyle and attracted to the way in which the people who attend Gatsby's parties interact. This interest and intrigue characterize Nick as a dandy. His house is situated between two immaculately large houses in the West Egg, and it faces Gatsby's mansion so that he can watch the events in the East Egg. In chapter 4, Nick begins by listing many people who he remembered going to Gatsby's parties over the summer. He is intrigued enough by the dandy lifestyle of "aristocratic superiority" that he does more than merely observes; he remembers specific people who frequented the Gatsby house (Baudelaire 799). Nick is interested in the lifestyle, the distinction, and the limelight, but he is content to observe the limelight and the lifestyle from a distance. Baudelaire explains that dandies are "in love with distinction above all things," and Nick is in love with the distinction that not only these partiers themselves possess but also the distinction that they bestow upon Gatsby when they attend his parties (799). Therefore, Nick's fascination with what Baudelaire describes as "aristocratic superiority" and "distinction" characterizes him as a dandy (799).

These conflicting characterizations create an internal conflict within Nick. While he is both intrigued by the lifestyle Gatsby leads, he is also repulsed by the consequences of that lifestyle. This internal conflict is demonstrated in Nick's relationship with Jordan Baker. Nick

enjoys Jordan, and her appearance, but he is equally repulsed by her dishonest, self-centeredness, and independence. Nick's attraction to Jordan demonstrates his dandy qualities: enjoying appearance, being intrigued by attention, and lavish disregard for wealth. When Nick first encounters Jordan, he spends a great deal of time admiring her appearance, "I enjoyed looking at her. She was a slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage, which she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulders like a young cadet. Her gray sun-strained eyes looked back at me with polite reciprocal curiosity out of a wan, charming, discontented face" (Fitzgerald ch. 1). Nick is enjoying the appearance that she presents; like a dandy, he is enjoying her company and her attention. Nick is drawn to her glamorous exterior and the richness of her world. However, he is eventually able to see through her glamour and rich exterior to the careless person she truly is. His ability to observe and critique her leads him to understand that she is a careless person, the kind of person that truly repulses him, "She was incurably dishonest. She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage and, given this unwillingness, I suppose she had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard, jaunty body" (Fitzgerald ch. 3). Nick describes her dishonest, cool, and insolent, yet he finds her incredibly attractive. Jordan creates a conflict for Nick not only in her physical appearance yet dubious personality, but she also creates a conflict between his flaneur and his dandy qualities.

Jordan: A Strong Female Character

Jordan represents a very strong female character in the novel. She, unlike Daisy, has a strong will, a strong voice, and strong opinions of her life and her future. Instead of marrying, like Daisy, she chooses to play golf and frequently dates, so much so that Nick comments that her family "shouldn't let her run around the country in this way" (Fitzgerald ch. 1). Part of

Nick's attraction to Jordan is her observational, sometimes cynical wit, but his repulsion to her is her strong willed and independent attitude. Jordan contrasts Daisy's compliant, inward focused, and married life. Jordan Baker creates tensions in the novel because she behaves inconsistently with both the expectations of women during the time period and also the behaviors and personalities of the other prominent women in the novel. Her strong will as a female breaks the stereotypes and expectations that Nick has for her. Judith Butler critiques the ideas of gender roles by stating,

> that gender reality is created through sustained social performances mean that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality (2501).

Butler explains that gender is determined by performances rather than stereotypical expectations and traditions. Thus, Jordan Baker through her dating and professional career is challenging Nick's traditional views of the roles of women in the novel. Jordan does not "perform" like Daisy and the typical women during this time period. Rather, she takes her love life, professional golf career, and her cynical wit to be her own power. This powerful female character challenges Nick's dandy attractions to her and reinforces his flaneur repulsion of her dishonesty and self-centeredness.

Tom Buchanan: The Quintessential Dandy

The final character that embodies dandy or flaneur characteristics is Tom Buchanan. Tom Buchanan is a quintessential dandy. Tom is very concerned with his status in the world because of his immense wealth; he came from "old money" and because of that he believes he is entitled

to occupy the highest status in society. Baudelaire explains that a dandy regards material elegance as “no more than symbols of his aristocratic superiority of mind” (798). Tom demonstrates his social status and descent from incredible wealth as his aristocratic superiority over the other dandies, and especially the other characters, in the novel. “His family were enormously wealthy -- even in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach -- but now he’d left Chicago and come East in a fashion that rather took your breath away: for instance, he’d brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest” (Fitzgerald, ch. 1). Tom inherited his wealth from generations of wealthy individuals, and he demonstrated that wealth, even in his college days, without thought or regard for his money. Tom desired to show off his wealth and status and be seen. Baudelaire states, “It is a kind of cult of the self which can nevertheless survive the pursuit of a happiness to be found in someone else--in woman, for example; which can survive all that goes by in the name of illusions. It is the joy of astonishing others, and the proud satisfaction of never oneself being astonish” (799). Tom finds his joy in flaunting his wealth in order to astonish others. Further, his only goal for flaunting his wealth, unlike Gatsby seeking to gain Daisy’s attention, is to be seen and regarded as having high status.

Further, Tom not only believes himself to be descended from a socially superior family, but he also believes that he is descended from a superior race. He explains in chapter 1 that he is of the Nordic people, and they are responsible for creating everything that makes civilization function. He also states, “It’s up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things” (Fitzgerald, ch. 1). Tom has further separated himself as superior both financially and racially. Baudelaire states that dandies are concerned with creating “distinction above all things” and a “cult of the self” (799). Thus, Tom has created his own society and social sphere in which he moves and interacts with other people.

Additionally, Tom seeks to cover his faults, in both his character and in his marriage, to create an illusion of his life. While he takes mistresses, abuses his wife, and is arrogant, he presents his life as picture-perfect, something every other man should envy. Nick describes Tom as a "sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining arrogant eyes had established a dominance over his face and have him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward" (Fitzgerald, ch. 1). Not only did Tom think he was superior in social standing, he also held himself physically above the other men in the novel. He held a higher physical stature, but his "arrogant eyes" and the "domination over his face" created an appearance that he believed himself to be of a higher lineage than the other characters. Therefore, he covers the imperfections of his life in order to maintain his superiority. Baudelaire states "A dandy may be blasé, he may even suffer; but in this case, he will smile like the Spartan boy under the fox's tooth" (799). Dandies will hide their deceit in order to maintain their reputation and egos. Tom hides his faults, both in his marriage and personality, in order to maintain the illusion of this higher status that he has created for himself. Tom is creating, according to Baudelaire, a "personal originality bound only by the limits of the proprieties" (799). His social status and ability to cover his faults overwhelms Tom as a dandy. Overall, Tom demonstrates his wealth without regard in order to flaunt the status afforded to him from generations of wealthy people, and he creates an illusion of a perfect life for himself in order to cover up his faults.

While dandies are explained using words such as "heroes," "beauty," and "finest in human pride," Tom is a character that is not a hero (Baudelaire 799). His faults are glaring, and the narrator and the reader both hold a sort of disdain for Tom. His temper, his infidelity, and his arrogance demonstrate that the concepts of a dandy or a flaneur are never as simple as they seem.

Tom demonstrates the ambiguity and complexity that Baudelaire highlights, “They are all representatives of what is finest in human pride, of that compelling need, alas only too rare today, of combating and destroying triviality. It is from this that the dandies obtain that haughty exclusiveness, provocative in its very coldness” (799). Tom, while seemingly starkly dandy, demonstrates the nuances in a dandy’s desire for “aristocratic superiority” and the consequential “air of coldness.” Dandies are concerned with destroying triviality, and from that pursuit, they obtain a haughty exclusiveness. Tom is an example of a character that is not simply a dandy but demonstrates the characteristics of a dandy with some discrepancies. Tom’s complexities appear from an apparent deviation of Baudelaire’s ideas of a typical dandy. Tom is not a “hero” of the story, and he is not well-liked by either the narrator or the reader. While Baudelaire presented a character type that was concerned with reputation, status, aristocratic superiority, and had a complete disregard for wealth, Tom couples those standards with less desirable attributes that are damaging to his reputation: infidelity, abusiveness, and arrogance (799). While, Tom does not have the complex pairing of both dandy and flaneur traits, he does present intricacies that seek to highlight his insecurities and faults. Ultimately, his identity is more complex than simply being strictly a dandy.

Character Motivations: Influenced by Dandy and Flaneur Characteristics

These characters, while all demonstrating similar characteristics either dandy or flaneur, are all motivated by different things. These differences in motivations create conflict as they all work to achieve their goals. Tom’s nearly pure dandy characteristics create a stark contrast to Gatsby’s intricate mixture of both dandy and flaneur and Nick’s largely flaneur characteristics. First, Tom is motivated largely by his dandy qualities: the need to be seen and his reputation. He disregards his wife, her opinions, and other characters’ emotions in order to maintain the high

social status. Gatsby, however, demonstrates dandy qualities while being motivated by his flaneur characteristics. His flaneur qualities motivate his dandy actions, for example, throwing the lavish parties in order to gain one woman's attention. The subject of love is the point greatest tension between these two characters. In true dandy fashion, Tom does not see love as something to be aimed at achieving. He views Daisy as a possession paid for, and thus he owns her. However, Gatsby's flaneur motivations demonstrate to us that he views Daisy and her love as an object to be achieved. His very existence hinges on her approval and her attention. Nick differs from both Tom's dandy motivations and actions and Gatsby's flaneur motivations yet dandy actions. Nick's actions are motivated by his flaneur features and acts as a flaneur, yet his interests are motivated by dandy traits. Despite Nick's enjoyment from watching people and critiquing the society in which he moves and participates, he is interested in somewhat being a part of that society. He remains an observer throughout the novel motivated by his flaneur characteristics.

By creating such complexities of characters, Fitzgerald has created a critique of pure capital, the American Dream, love, and motivations. Fitzgerald also highlights the intricacies of characters with different motivations and different end goals. Characters can be similar in personality aspects and differ immensely in their motivations. Fitzgerald's nuances in characterization critique the complexities inherent in identity formation. Gatsby created for himself a dandy identity by disregarding his wealth and throwing lavish parties with stylish people; however, underneath that dandy exterior he is very much a flaneur who is motivated by an intense, nearly fetishistic, love of a woman. Nick appears to be solely a flaneur-silently watching, critiquing- but in reality, he does have an affinity for the finer things in life and the decadence of others. The way in which these characters create their identities requires the reader

to focus on the more nuanced details in the text. The reader must become a silent critic of the action of the novel; the reader must become a flaneur in order to fully understand the interactions of the novel and these characters' identities. Fitzgerald's intricacies require a more active readership, and a readership that can see through the characters' created identities to their true driving forces.

Benefits: Implementing Theoretical Approaches to Literature

As the example with *The Great Gatsby* demonstrated, theoretical grounding in literary analysis provides another layer of depth when discussing blanket concepts like characterization. According to Hall and Piazza, "Too few students are likely to have had experiences with critical literacy in school. In English, it is common for the curriculum to be centered on reading a particular set of texts or genres that are considered central to develop student's literary knowledge" (92). Students are asked too frequently to analyze theme, literary elements, and symbolism when analyzing, but critical literacy allows students to interact on a deeper level and connect more with the world around them (Rains 32 or Hall and Piazza 92). Therefore, by approaching literary instruction through critical literacy education, students are able to connect with literature on a deeper level and apply those connections to the world around them.

Implementing theoretical approaches begins to initiate students into the academic discourse of postsecondary education. Theoretical approaches to literature in high school English classrooms can begin to initiate students into the type of reading that will required of them in postsecondary education. Most postsecondary literature courses ask student to "'read' with an understanding that this means critically engaging with textual material and assuming an interpretative stance" (Eckert 111). However, secondary literature classrooms frequently train students to decode words rather than to approach literature with the language or critical literary

interpretation (Eckert 111). Therefore, by implementing theoretical approaches to literature in secondary schools, students will begin to practice the "reading," interpretive theoretical reading, valued and expected by college-level literature courses. Teaching literary theories at the secondary level allows students to "make the jump from passive reading to active interpretation" (Rains 33). Therefore, theoretical applications to literature better prepare students for postsecondary curriculum because they are able to begin to use the skills that will be expected of them in higher education.

Pedagogical Strategies for Implementing Literary Theory

Implementing literary theory may be challenging for both instructors and students of literature. However, there are many pedagogical approaches to successfully incorporating literary theory at the secondary level. Approaching theory as a supplement to traditional, and oftentimes repetitive, skills-based pedagogy will not lend the depth that theory can provide to literature instruction. Centering the course around literary theory and requiring students to "make a prodigious cognitive leap from *reading* to *interpretation*" will lend the depth of analysis and allow students to look deeper at the social hierarchies within pieces of literature (Eckert 111 and Rains 33).

One suggestion for teaching literary theory is to explicitly teach a few prominent literary theories at the beginning of the school year and revisit them throughout the school year; thus, literary theories become "tools to be accessed in future units" (Wilson 70). Students must be open to the numerous and varied ways that texts can generate meaning; they must abandon their thinking that "texts generate meaning in a single, albeit complex, way" (Wilson 71). Therefore, students should be given a concrete grounding in the different theoretical approaches to literature. Direct instruction on how each theoretical approach will give students "an

understanding of how lenses offer new ways of seeing and reading" (Wilson 71). By allowing students to understand that there are multiple ways of viewing and reading a text, students are required to make the move from reading to interpreting. Here, I would like to make one important point. Instructors must express that different interpretations are valid as long as they are textually supported. Students often become overwhelmed with finding the "right" answer; however, interpretation and theory leaves room for students to express and explore different aspects of a text. Therefore, they may not be able to find one "right" answer, but they should understand that this is acceptable in the world of literary interpretation.

Another approach to applying literary theory in secondary English classrooms is to create a thematic unit surrounding one or more works of literature and corresponding literary theories allowing students to engage with the work(s) of literature using many different theoretical approaches. As I have shown above in *The Great Gatsby*, this is an opportunity to ground students' interpretations of literature in one or more theories using one work of literature. Beth Wilson suggests using

> one short work to teach each theory-perhaps Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" for feminist theory, George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" for postcolonial theory, and so on. Alternatively, a novel such as *Jane Eyre* or *The Color Purple* can provide fodder for discussing many theories and discovering the value of layering or switching between theories to enrich one's reading (70).

Centering theoretical approaches to literature around a thematic unit with one or more works of literature allows students to begin to see interpretations of literature as more fluid as they apply, or layer, different theoretical lenses.

Finally, using literary theory as the focus of an entire course can be another way to initiate students into theoretical interpretations of literature. Beginning with introducing all theories early on in the course and then highlighting each one throughout the course can be a beneficial way to pair required reading lists with a new approach to teaching literature. Beth Wilson suggests: "use[ing] literary theory as a framework for an entire course […] offering varied texts to which the students apply the lens at hand. This approach may work well for the teacher who is happy with (or obligated to follow) a particular reading list, but who is interested in a new way to approach it with increased emphasis on interpretive skills" (70). This approach to incorporating literary theory asks instructors to reimagine how they approach literary instruction to focus largely on the different lenses through which students can interpret literature. Skills-based instruction can be paired with theoretical instruction but will be supplemental to the interpretive reading strategies taught through a more theoretical approach to literature.

The importance of teaching literary theory in secondary classrooms goes far beyond simply moving students from reading to decode words or for comprehension to reading for interpretation. "When we hold back literary theory from overt instruction, we also hold students back from learning as deeply as they can through the other layers" (Wilson 71). Additionally, when we avoid literary theory for fears of it being too complex or nuanced for students to grasp, we "underestimate what students are capable of doing" (Eckert 111). Literary theory allows students to engage with literature on a deeper level and try to understand "the entire message of the text" (Rains 32). Theoretical approaches to literature are important for students to be able to communicate and participate in the world around them: "these theories aren't just for literature: they are for everything. Students can use the theories they learn to apply to literature and apply them to their own lives and the world around them, using the lenses to examine their opinions,

assumptions, and biases, as well as those of the people in their lives and in society as a whole" (Rains 32). Pedagogy surrounding theoretical approaches to literature is important to initiate students into the reading expected of them in postsecondary education, allow them to interpret literature through new lenses, and give them the tools to analyze their own assumptions and those of others.

Suggestions for Further Research

Theoretical approaches to literature are rarely used in secondary English curriculums. This could stem from a variety of influential factors including: an overwhelming abundance of state content standards, a reliance on standardized testing to measure student and teacher achievement and progress, and a lack of training and education on how to implement theoretical approaches to literature in teacher training programs. This area of research would benefit largely from additional research into the content understanding, test scores, and college readiness of students who received theoretical literature instruction. Particularly, areas of research could focus on upper secondary level English curriculums including Advanced Placement literature courses and American Literature courses, typically completed by juniors and seniors in high school. Scores on the Advanced Placement test and grades in college level Literature courses would be a valuable area of analysis. Additionally, student writing samples could be analyzed and evaluated for level of depth of engagement with the literary text about which they are writing. Future research could engage with the benefits of a theoretical approach to literature for student writing. Overall, more research needs to be done about the effects of a theoretical approach to literature instruction on student college readiness, depth of engagement with literary texts, and scores on Advanced Placement tests and postsecondary literature courses.

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Issues with the Canon: An Argument for Adding Diverse Literature in Classrooms

Canonical literature is an essential element of most English classrooms both in colleges and in high schools; however, issues with the Western canon and the works that are included in the canon open up debate on the addition of more diverse literature, particularly literature by women, racial minorities, and contemporary literature, to curriculum content. The traditional Western canon is a body of literary works that "is the authentic foundation of cultural thinking and … exists precisely in order to impose limits, to set a standard of measurement that is anything but political or moral" (Bloom 35). The literary canon is a set of key works in a culture and refers

> to the philosophical, political, and religious texts that a particular society has come by consensus to regard as foundational. Today the term canon has come to signify authors and works that either used to be included in literature syllabi or textbooks, or those works that repeatedly appear in standard volumes of the history of literature, bibliographies, and literary criticism (Wilczek 1687).

The Western canon arguably serves many purposes in current English studies, such as a curriculum guide, an introduction into the works of Western culture, and a list of great and influential texts that are important for students to have read: "The overwhelming force of this conception [the conception of the literary canon and term "classic"] lies in its seeming to have arisen not from any particular school of criticism or collection of interests, but naturally and inevitably, as a way of accounting for the ability of certain literary works to command the attention of educated readers generation after generation" (Thompkins 139). Therefore, the literary canon in most secondary and postsecondary English curriculums serves as a catalogue of

works that transcend time and continue to be relevant to educated readers and a staple to Western educational experiences.

However, literature professors' complete reliance on the literary canon for curriculum content presents many important issues: the lack of explicit criteria for what constitutes canonical literature, the exclusion of great female authors and other authors of diverse backgrounds, the political and social influences that prompted the inclusion of works in the canon. These authors (for example, Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, and Hawthorne) are considered to have produced some of the greatest works written. Nonetheless, issues with the Western literary canon, highlighted by current shifting cultural and political landscapes, create an opportunity to supplement canonical literature in English curriculums with diverse literature and even contemporary literature. Including contemporary literature, literature written by racially and ethnically diverse authors, and literature written by women accomplishes many valuable things: exposing students to other perspectives in literature besides those famously considered canonical, reinforcing the value of diversity and different perspectives, and encouraging students to understand, connect with, and apply their own diverse backgrounds in an academic setting.

Primarily, the lack of explicit criteria for what defines "canonical" literature presents issues with introduction and inclusion of works in the canon. The criteria for the value of literature is neither explicit nor specific and changes as the time period changes, "The value judgements inherent in the literary canon had an authority that transcended our individual likes and dislikes and expressed something more fundamental, more permanent, about our culture … however fundamental these judgements were, they were not permanent at all, they were very much the judgments of a particular age" (Richter 122). While the function of the literary canon suggests that there is a shared set of values in judging literature, what Richter calls "human

nature," the literary canon continues to shift as times change (123). As the time period changes, these shared values change prompting movement within the canon; the canon is never stable, and the criteria on which literature is judged is never stable. "[…] The criteria by which those critics judged Hawthorne were different from ours" (Tompkins 143). Tompkins demonstrates the changing opinions of classical literature using Nathaniel Hawthorne's writing and its classical status over time. Tompkins explains that the critics of Hawthorne's work in the nineteenth-century praised short-stories, like "Young Goodman Brown," "The Minister's Black Veil," and "Little Annie's Ramble," that "moralize on domestic topics and fails to appreciate what we now consider classic examples of the American short-story" (139). Critics in the nineteenth-century seemingly overlooked what critics in the twentieth-century admired: "his symbolic complexity, psychological depth, moral subtlety, and density of composition" (139). Literary critics in the nineteenth-century preferred different texts by Hawthorne and read them under entirely different cultural circumstances: "[…] what Hawthorne's contemporaries saw when they read his work is not what we see now" (Tompkins 140). Tompkins is expressing, using Hawthorne as just one example, the changing aspects of literature that literary critics considered great. As generations passed, Hawthorne remained canonical, but what "canonical" meant, what works were read, and the cultural circumstances changed leading to an unstable literary canon, a lack of explicit criteria for judging literature, and changing opinions about what should be included in the canon.

This lack of explicit criteria for inclusion in the canon creates instability within the canon as texts are added and others are removed; textbooks become outdated, and students are now exposed to different authors than their literature professors and other literary critics. Richter also demonstrated the changing tides of the literary canon using an example of Romantic poets in English literature: "For some reason, the canon seems to have space for six Romantic poets and

no more. When the poetry of Blake became canonical around the middle of this century, that of Walter Scott was squeezed out" (122). Because there are no explicit criteria for inclusion in the canon, the canon continues to shift causing changes in the works included in the canon and studied largely in higher education. As criteria and judgements changed, authors are removed from the canon and fall out of favor; the reason for this lack of explicit criteria and abandonment of certain authors is more troubling than the changing tides of the literary canon.

The "interests of the reading public" create the aforementioned lack of explicit criteria for what defines canonical literature, thus leading to the instability and shifts in what is considered great literature. "Literary quality is simply a function of the current interests of the reading public; each public revises the short lists drawn up by the publics of the past in accordance with its own cultural needs" (Richter 126). Reader interest, political influence, and cultural circumstances largely affect the inclusion of texts in the literary canon. Literary greats like William Blake, T.S. Elliot, and Herman Melville are frequently believed to have been independent and immune to political and social influences, and therefore, the canon was not subject to the oftentimes turbulent cultural circumstances that produced the work. However, Jane Tompkins argues it is from these very political and social circumstances that great works of literature become regarded as such, and thus, included in the canon. Tompkins addresses literary reputation and the status of "classic literature" by stating "[…] a literary reputation could never be anything but a political matter" (138). Tompkins argues here that a literary reputation and political influences are intertwined; literary greatness in some cases in created through political influence. This is not aimed to detract from the success of the work, but to emphasize the workings of the social and political parties responsible for maintaining the author's canonical status. What Tompkins calls "partisan processes" heavily influenced the formation and

maintenance of the canon, and "the works that now make up the canon do so because the groups that have an investment in them are culturally the most influential" (138). Social and cultural influences played a great part in the classical status of many authors:

> The effects of favor and competition," "the tradition of friendships," the "advantages" of "local customs," and "temporary opinions," far from being the irrelevant factors that [Samuel] Johnson considered them, are what originally created and subsequently sustained Hawthorne's reputation as a classic author. Hawthorne's work, from the very beginning, emerged into visibility, and was ignored or acclaimed, as a function of the circumstances in which it was read. (Tompkins 139)

Political and social influence alone did not create the Western canon, but these powerful institutions helped to maintain canonical status for many authors while excluding others. Some authors' literary reputation was birthed from favorable social and political connections and societal influences. The work of literature cannot be separated from the author's social connections that played a significant role in creating a literary reputation.

Because of the influence of social and political factors in canon formation, readers and instructors must consider these influences and how they contributed to literary reputation and inclusion in the canon when choosing literature for high school and college classrooms. It must be acknowledged that other powerful institutions, like social connections and political influences, helped to create the Western canon, and literary quality alone was not the deciding factor in canon formation. Even if literary quality alone had been the deciding factor, Richter explained the changing tides of literary quality and the complications inherent in deciding what works were considered quality pieces of literature. While canonical literature continues to be considered great and transcends time, the lack of explicit criteria for canonical status, influential

factors of social, and political changes, and interests of the reading public at the time of publication allow for instructors to create a curriculum that incorporates classical literature and diverse, contemporary literature of the same themes. Tompkins argued that political and social influences were not solely responsible for author's (like Hawthorne's) reputation, canonical literature maintains a quality of greatness, but those factors leave room for instructors to include other works of literature, as the canonical authors are not the only quintessential authors.

When instructors rely solely on canonical literature, avoiding or ignoring the value of contemporary and diverse literature, despite the challenges in canon formation, the canon advances a certain, often narrow and disconnected, culture within the classroom. Choices of literature in classrooms, whether intentionally or unintentionally, advance a culture specific to the university or school. "What is transmitted by the school is, to be sure, a kind of culture; but it is the *culture of the school*" (Guillory 219). By only teaching canonical literature, it becomes difficult to enrich the culture of the school and classroom because of the hegemony of white male writers. According to Guillory, this school culture, advanced by the Western literary canon, is not authentic to the national culture, and what is considered "national cultural" in universities is only available to those that have acquired that level of education: "what this group may learn to think of as a national culture is always a specific *relationship* to the knowledge defined by the university curriculum" (219). Therefore, it is important for instructors to supplement the canonical works with diverse works of literature (like Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* and Sandra Cisneros' *The House On Mango Street)* and to teach those works of literature in context in order to provide a genuine, diverse perspective, to encourage open dialogue regarding diverse authors, and to value diverse voices within the classroom. The issues of what authors and works were included in the canon provide an opportunity to incorporate contemporary and diverse literature

into traditional literature classrooms, however, it must be taught in context with a focus on the culture from which the work was produced: “The function imposed upon schools of acculturating students in ‘our’ culture often thus represents that texts be read ‘out of context,’ as signs of cultural continuity, or cultural unity” (Guillory 222). Without the proper context, the diverse literature does not enrich the culture of the school, rather it does the opposite by trying to create one single culture within the school. Works by diverse authors must be taught in the context of author and cultural backgrounds and taught free from underlying prejudices and biases. Approaching diverse literature as way to broaden students’ perspectives and challenge any potential biases or prejudices is important. Including diverse literature is one way to combat the single view of “national culture” advanced by canonical literature; nevertheless, it is important to refrain from imposing one universal cultural onto the literature and the students even when including diverse literature. By teaching diverse literature in its historical and cultural context paired with canonical literature, the culture of the school is enriched by creating awareness, promoting discussion, and encouraging students to create their own unique voices by employing their own cultural diversities while also being exposed to the works considered great by generations of literary critics.

Consequently, the changing canonical list paired with changing societal and political opinions of literature allows instructors some freedom to supplement canonical literature with contemporary and diverse literature in curriculums to advance a more authentic and diverse culture. In fact, the notion of a literary canon is supported largely by the commitment to the *idea* of the canon rather than a universal definition of what is considered “great” literature (Tompkins 145). Therefore, if instructors of literature broaden their definition of “great” literature and incorporate literature from diverse perspectives, students can understand not only the value of

literature but also the different approaches to and perspectives about the human experience. Additionally, the lack of explicit criteria regarding what should constitute canonical literature and what classic literature should embody allows for literature classrooms to approach universal themes and analyze multiple works of literature that employ that theme. In fact, a study of canonical literature can be edified by the inclusion of contemporary and diverse works because it demonstrates that the themes and qualities of canonical literature that are considered great and timeless are recurring and evident in contemporary literature. Supplementing canonical literature with diverse or contemporary literature allows students to connect with the canonical works from different perspectives, engage with diverse voices, and employ their own diverse voices within the classroom as they read and analyze. Overall, the lack of definition for canonical literature open doors for contemporary and diverse literature and allows for students to begin analyzing and understanding other prominent voices and to develop and apply their own diverse voices within a new, academic environment.

Ultimately, the canon presents a difficult categorization of literature because of the influencing factors, changing political and social climate, and inability for students to relate to the works. However, this argument is not meant to completely cast aside these great literary works. As Jane Tompkins argues of *The Scarlet Letter,* "*The Scarlet Letter* is a great novel in 1850, in 1876, in 1904, in 1942, and in 1966, but each time is it great for different reasons" (144). Classic literature continues to stand the test of time because it continues to be relevant to literary critics and educated readers despite political changes and cultural climates. Thus, the classics are and will remain an important aspect of English curricula. However, pairing diverse and contemporary literature with classical texts will allow students to access the material, create meaning, discuss critiques, and relate to the texts on a level that may not be possible without

consideration and inclusion of more diverse literary representations. By allowing students to read canonical literature alongside diverse representations of literature, the idea of the literary canon becomes less restrictive in literature classrooms.

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Femme Fatales: Representations in Fiction and Film

The Emergence of the Femme Fatale

The reputation of a Victorian woman was dependent on men's representation of her sexuality in literature and art. Throughout artistic history, it is difficult to separate a woman from her subservience to men and sexuality; therefore, representations of women and femininity are characterized by the male constructions of her sexuality in art and literature. According to Adriana Sanchez, "it would be difficult to separate notions of women, sexuality, and art. Throughout literary and artistic history, the construction and/or nature of a female is typically characterized by her sexuality in the productions of male artists and writers, thus her body becomes the object of intrigue, repressed desires, and representation" (1). Women were consistently confined to struggle in a realm dominated by men's power over them and men's fears of women's sexual autonomy.

The emergence of the Victorian femme fatale signals a "destabilization of previously clearly demarcated sex roles and other boundaries" (Sanchez 1). The Victorian femme fatale thrills readers through her sexual deviation, transgression of social boundaries, and rebellion against conformity (Hedgecock, *The sexual threat* 1). This motif became a popular recurrent figure beginning in 1848 with W. M. Thackeray's realist novel *Vanity Fair*[1] (Hedgecock, *The sexual threat* 2). The femme fatale motif in Victorian literature signaled a shift in the feminist movement of the 1840s:

> By the 1860's, a mere twenty odd years later, middle-class feminists denounced bourgeois ideals that relegate women to the domestic sphere and prevent them from

[1] *Vanity Fair* is framed by its preface as a puppet show taking place at a fair. Set in London in 1814, the novel features Rebecca (Becky) sharp as a strong-willed, poor, cunning young woman determined to make her way in society. Becky uses her feminine guile to manipulate men, and she does so very easily.

> entering into public life. By challenging censorship, insisting on greater sexual freedom, rejecting biased divorce and property laws, and opposing the Contagious Diseases Acts[2], these women demonstrated their refusal to be subordinated to men. (Hedgecock, *The sexual threat* 3)

The femme fatale was a threat not only to male dominance in Victorian culture but also to the previously unchallenged social ideologies that prevented women from being autonomous members of society. The representation of women as powerful, in control of their sexual desires, and independent allowed women to see the "evolving assertiveness on the part of women" (Hedgecock, *The sexual threat* 3).

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk by Nikolia Leskov and the film version of the novella, *Lady Macbeth,*[3] present a powerful female character that demonstrates her agency through her sexual deviation. Whether driven to infidelity by boredom, in the novella, or an abusive and dismissive husband, in the film, both mediums portray Katherine as a deviant wife who manipulates others in order to continue her sexual freedom and gain economic stability. To Katherine, no price is too great to pay in order to continue her love affair with her husband's clerk, Sebastian. Katherine is the epitome of a femme fatale, and her actions portray a woman discovering and then exercising her power over the men in her life. According to Jennifer Hedgecock, the femme fatale is "a literary signpost of the changing roles of women in the nineteenth century, a period when middle class women begin organizing more radical feminist movements, and that she foreshadows later protests against society's treatment of women" (*The Femme Fatale* 3). In the

[2] The Contagious Diseases Act was first passed in 1864 to regulate 'common prostitutes' in order to reduce sexually transmitted diseases. The act was extended in 1866 before being repealed in 1886.
[3] *Lady Macbeth* was a 2017 film reproduction of the novella *Lady Macbeth of Mtsenck* written by Nikolia Leskov in 1865. The film renamed the main character Katherine (the American version of the Russian name Katerina used in the novella). For clarity, the American version, Katherine, will be used in reference to both the film and the novella.

film, Katherine becomes an example of the power that women could hold, yet, in the novella, Katherine becomes an example of the consequences of sexual deviation and her affair and also an example of the horrendous life following for a deviant woman following her affair and sexual prowess, an example of the fears men in the Victorian period held about sexually autonomous women. The differences inherent in the two representations of the femme fatale demonstrate two important aspects of the femme fatale: power and agency and the consequences of that power.

Lady Macbeth and *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*: Representations of Katherine as a Femme Fatale

Lady Macbeth and *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* demonstrate a powerful woman using her sexuality as her own agency. In both mediums, a powerful female is objectified in her marriage and fails in her womanly duties, producing an heir. However, the film deviates from the novella in the demise of Katherine's life. Thus, the film makes a lasting statement about the power and agency Katherine held; while the novella makes a powerful statement about the femme fatale being held accountable for her actions and responsible for the consequences of her sexual deviance. The film of portrayal presents a more sexualized, demonized, manipulative, and selfish femme fatale than the novella that presents a femme fatale that is motivated by her devotion to her lover and is ultimately destroyed by it.

Representations of Katherine in Marriage

One primary difference in both representations is the portrayals of Katherine in her marriage. Femme fatales during this time period stood as a stark contrast to the subservient, powerless women, "This feminine trope of the dangerous woman seems unabashedly to subvert the bourgeois ideology that disenfranchises a woman who transgresses the social boundaries and exploits men for their power and wealth" (Hedgecock, *The Femme Fatale* 5). Katherine subverts

the ideology of a submissive wife by pursuing and maintaining her affair with her husband's clerk, Sebastian. However, the film and the novella emphasize different circumstances regarding Katherine's marriage to Alexander Lester.[4] These differences greatly change her motivations for her affair.

In the novella, Katherine is a captive in her own home, often left to her own devices with little interactions with her husband. While she moves about the house in incredible loneliness, she becomes very bored with her life walled up in her husband's home. Katherine is a necessity for her husband, the only outlet through which to bear children and a legitimate heir to the property and wealth in his family. Therefore, Katherine becomes simply a fixture of his property and is often left as such, a fixture that does not require human interaction or attention. From this abandonment, Katherine seeks attention elsewhere, ultimately from her husband's clerk. The novella demonstrates that Katherine's sexual deviance and her agency was driven by intense loneliness and her husband's abandonment of her. Katherine's attraction to Sebastian in the novella is "intensely and deeply physical" (Wells 166). Thus, Sebastian became the sexual gratification and attention that Katherine was not receiving from her husband.

This abandonment in the novella critiques the traditional roles of wives in the household. Katherine is subjected to suffocating loneliness as her husband refuses to engage with her. The novella is critiquing the societal standards of women being submissive wives content to live in the houses of their husbands with no purpose other than having children. Katherine's sexual deviation through her affair with Sebastian subverts this societal standard. While Katherine is expected to be the submissive wife of her absent and disinterested husband, she goes against

[4] Lester's father, Boris Lester, bought a piece of property with Katherine as an additional bargaining tool. Therefore, upon purchase of the land she automatically became Alexander Lester's wife. Alexander was a merchant who was frequently gone for long business trips during which Katherine was left alone and confined to the house.

those expectations to engage with her sexual desires and attraction to Sebastian. Further, Katherine's husband never sexually validates her as a woman. While his dismissiveness of her creates overwhelming loneliness, his refusal to consummate their marriage oppresses her sexual desires driving her to act on her sexuality elsewhere. In the novella, her boredom prompts her to engage with Sebastian. She seeks interaction and validation as a woman from her husband's clerk because her husband simply expected her to be a fixture of his estate, not a human being that craved interaction, validation, and attention.

The film version compounds Katherine's state as emotionally abused, secluded, and oppressed by amplifying her representation as piece of property purchased along with a plot of land. Katherine is regarded as property bought to fulfill one purpose, producing an heir. Lester states, "My father bought you, along with a piece of land not fit for a cattle to graze upon" (51:11). Thus, Katherine was regarded as a possession, rather than a wife. Further, Katherine's inability to produce an heir stems from her husband's complete dismissal of her and refusal to consummate the marriage.[5] The film's depiction of Katherine being abused, reduced to property, and dismissed by her husband creates an utter powerlessness in Katherine. While Katherine was regarded as property and emotionally and physically abused, she began to create for herself her own sense of agency. When she meets Sebastian, he provides for her a sense of power that she can exercise over her husband. Her passionate affair with Sebastian allows her to utilize her sexuality and find validation from Sebastian despite her husband's dismissal of her. Film noir is described as portraying "social alienation; its analysis of cultural game-changers that have

[5] In the film, the audience sees Lester's refusal to consummate their marriage. The audience is unsure if he is refusing by choice or is incapable of consummation. However, he frequently requires Katherine to disrobe and face the wall while he masturbates behind her. The audience later learns that he impregnates another woman while he is away traveling; therefore, Lester's refusal to consummate his and Katherine's marriage is the reason for his lack of heir.

particular and acute consequences for women; and its registers for failure of communication and longing for meaningful interaction" (Grossman 13). Despite Katherine's desires for a child, sexual desires, and desires for validation as a woman, her husband denies her those desires. Because her husband refused to consummate their marriage, Katherine is forced to seek approval and validation from another man, Sebastian. The conditions that produce Katherine's affair in the film are far worse than in the novella. In the film, the audience sees Katherine objectified and demoralized much more than in the novella as her husband masturbates while she is disrobed and is forced to face the wall and as her father-in-law, Boris Lester, physically abuses her and demonizes her for not producing an heir when in fact her husband refuses to consummate their marriage. Therefore, the film version portrays a much more powerful image of a demonized, objectified, and demoralized woman than the novella.

The novella presents a vision of the femme fatale as deviant and dangerous to men, while the film emphasizes the circumstances that produced the deviance. In the film, there is a much stronger critique of the influences of patriarchal control. The femme fatale is born out of the husband's neglect. The film's emphasis on the husband's role in creating sexual deviation demonstrates a critique on the circumstances of marriage in the Victorian period:

> Though the Matrimonial Causes Act[6] recognized the potentially oppressive nature of marriage, it still limited a woman's petition to obtain a divorce from her husband. Proving a husband's cruelty was a most humiliating and difficult ordeal. According to Barrett among the offenses included were "rape, domestic violence, pornography, prostitution, a denial of female sexual autonomy" (42). Violence at home often curtailed

[6] The Matrimonial Causes Act passed in 1857 allowed women to divorce their husbands if they could prove adultery or abuse.

> a woman's independence and kept her subordinated to her husband because she feared him in addition to being humiliated. (Hedgecock, *The sexual threat* 101)

The oppressive nature of marriage was recognized in the Victorian period, but women often feared their husbands and the humiliation that would follow if they sought divorce. Therefore, oppressive and abusive marriages continued despite the Matrimonial Causes Act. The novella did not treat the abuse with such graphic detail; it highlighted the sexual deviation of women as something to be feared. Female sexuality in Victorian literature was often seen as destructive and dangerous to men and to the ideology established in this time period: "Fears of losing dominion, of metaphoric castration, of being overwhelmed by untamed female sexuality, of losing their identity contribute to the overall anxiety men were facing when women started gaining control of their lives and sexuality …" (Sanchez 3). Therefore, the film highlights a different aspect of the lives of Victorian women. Rather than female sexual agency being something that is destructive to men and Victorian culture and something to be feared, sexual deviation and autonomy is highlighted as something caused by male abuse and isolation.

The Manipulative Femme Fatale

Secondly, the film presents Katherine to be a much more manipulative character than the novella. In both stories, she is motivated by a need to maintain her love affair with Sebastian, but the film also emphasizes her desire for economic advancement and wealth. The consequences of her desire to obtain wealth and economic status and maintain her affair demonstrate how much Katherine is willing to sacrifice. In the film, Katherine manipulates every character in order to maintain her relationship, her economic status, and her own safety. While in the novella, Katherine does not manipulate the other characters to the extreme extent that she does in the

film. Therefore, the film is creating a more nuanced critique of the agency that Katherine possesses, and her desires are far beyond a love affair and sexual validation.

In the film, Katherine manipulates every character involved in order to gain economic status and also maintain her affair. As Katherine acts on her agency and sexual power, her friends and even those who helped her become victims to her plot to obtain wealth and continue her affair. Katherine's servant Anna, throughout the film, attempts to help Katherine: when Katherine is caught drinking all of her father-in-law's wine, Anna lies to hide it even though it means she is punished, Anna keeps Katherine's affair a secret, and she even takes the blame for the murders of Katherine's husband and his father in the end.[7] In the film, Anna goes to great lengths to help and protect Katherine. However, in the end of the film, Katherine blames, and by consequence sacrifices, Anna because Anna is ultimately punished for the murders and is sent to a labor camp along with Sebastian.

Further, Katherine's manipulation, especially her sexual manipulation of her husband and her lover, Sebastian, in the film presents an even more independent and devious character than the novella because she is motivated by the desire to ensure her own wealth. Julie Grossman emphasizes the femme fatale's independence and deviance: "The dangerous women in film noir are lawless agents of female desire, rebelling against the patriarchal relegation of women to the domestic sphere where they are deemed passive and valued only in relation to their maternal and wifely vocation" (Grossman 4). Katherine represents the lawless agent of her desire in the film because of her rebellion, the murders of her father-in-law and husband, her sexual manipulation

[7] Katherine poisons Boris [her father-in-law] after he learns of Katherine's affair with Sebastian and he beats and imprisons Sebastian and refuses to allow Katherine to see him. Later, she kills Alexander by striking him with a club after he returned home early and found her and Sebastian in their marital bed. Katherine shows no remorse for the killings and is even happy to be rid of the two biggest obstacles of her affair.

of both her husband and her lover, and the manipulation of the other characters in the film in order to gain economic stability. Jennifer Hedgecock highlights the femme fatales' "formidable and uncontrollable threat" (*The Femme Fatale* 32). Katherine presents herself as a threat to her husband and her father-in-law, but in the end of the film she also proves herself to be a threat to every character. For example, when Sebastian confessed to his role in the murders, Katherine stated that it was Anna and Sebastian who had actually committed the crimes in order to remain together. Thus, Anna, who was innocent and tried to help Katherine, was sacrificed and sent along with Sebastian to a labor camp. Katherine at every turn chooses death and destruction of every other character in order to preserve herself. Elizabeth Bronfen explains that "She [femme fatales] chooses destruction at every turn, and in doing so draws attention to the question of inevitability in a tragic sequence" (105). Katherine chooses the destruction of numerous characters in order to maintain her own reputation and status as the heir to her husband's wealth. Even an innocent child, Alexander Lester's illegitimate son produced from an affair that he had while traveling, fell victim to Katherine's uncontrollable need for self-preservation and economic stability. When the child arrived to lay claim to his wealth as Lester's heir, Katherine smothers him in order to maintain her claim to the wealth. Therefore, Katherine chose destruction at every turn, in order to save herself. The film version depicts Katherine as an independent and strong female character that is in control of her own actions and who manipulates other characters in order to advance her own agenda and ensure her own safety. Therefore, the film takes the liberties of constructing a much more independent and manipulative femme fatale motivated by much more than love and validation.

Contrastingly, Katherine in the novella is depicted as lovestruck, a woman that has found necessary validation and meaningful attention from a man. Katherine would do anything in her

power to maintain her relationship with Sebastian. Her motivations for killing her father-in-law stem from his threat to separate them and end her affair. She is driven by her intense desire for Sebastian and her love for him. Katherine kills solely to maintain her relationship with Sebastian. Her power over her husband and father-in-law stems from her desire for Sebastian and the sexual autonomy gained from their relationship. In the novella, she is acting on her sexual desire driven by her emotions, but her manipulation of other characters is minimal. In the novella, she does not blame Anna for the murders, and the reason she killed her husband and father-in-law is to protect her own love affair. When the murders are found out, Katherine confesses and is held accountable for her actions. This demonstrates that Katherine is largely controlled by her love for Sebastian. Katherine is now held captive, not in her husband's house, but in a relationship in which she would do anything to maintain it, "Katerina Ivovna was now ready, for the sake of Sebastian, to go through fire, through water, to prison, to the cross. He made her fall so in love with him that her devotion to him knew no measure" (Leskov, ch. 6). While the film presented Katherine as an uncontrollable threat to every character, the novella presented her as very much controlled by her passion for and devotion to Sebastian. Therefore, Katherine's power in the novella stems from sexual desire and love for Sebastian rather than manipulation, sexual autonomy, and most importantly the desire for economic gain.

The Fate of the Femme Fatale: Wealthy and Powerful or Destroyed

Finally, the fate of Katherine is portrayed as vastly different in the film and the novella. In the film, she demonstrates great cunning in order to ensure that she is not punished her affair nor the murders of her father-in-law, husband, and the child. Contrastingly, in the novella, she does not demonstrate the same cunning and manipulative powers. Rather than manipulate the witnesses and lie to save herself, she simply accepts her fate without denial. While this does not

demonstrate a powerful, manipulative femme fatale, it creates a critique of the femme fatale being held responsible for her actions and coming to her own demise because of her actions.

Katherine is depicted in the film as incredibly manipulative so much so that she is able to escape all blame and punishment for the murders. This ability to manipulate everyone involved in order to ensure her own safety demonstrates Katherine's power. Upon Sebastian's confessions of the crimes, Katherine states that he is simply telling a lie and that Anna and Sebastian were having an affair and were responsible for the murders to cover up the affair. Katherine's quick lies and cunning sacrificed her lover and her servant, but it saved herself from punishment and her demise because of her actions. According to Jennifer Hedgecock, women of this time period "were required to be more cunning in order to gain a greater freedom, to become something other than a victim" (*The Femme Fatale* xiv). Therefore, Katherine demonstrates the cunning that Hedgecock stated was necessary in order to escape becoming a victim of her own crimes. While she sacrificed her lover and her maid, she ensured her own safety and her own economic stability as the heir to her husband's wealth. At the end of the film, the final scene is one of Katherine sitting gently down in a chair as she holds her stomach. The audience realizes that she is pregnant. Therefore, the cunning and manipulation are not only to save herself but to also save her unborn child. She has triumphed in not only saving herself from persecution and ensuring her wealth as heir to Lester's estate, but she has triumphed in what she longed to do, the one thing Lester refused to help her do from the beginning: have a child.

However, the novella presents an entirely different ending; one in which Katherine is held accountable for the atrocities which she has committed. In the novella, she does not deny her involvement with the murders or lie to save herself. She simply admits her involvement after Sebastian confesses her part in the murders, "If he's willing to tell about it, there's no point in

my denying it: I killed them" (Leskov, ch. 12). Katherine and Sebastian are then beaten, sent to prison, and a labor camp. Even Katherine's child, which she bore in prison, disgusted her. Even though at the beginning of the novella she longed for a child, she refused to even hold the child she had with Sebastian. Throughout the final chapters of the novella, the reader sees Katherine not only abused and tortured physically at the labor camp, but also abused emotionally and mentally as Sebastian sleeps with two other women. He preys on her love for him by asking her for stockings and then giving them to his other mistress to spite her. Finally, the novella takes on a critique of the femme fatale in Katherine's suicide by drowning. This is a trope seen throughout Victorian Literature of the fallen woman killing herself by drowning in order to demonstrate the ultimate fall from society. Katherine's last act is to fling herself and Sebastian's lover into the ocean to kill them both. Her final moment of utter powerlessness became her final moment of power over Sebastian as she killed not only herself but also his lover.

The Femme Fatale as an Expression of Agency and as an Expression of Fear

Overall, the film presents a femme fatale motivated by economic gain and self-preservation rather than simply love. Marriage added another layer of oppression for women in Victorian periods: socioeconomic dependency. The film highlights Victorian women's increased desire for economic autonomy as well as sexual autonomy: "This oppressive form of socioeconomic dependency eventually increased middleclass women's desire for liberty and equality" (Hedgecock, *The sexual threat* 100). The film highlights the desire for not only sexual agency but economic agency during the Victorian period. Additionally, the film presents an idealized femme fatale, one that escapes oppression and consequences of her deviance. Katherine, at the end of the film, obtained everything that she wanted: power, economic stability, and a child. The film's manipulative femme fatale, who sacrifices anything and anyone in order

to secure her economic stability and her own safety, contrasts the novella's femme fatale that is motivated by love and sexual desire. The novella expresses Victorian men's fears of female sexual agency: "The femme fatale image … is the menacing female construction by the masculine imagination reflecting male anxieties particularly about the rise of female sexual autonomy and resulting in the loss of male sexual dominance" (Sanchez 5). The novella depicts the anxieties felt by men during this rise of female autonomy and sexuality, while the film depicts a woman rebelling against economic dependency created by marriage. Katherine, in the novella, became an example, a warning almost, of the consequences of female sexual agency: "Female sexuality is typically portrayed in Victorian art and literature as destructive and fatal […]" (Sanchez 3). Katherine's sexuality was destructive not only to herself but also to her husband and many other characters. Her sexual deviation caused her downfall as an example of the dangers of female sexual agency. Sanchez explains the fear associated with female sexuality:

> Thus through femme fatale images notions of feminine sexuality become synonyms to feminine evil within the sexist cultural productions of the Victorian Period precisely because a femme fatale cannot be separated from her sexuality used in her destructive schemes. Evil connotations attributed to female sexuality emphasize both the fear she creates and is a product of. (6)

The novella expressed the fear involved with women's sexuality and agency. Whereas, the film strongly critiqued the institution of marriage, economic dependency, and female subservience. During the nineteenth century, these femme fatales were figures of disenfranchised women seeking to better their economic and social standings that allowed for female readers to identify with women seeking to subvert societal molds and expectations, "Subversive images of women may have led young Victorian readers to believe that rebelling against social codes is not a moral

crime" (Hedgecock, *The Femme Fatal*, 5). Therefore, Katherine in the novella became a symbol of women that were oppressed, objectified, and ignored in their marriage. She regained, however forcibly, her freedom that was taken from her when she was married, and she is an image for women to identify with despite the oppressive nature of the culture, but the novella's ending serves as a warning, and an example of male insecurities, to women who may be considering exercising their sexual agency.

In conclusion, the film presents a very powerful, cunning and manipulative femme fatale that is able to escape all blame. This representation of the femme fatale leads the audience to understand that her freedom was regained through sexual agency, but her power is far greater than that. The novella depicted a femme fatale that regained her freedom but ultimately sacrificed her life in a final exemplification of power over her tormenting lover and serves as an example of the dangers, not only to men but also to women, of female sexual agency. The film presents a more powerful femme fatale who demonstrates that there is more to a woman's power than just sexual agency.

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