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Derrida and the Teaching of Writing:

Forming (a) Deconstructive Pedagogy(s)

> *"I can't read," Garion admitted without thinking.*
> *"What?" [Ce'Nedra said]*
> *"I can't read," Garion repeated. "Nobody ever taught me how."*
> *"That's ridiculous!"*
> *"It's not my fault," he said defensively. . . .*
> *"Would you like to have me teach you how?" she offered. . . .*
> *"Would it take very long?"*
> *"That depends on how clever you are."*
> *"When do you think we could start?"*
> *She frowned. "I've got a couple of books, but we'll need something to write on."*
> *"I don't know that I need to learn how to write," he said. "Reading ought to be enough for right now."*
> *She laughed. "They're the same thing, you goose."*
> *"I didn't know that," Garion said, flushing slightly. "I thought--" He floundered with the whole idea. "I guess I never really thought about it."* (Eddings 449-50)

Many, like Garion, have and continue to think of reading and writing as if they were distinct operations--separate, dissimilar, or perhaps even opposites. As teachers of English composition, many of the students we teach enter our classrooms thinking that reading any text requires nothing more than searching for and "uncovering the theme" (Kaufer & Waller 70), which leads them to understanding. Writing asks them to manipulate words in a prescribed way (the "Five Paragraph Expository Essay"), moving "know-ledge[1]" from the stacks of the library to our desks. They exit our offices confident that they have followed the rules of good style and

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[1] I divide the term to indicate both that the students have actually come to "know" something, while at the same time drawing attention, in the Derridean sense, to the ledge that divides them from "knowing" and the "abyss" they (and of course we) teeter on the (l)edge of.

grammar,[2] "a 'split infinitive away' from Shakespeare, a 'dangling participle' away from Milton" (75).[3]

One tenet of deconstruction is its insistence that texts do not come to readers free from the competing discourses in which the text is both produced and read (88). The deconstructive reader will not blindly accept the "ideological presuppositions" or the claims to truth a text makes without careful, ruthless examination. This examination forces him/her to examine her/his "presuppositions, [his][4] metaphysical privileging of comforting assumptions, . . . concepts, and habitual praxis" (91). Turning to the text, the deconstructive reader "looks for the seams[5]--the

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[2]A high school English instructor, telling them that their prose approached Hemmingway, loaned them her/his copy of Strunck & White's *The Elements of Style*, with the advice that if they followed this book, to the letter, that the Teaching Assistant who instructed their Freshman comp. class, would be so impressed that he (read note #4) would "write them a note," freeing the student from ever having to take another writing course for the rest of their natural lives, write a second note to Ballantine, a contract would arrive in their dorm room by fax, setting them up on the "gravy train," no doubt.

[3]Kaufer & Waller note that many, in English departments, exclaim, when they learn of K & F's intent to teach deconstruction in freshman literature courses: "Oh horrors! that Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and others should be forced to suffer such indignities! Worse, that students should be encouraged to let *Macbeth* or 'In Memoriam' mean 'anything'" (83). As I will no doubt show, this fear shows that what these professors fear, are students who think for themselves. Deconstruction empowers them to read and write while "depropriating" the professorial monopoly on academic (or any, for that matter) discourse, showing that they [professors] are just inmates, like their students, in "the prison house of language."

[4]From here on, the pronouns "he/his/him" stand for "she/hers/her," while the pronouns "she/hers/her" stand for "he/his/him" and vice versa (or is it the other way around?).

[5]"Seams" in the sense of "gap," "fissure," or "crack," differentiated from "seems" as "appears" or "looks," though there is "appearance" in "seams"--"I noticed your *seams* are splitting"--and "gap" in "seems" (not quite sure)--"It *seems* to me that you are upset." I will raise this point later, showing how meaning emerges from the interplay among parts of a signifying chain, and how parts "infringe" upon other parts, causing final, closed meaning to be forever deferred.

ways in which language fails to smooth over contradictions and gaps[6] in logic--in order to

understand the ways in which the ideologies from which the text is constructed fall short of their

projects" (Tyson 230). This approach differs significantly, though many argue slightly, from the

New Critics project that made texts whole through a "close reading," creating a univocal and

"authorized"[7] reading of a text. Deconstruction, by its very nature, asserts that no univocal

(proper) reader can exist; neither can there be a univocal (proper), "authorized" deconstruction.

This fact alone has created in me much anxiety,[8] as I have taken on the task of describing a

"deconstructive pedagogy" for the teaching of composition.

Conventional belief holds that the relation between word and meaning, between signifier

and signified, is transparent. Paul Northam argues that, in this view, "the signifier is similar to a

window through which we can glimpse an extralinguistic[9] concept or referential object known as

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[6]Re-read note #5 and replace "seams" with "gap."

[7]Though few have ever spoken to the "author" to get permission for their "author-ized" reading. Frankly, I think most New Critics were happy the authors were dead, that way no author could show up and disrupt their monopoly on meaning. That is, with the notable exception of T. S. Eliot, whose copious footnotes (to "The Wasteland") ensure that the reader "gets it."

[8]I'm sure that the reader of my "text" has already noticed the fragmentary nature of the narrative--especially, no doubt, the way I continue to interrupt the narrative flow with footnotes. Derrida would perhaps reply that this (insert the referent of your choice) shows the "play" inherent in language. J. Hillis Miller notes that "the text performs on itself the act of deconstruction without any help from the critic" (qtd. in Kaufer & Waller 67).

[9]The concept of an "extralinguistic concept" is the point at which the full force of deconstruction bears down upon Plato's idea of the forms. Every "chair" partakes of the form of the ideal "chair" that exists somewhere outside of this corrupted world. Derrida replies: "What about the "chair" of the English Department? Does he (re-read note#4) partake of the ideal "chair?" Can one "sit" on him? (I suppose it could be argued that one could "sit" on a weak "chair," but this could not be true of a strong "chair," who would most likely sit on you.) If language, as I will soon argue, constructs our world, or if our world is constructed of language, how can something "lingual" be "extralinguistic?"

the signified" (118). We can re-present this as the equation, SIGN=SIGNIFIER+SIGNIFIED.

However, deconstruction asserts that there is no "one-to-one" correspondence between signifier

and signified. If we look for the signified of any signifier, we will encounter only more signifiers,

what Derrideans call "signifying chains." This "chain" implies an absence; in other words, things

are defined according to what they are not, denoting "perceived (but not . . . actual) absences"

(118). When we think of a "horse," for example, not only do we use other signifiers,[10] we think in

terms of what it is not: "not cow, deer, human, biped, carnivorous, etc." As Northam notes,

"[a]bsence enters into and becomes presence as, simultaneously, presence enters into and becomes

absence" (119). One "inheres" in the other, and the interplay among the parts creates meaning.

Yet, because the parts of a signifying chain infringe upon the meanings of other parts, final, closed

meaning is continually deferred. Northam calls this an "undercurrent of signification" that makes

possible alternative meanings. Meaning is not "either/or" but "both/and": "the semantic territory

of a given signifier overlaps that of associated signifiers, thus compromising univocality" (120).

Because of the nature of language, the "play" inherent in any utterance, text, etc., deconstruction

happens,[11] (N#8) meanings "differ" and "defer," resisting final closure.

Perhaps an example of this interplay would be illuminating and useful. Take the sentence,

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[10]Using Dickens' immortal example from *Hard Times*, "horse" is "Quadruped.
Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely, twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive.
Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be
shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth" (14). We thus see only a chain of signifiers,
nothing that leads us to the "ideal, extralinguistic" signified.

[11]The phrase, "deconstruction happens," should be confused with the popular, vulgar
phrase from which it was no doubt stolen. Many critics feel that "deconstruction" and the profane
term, popularized by the common saying, are interchangeable. In fact, most would argue that the
term "deconstruction" should be dropped in favor of the vulgar term, since, in their minds, it more
accurately portrays what everyone, who is "normal," should think. (Re-read note #3)

"This class is strange,"[12] and apply the principles described above. In both hearer and speaker,[13]

"class" refers to chains of signifiers in each mind, and each signifier in both chains refers to other

chains, etc.[14] Referring to the phrase "this class is strange," is the speaker comparing the class to

herself? (Re-read note #4) To another class? Which other class? Is she surprised by the

strangeness of the class? Or is she merely informing us that the class is strange? Is she informing

us so that we will know something about the class or so that we will understand something about

the word *strange*? What must she think of us if she believes we need such information? Does she

think we are just learning to speak English? Or is she being sarcastic? If so, why?[15] Texts and

know-ledge are chains of signifiers. Tyson notes that "[w]hat we really know of the world is our

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[12]I borrowed this phrase from my fellow English 506 students, also teachers of Freshman Composition, and therefore point the reader to the "signifying chain" from which this particular meaning arises out of the interplay between/among its several divergent and infringing parts, in every Derridean sense of the word(s).

[13]In this case, it is probably more accurate to say "writer and reader." However, this (mis)reading (read note #35) of my text exists due to the interplay between the reader's culture, language, history, and the "double-onion chili-dog" the reader had for lunch.

[14]Since the particular reader and writer of this text are clearly in mind, it is inappropriate to include the *ad infinitum* implicit in the signifying chains. Perhaps Bialostosky is correct in stating that the more common background and shared know-ledge speaker and hearer have, the more that can be said through fewer words, limiting the possible lengths of the signifying chains in question (215).

[15]Does she (ignore for the moment note #4) even know I exist? For the record, I borrowed this string of questions from Lois Tyson's essay (see Works Cited page), substituting my sentence for her more reasonable "this tree is big." I make this claim in a vain attempt to avoid responsibility for my rather dubious actions. I plead "brain meltdown," a malady known to afflict graduate student teaching assistants in the terminal days of a Spring semester. Of course, the previous sentence may in fact elicit a signifying chain in the reader's mind, beyond what I the author "authorize," regardless of the number of footnotes I insert (Sorry, Mr. Eliot. Your history, language, and culture intersect at a different point than mine, and your footnotes lead me down a different signifying chain than you intended. Say, didn't you New Critics argue that author intent was irrelevant to a close reading? The author is dead! Long live the author!).

conception and perception of it" (229), which we construct out of our ideologies--cultures--that control how we understand the world. Since we pass our ideologies on through language, language constructs our perceptions of the world and equally, ourselves.

Returning, after a "seemingly" (re-read note #5) long digression, to our deconstructive reader, Fink states that "deconstruction, as a literary, critical strategy, primarily promotes an aesthetic appreciation of the irrepressible play of words" (239), or in Northam's words, deconstruction explores "the oscillations of meaning of the language that embodies them" (116). Our reader chooses from among possible meanings thereby limiting himself to a particular "thread of meaning." The choices he makes, made according to his ideological background, discard other threads incompatible with the selected thread.[16] The deeper our reader digs into the text, the more he (N#4, again) explores textual "possibilities that have been systematically repressed"

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[16]Since I've used the term three times in this sentence alone, I feel I should add that the noun "thread" is one of our original English terms, coming to English from Old Norse by way of Germanic, Danish, Old English into Middle and Modern English. It comes from the ON term *thrathr* or "wire." The verb "thread" is a derivative of the ME *throwen*, *thrawen*, from OE *thrāwan* or "to twist, turn," from D and G, *drehen* or "to turn, spin, twirl, whirl" akin to Latin and Greek *teírein* meaning, "to rub out." The Derridian in me cannot help but pause for a moment on the playfulness of the term "thread," and how I have used it in relation to the construction of meaning. Both positive and negative connotations come with the "twisted wire" sense of the word. "Twisted" implies both a twisting of meanings in order to say what one desires, while at the same time indicating a strength in numbers--the more threads of wire twisted together, the stronger the wire becomes. I recently watched a group of modern Incas construct a suspension bridge over a chasm completely from grass, strong enough to hold four loaded llamas at a time. Also, a story "turns" on the meaning of a word; we spin stories to amuse, webs to catch, clothes from silk, or straw into gold; the twirl and whirl of a dance, or the twirl and whirl of the nihilistic abyss, a criticism levied against deconstruction that I will respond to later. Finally, the Gk "to rub out," relates to someone's clandestine death, or how I polish the laquer paint of my 1963 Studebaker Lark, or how one erases writing, meaning by "rubbing it out" of a blackboard, restroom, love note from a failed affair, the "writing on the wall," or simply writing, an issue also to be taken up later.

(Kaufer & Waller 71). He works from inside the text,[17] and so becomes subversive of the ideologies in himself and the text that seek to suppress the "breach" that opens within the text, cracked by the inherent playfulness of language. The playfulness in language can lead, if the deconstructor is not reading carefully, to a point in the text that, according to Miller, "no longer makes rational sense . . . an 'aporia' or impasse" (qtd. in LaGrandeur 73). Understanding comes as the reader moves from differences in words/signifiers to differences within the signifier itself. In other words, "A" doesn't oppose "B," but "B" adds to and replaces "A"--each sign contains a trace of the other sign or "supplements"[18] it (Atkins & Johnson 3). Atkins & Johnson call the "impasse" noted by Miller above the "warring forces" within the text (and we should add, within the reader and between the reader and text) that deconstruction changes from opposition to addition and/or substitution, undermining the conflict as deconstruction reveals it. The inherent playfulness of language[19] shows how "a discourse . . . undermines the philosophy it asserts . . . by identifying . . . the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of the argument" (Atkins & Johnson 2). Thus again, we see how the "close reader" moves to the inside, pulling down the structure with the very structures that seem (appear--note #5) to uphold it.

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[17]The "deconstructor" works from within the system "in order to breach it," using "the very principle it deconstructs" (Atkins & Johnson 2). I'm not unaware of the playfulness of the term "breach," "to break or rupture" with the term "breech" "the lower trunk, rear part of the body; the back part of a gun" where the bullet goes in for firing, or "clothing akin to pants" that cover the lower or rear part of the body. "Breach" is akin to the Latin term for "fragile," which can refer to the parts of the body covered by "breech(es)."

[18]"Supplement" refers, in the Derridean cosmology, to both an "addition" to and a "substitute" or "replacement" for, which "lies" at the heart of Derrida's *différance*.

[19]I'm certain the reader tires of my constant use of the big "D" word. So, from time to time, I'll replace it with other terms, less loaded (by the bre(a)ch, no doubt) terms (meaning the phrase above that led to this note). This will have the effect, no doubt, of causing the reader to forget the vulgar association mentioned in note #11 (Do not re-read note #11).

Critics of this approach argue that first, deconstruction and the "impasse" to which it can sometimes lead, mask a desire for anarchy or a "nihilistic" society that, like the structure mentioned, collapses for the lack of a foundation. On one front--the "canon"[20]--Sharon Crowley asks how one can deconstruct the "canon" if one has never felt excluded by the "canon?" (393). Kevin LaGrandeur observes that "notions of total relativity are more the result of facile thinking than of any theory. . . . [I]t [deconstruction] always demands rigorous thinking and reading" (77).[21] We could argue that if a deconstructive reading leads to total chaos, it is the fault of the text's (and reader's) culture, language, and history--that text and reader were poorly constructed by the ISA's that surround and permeate every post-modern society. The second objection to deconstruction, raised by John Schilb, is that "it curiously fails to invoke human subjects who might perform these maneuvers. It cites many actions, but it does not really specify their agents . . . it portrays students as recipients or objects of an action, not as agents" (55).[22] At the heart of Schilb's argument is the claim that since "close-reading" (re-read note #19) gets inside and collapses language, deconstruction does nothing to change oppressive political or social

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[20]Not to be confused with "cannon," breech-loaded from the rear. Although many of the same critics, listed above, believe the "close reader" desires to take a "cannon" to the "canon," opening "breaches" for subverted texts and voices, solely to get/ win the minority (and (Fe)male-- I mean "iron-men," i.e. women) vote and oust the "right-wingers" (if they are right wing dominant, won't they fly in circles?) who hold the majority in Congress.

[21]J. Hillis Miller adds, "I speak of deconstruction as if it were one special technique of reading, but in fact deconstruction is a currently fashionable or notorious name for good reading as such. *All good readers are and always have been deconstructionists*" (qtd. in LaGrandeur 77, emphasis mine--so the reader "gets it."). Touché, Mr. Eliot!

[22]We might argue that since our world is constructed of language then our reader, who is the agent of deconstruction, is also a construction of language and therefore doesn't exist outside of language and so, there can be no deconstructive reader. I drop Schilb's text to the floor, kick it, and say out loud, "Thus, I refute Schilb."

(ideological) institutions.[23]   In one of the essays he levies this accusation against, by Vincent

Leitch, I counted twenty references to deconstruction's effect on the state or institutions in the

first two pages.[24]   Leitch opens his essay with a discussion of Derrida's work with GREPH[25] and

its inquiry into "the economic and political links between various social and pedagogical

institutions--that is, into the nature and history of modern education" (16-7).   Leitch notes in the

beginning of his essay, "that the university *serves* culture and society becomes, in deconstructive

thinking, the grounds for a critique and positive transformation of educational institutions and

pedagogical practices" (16).[26]   Leitch goes on to outline Derrida's stance (with GREPH) toward

institutions:

> (1) every field is a site of contending, differential forces; (2) every such site is
>
> historically constituted as a set of hierarchical values and apparatuses . . . ; (3)
>
> there is no outside to such a systematics--only transformations from within; (4)

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[23]I just dropped *Writing and Difference*, *Margins of Philosophy*, and *Positions* onto Schilb's essay: "Thus again, I refute Schilb." (Re-read note #22)

[24]Perhaps if Schilb were "reading-closely," (again, N#19) he wouldn't have missed these references. I suppose we could argue that he read so closely that he missed them. I quote from marginal comments written within Schilb's text: "He can't see the forest for the trees!" a cliché I know, but who can be responsible for the inferior way students read and comment on an "expert's" text? (Open a space between the "x" and "p" and insert the possessive "s" between.) We might also say that Schilb was missing the first pages from Leitch's essay (the same as above is true of the next few pages). OK, so he was missing all but the last pages (use previous parenthetical and insert "last pages." Hence, maybe if he had read the article, he wouldn't have missed them, but he is a busy academic and hasn't the time to mess with "passing fads" like deconstruction.).

[25]Group for Research on Philosophic Teaching.

[26]Derrida, speaking of deconstruction, notes: "It's not only a way of reading texts in the trivial sense; it's also a way of dealing with institutions. Not only with content and concepts, but with the authority of institutions, with the models of institutions, with the hard structures of institutions" (qtd. in Olson 8). Touché, Mr. Schilb.

apocalypse and revolution . . . tend to reconstitute more firmly the preexisting

forms and practices. (17)

Kaufer & and Waller add that "[a]ll human discourse is one text waiting to be unraveled" (86),

and deconstruction seeks to topple the hierarchies and ideologies that, for example, claim one race

is superior to another, or that one gender is better than the other. The "close reader" (N#19)

moves inside the opposition and, using the very arguments that constitute the opposition,

defuses[27] the oppositional quality of the relationship. This, I believe, sets the stage (of

deconstruction) for our return to the initial discussion of reading and writing.

If, as we argued above, language constructs our perceptions of the world--our

know(l)edge--we can say that writing, a form of language, constitutes our know(l)edge, even

produces our knowledge (Leitch 23). Writing is not just the "simple grapholect" but also the

process by which things in the world are distinguished--by naming them we constitute them.

Northam notes that "we determine existence and all of its facets by language" (124) and,

according to Paul de Man, "language . . . has to extend well beyond what is empirically

understood as articulated verbal utterance and subsumes . . . what is traditionally referred to as

perception" (qtd. in Northam 124). Thus writing, the inscribed[28] [29] form of language, becomes

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[27]This term indicates that deconstruction "de-" removes, separates the "fuse" an "agent" that "sets-off" an explosive, from the conflict, precisely, the "opposition." I infer from this note that what it does, in the cases of gender and race, to remove the opposition between race (or gender) "A" and "B" is by saying that "A" and "B" add to and replace (substitute for) one another. I direct the reader back to note #5 and the idea, discussed above, that the elements (parts) of signifying chains both infringe upon and inhere in each other, collapsing the opposition between "A" and "B," irrespective of which race (or gender) "A" and "B" re-present.

[28]Of this, Derrida writes, "dare I say of writing if I compare the pen to a syringe, and I always dream of a pen that would be a syringe, a suction point rather than that very hard weapon with which one must inscribe, incise, choose, calculate, take ink before filtering the inscribable, playing the keyboard on the screen, whereas here, once the right vein has been found, no more

that which constitutes our know(l)edge. Writing includes all forms of inscription, "from carving a

path through the forest . . . to penning a legal code" (Leitch 23). This view of writing shifts from

"the world as an orderly array of substances and things to the world as a differential text" that

"defamiliarize[s] or denaturalize[s] our knowledge" (23). We construct our relationship to

language so it is possible for us to re-construct that relationship. De-construction makes this

transformation possible.[30]

Reading and writing are culturally acquired activities, constructed "by the intersection of

models, paradigms, sign systems, and conventions mediated by our culture" (Kaufer & Waller

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toil, no responsibility, no risk of bad taste nor of violence, the blood delivers itself all alone, the
inside gives itself up and you can do what you like with it, it's me but I'm no longer there, for
nothing, for nobody, diagnose the worst, you'd be right it'll always be true, then the glorious
appeasement at least, at least what I call glorious appeasement, depends on the volume of blood,
incredible amount for the child I remain this evening" (Bennington & Derrida 10-12).

[29]"Inscribe" means literally, "in, to write." Recalling the Roman Empire, from which the
term originates, the "scribe" marked, making impressions in a wax or metal plate, doing
"violence" to the medium inscribed. So the term means to leave marks in the wax or metal by
pushing the stylus "in, to write." To scribe in more modern times is how the carpenter or
metalworker marks the wood or metal for cutting. Glass can also be "in-scribed" with lines to
create a design--an etching--considered a form of art. Thus, art is violence. And, when Derrida
compares a pen (fountain pen) to a syringe (the fountain pen drawing in ink as the syringe draws
in blood), we can see why he would call writing violent. All things constructed by language, in
this case writing, are subject to transformation through critique. Leitch from this concludes, "[i]t
is precisely the power of *writing*--to ordain, create, naturalize, and monumentalize--which
produces the grounds for critique and transformation" (23). Up through January 1776, the
Founders still tried to negotiate a settlement with George III, to remain in the British Empire.
Thomas Paine, a recent immigrant, penned *Common Sense*, and four months later, the Founders
opted for independence through revolution--the violent power of writing to transform through
critique.

[30]The term "construct," used often up to this point without explanation, deserves
clarification. It is built from the Latin *struere* which, with the prefix, means "to build together."
We commonly think of "construction" in relation to plans to build a structure (in a literal,
etymological sense). However, the L is related to the Gk, *streuen*, which means "to spread or
scatter," showing again the inherent playfulness in language and the inherence of "deconstruction"
in "construction," terms that take things apart even as they put them together.

68). This cultural construction is what we, as composition instructors, encounter when the

students enter our classrooms, for the "students' assumptions about literacy determine how they

represent and act upon writing and reading assignments" (71), assumptions that both enable and

limit our students' abilities to read and write. One key assumption they bring with them involves

an asymmetrical relation between reading and writing: we read only to write--reading is slave to

the master, writing.[31] Reading is a device, in the student view, that moves know(l)edge from the

external world while writing moves the know-ledge out again (re-read note #1). Students are

trained that reading is only recognizing words and writing puts the words together following

certain prescribed forms (re-read note #9).[32] However, deconstruction teaches that reading and

writing cannot be separated and can aid students in also seeing the "interrelationships of reading

and writing" (Atkins & Johnson 3). Later in the same essay, Miller argues that reading "is itself a

kind of writing, or writing is a trope for the act of reading. Every act of writing is an act of

reading, an interpretation of some part of the totality of what is" (qtd. in Atkins & Johnson 9).

Reading takes apart--"decomposes"--texts and tropes while writing "composes" new texts and

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[31]We recall the Hegelian Master/slave dialectic in which the master becomes subordinate
to the slave through the slave's production of goods upon which the master depends for survival.
The same could be said of the reading/ writing relation as carried by our students into the
classroom. Thus, their assumptions about reading and writing contain the seeds of the
deconstruction we perform when we equalize the relationship by teaching them critical thinking
skills, though few would call it by the "D" term (re-read note #21).

[32]Re-calling, however, our discussion above, we have seen that because of the play in
language, its resistance to closure, that our students oversimplify the process. As Kaufer &
Waller note, "to 'read' a text is always to be thrown into language, into its flow and surprises, and
to recognize that we are part of that flow, that 'writing.' Reading and writing . . . move as
lingsuistic and cultural yin and yang: we read each other, the signs of the world, the nuances or
blatant assaults of political, commercial, cultural signs; and to 'read' is to find ourselves in
'writing'" (83).

new tropes.[33] Miller continues, "learning to write well cannot be separated from learning to read

well" (qtd. in Atkins & Johnson 8); thus, composition programs should integrate reading and

writing. The trick for us as teachers of composition is to move students from their simplistic,

asymmetrical model of reading (and of course, writing) to our more complex system that allows

them to construct new meanings and insights.[34] If students can read analytically, they can read

deconstructively. The "close reading" (N#19) leads to new insights and recognition by the

students that they have something significant to say.[35] In the words of Richard L. Larson, "[t]he

impulse to write . . . comes from the discovery of a comment worth making" (qtd. in Northam

121). The deconstructive stance gives students a new pleasure of reading, released from

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[33]Of this, Derrida writes that "the connection between deconstruction and composition should be problematized--first, I would say, in political and institutional (re-read note #26) terms. The word *composition*, as you know, is an old word, implying that you can distinguish the meaning, the contents of the meaning, and the way you put these together. As you know, *deconstruction* means, among other things, the questioning of what synthesis is, what thesis is, what a position is, what composition is, not only in terms of rhetoric, but what *position* is, what *positing* means. Deconstruction questions the *thesis*, the theme, the positionality of everything, including, among other things, *com*position" (qtd. in Olson 8, emphasis original).

[34]Mariolina Salvatori describes the reading process as "an extremely complicated activity in which the mind is at one and the same time relaxed and alert, expanding meanings as it selects and modifies them, confronting the blanks and filling them with constantly modifiable projections produced by inter-textual and intra-textual connections. Because of the nature of the reading process, each reading remains as 'indeterminate' as the text that it is a response to" (qtd. in Atkins & Johnson 4).

[35]Derrida adds that "[e]ach time you read a text--and this is my situation and the situation of every reader--there is some misunderstanding, but I know of no way to avoid this. Misunderstanding is always significant; it's not simply a mistake, or just an absurdity. It's something that is motivated by some interest and some understaning" (qtd. in Olson 20). I also re-call the reader to the statement by Bartholomae & Petrosky that "[r]eading is misreading" (6)-- deconstruction embraces this notion.

"canonical readings"[36] and allowed to construct meaning according to the interaction between themselves, their perspectives, and the text.[37]

These views of language--of reading and writing--should alter the approach we take to teaching composition. In the modernist view, the teacher is a master of language, "more adept than his or her students at manipulating words as tools in order to build formally correct essays" (Northam 123). We now recognize, however, in the postmodern world, that due to the shifty nature of language--its inherent playfulness and resistance to closure--no one can have an undisputed mastery of language. This idea makes many in the academy uncomfortable (N#3 and read note #38) and leads Lyotard to exclaim that professors in a postmodern world are no longer simple purveyors of knowledge, they must "find a new function or become obsolete" (qtd. in Ulmer 61). Deconstruction "happens"--works--to undermine the structure of the academy, since the academy, like any institution, is constructed by language and so cannot escape the

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[36]Northam is quick to add, however, that the students begin with a "canonical reading." In regards to the accusation that "close reading" (N#19), seeks to destroy the "canon," Derrida replies: "I think that if what is called 'deconstruction' produces neglect of the classical authors, the canonical texts, and so on, we should fight it. I wouldn't be in favor of such a deconstruction. I'm in favor of the canon, but I won't stop there. I think that students should read what are considered the great texts in our tradition--even if that's not enough, even if we have to change the canon, even if we have to open the field and to bring into the canonical tradition other texts from other cultures. If deconstruction is only a pretense to ignore minimal requirements or knowledge of the tradition, it could be a bad thing" (qtd. in Olson 11). To this, Jasper Neel replies: "No one could be so obtuse a reader or so enamored of Derrida as to miss the elitism that marks these 'minimal requirements'" (391). I would be interested to know how Neel defines "elitism." I find it difficult to associate a theory that empowers the mis-readings of "every reader" (re-read note #35) with elitism. Perhaps Neel subscribes to the strain of deconstruction, noted above, that neglects the canon. Derrida adds, "[i]f you're not trained in the tradition, then deconstruction means nothing. It's simply nothing."

[37]Sharon Crowley notes that "[t]exts are occasioned by other texts. They are produced in order to be read, to be rewritten, and hence to generate other texts," and "[t]exts are not 'real'; they are 'practice' for some imagined future production of 'real' texts" (93).

transformative critique. We then must alter our pedagogies to take into account our position,

caught, as it were, within language.

Ulmer posits that we, as composition teachers, should approach our students as amateurs

(advanced, no doubt) rather than specialists or experts (N#24). Northam suggests that we should

become "fellow explorers" with our students, examining together the oscillations in language,

recognizing each "explorer's" ideological assumptions (including of course our own) and how this

cultural baggage affects our readings and writings. LaGrandeur feels that we should be "class

moderators." These views move us away from authority (re-view notes #3, 7, 15); students are

no longer simple spectators of the scene of writing forced to blindly accept our "authoritative"

utterances.[38] We must admit that we do have more experience than our students, which places us

as guides helping our students navigate the expectations of society and the academy for writing.[39]

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[38]This stance, this unwillingness to relinquish classroom authority and move ourselves to more equal footing with our students, places teachers necessarily into the doulbe-bind of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic (N#31). We take the superior position and so become dependent on our student-inferiors for our survival. For, as we have so recently learned, if the students don't come to the academy, our positions become superfluous. This, perhaps, explains why administrators in higher education are so concerned about declining enrollments. We also begin to see some roots under the movement to eliminate tenure--professors can no longer "hide behind" their academic shield in these days of diminishing enrollments and funding. They must change and, as Lyotard said, "find a new function or become obsolete" (qtd. in Ulmer 61). This position in which we are placed makes the move to new, more responsive pedagogies more urgent and, I suppose, vindicates "close reading" (N#19).

[39]Randall Knoper notes that "while the authority of the teacher cannot be denied, it perhaps can be loosened" (qtd. in LaGrandeur 71). Derrida adds that the very fact of speech--that the teacher speaks--empowers the "law of the classroom," or the hierarchy, and makes a totally deconstructive classroom nearly impossible (Leitch 20). This notion leads Leitch to argue that to deconstruct the hierarchy, the teacher's speech "should become chronic linguistic sidetracking--randomized movement" (21). As I will later show, this view is problematic for deconstruction in an academy classroom. For, as the reader has no doubt concluded, Leitch's view leads directly to what the critics have called the root of the deconstructive project--chaos and anarchy (re-read note #36). Deconstruction, as envisioned by Derrida with GREPH, does not seek to destroy the academy--for that leads to other, and quite likely, more oppressive, more strongly entrenched

To move us (teachers) onto more equal footing with our students, LaGrandeur believes we should

enter the classroom without the text and not having read the text. We thus avoid the role of a

final judge, assuming rather the role (because of our experience) of asking probing questions. The

students, having read and studied the text, we assume, thus have more know(l)edge of the

material, creating an equal need between the teacher and students.[40] LaGrandeur recognizes that

relinquishing control is hard,[41] but that we must for the sake of our students. In my own

classroom, we looked at an essay on affirmative action, written by a Black scholar, named

Spencer, for a Black academic journal, that I did not understand, though I had read it several

times. I admitted to my students that I was unclear on Spencer's essay. This move had the effect

of "defusing" (N#27) the anxiety filling the room--they recognized that all--including the

supposedly all-know-ing instructor--mis-understood the essay. In the discussion, we decided

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academies--but to transform the academy through the critique inherent within language.

[40]Although, as I'm sure the reader has noticed, that students generally put off the reading until class, expecting us to fill them in on what is important, or they read the text but have no clue into its content and again, expect us to enlighten them. Very few students actually read *and* study beforehand, entering as prepared as LaGrandeur expects them to be. In most cases, if the teacher did not read the text or bring it, neither would the students, and we could all sit, silently staring at one another until class is over or the first brave student decides that she (N#4) has had enough of the nonsense. Herd mentality takes control and the others shortly follow. The report, necessarily, gets back to the Dean of Academic Affairs--perhaps by way of some student's alumni parents, who are also Boosters--the "DAA" calls the "chair" (N#9) and "unloads" (through the bre(a)ch no doubt, or fires off a response--N#20--through the bre(e)ch, again) on the "chair" (sits on him, perhaps), who turns (grinding his heel into the bre(e)ch) on the director of writing, who again unloads on the poor TA. Incidently, this happens (N#11) before the poor TA can walk back from his (N#4) classroom, in which the incident took place, leading him to accept that objects can indeed travel faster-than-light, since rumor has "preceded" him.

[41]How hard, he knows not. Since, as per Freudian psychology, he has "blocked out" (or repressed, in the hydraulic model) all memory of his own days as a TA.

collectively that our cultural differences prevented us from "under-standing."[42] After we

established as much of the context[43] as we could, we formed a reading (mis-reading?--N#35),

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[42]Does the play in this word imply that we need to lower ourselves *below* someone else in order to "understand" them? Doesn't that "re-empower" the unequal relationship, or produce the reversal in the master/slave dialectic, without "de-fusing" the oppositional quality of the relationship?

[43]The word "context" is also interesting, coming from the Latin word *contextus* "a joining together," from the verb *contex(ere)* "to join by weaving." When we determine "context" we literally "weave" ourselves with the text in order to gain "under-standing" (N#42). The word "text" comes from the verb listed above--*tex(ere)*--meaning "to weave, plait." This has interesting implications for what an "author"--dead though he be--does in creating a "text" out of his (N#4) cultural "context." In this we see how cultures and institutions become "texts" read/written by readers/writers, for they too, are woven together by language. This notion, I believe, further empowers our students who, like us, are woven from language. "Authors" weave language together to form "texts," "occasioned by other texts" (N#37). "The writer's thought does not control his language from without; the writer himself is a kind of new idiom, constructing itself" (Derrida 11), and, as we noted earlier, texts are "constantly structuring them [readers/writers] as they structure it" (qtd. in Atkins & Johnson 4). I would argue that no reader/writer can read a text without altering the text and without the text altering him. "There is thus no insurance against the risk of writing [or reading]. Writing is an initial and graceless recourse for the writer, even if he is not an atheist but, rather, a writer. Did Saint John Chrysostom speak of the writer? 'It were indeed meet for us not at all to require the aid of the written Word, but to exhibit life so pure, that the grace of the spirit should be instead of books to our souls, and that these are inscribed with ink, even so should our hearts be with the Spirit. But since we have utterly put away from us this grace, come let us at any rate embrace the second best course.' But, all faith or theological assurance aside, is not the experience of *secondarity* tied to the strange redoubling by means of which constituted--written--meaning presents itself as prerequisitely and simultaneously *read*: and does not meaning present itself as such at the point at which the other is found, the other who maintains both the vigil and the back-and-forth motion, the work, that comes between writing and reading, making this work irreducible? Meaning is neither before nor after the act. Is not that which is called God, that which imprints every human course and recourse with its secondarity, the passageway of deferred reciprocity between reading and writing? or the absolute witness to the dialogue in which what one sets out to write has already been read, and what one sets out to say is already a response, the third party as the transparency of meaning?" (Derrida 11). This is best illustrated in the act of writing with a computer. I type out the words I want to say, having already thought through them, while at the same time, reading what I have written, revising what I will write, typing the letters that seem to simultaneously appear on the screen to be read even as they are written. Thus Derrida, with all the "finality" deconstruction offers, collapses the distinction between reading and writing, making teachers amateurs and students "authors."

arguing that Spencer wanted us to agree that the issue was one of economic class rather than

ethnic identity. This incident partially ("very-partially," I must add) vindicates the preliminary

model[44] LaGrandeur presents.

LaGrandeur begins his example model of a deconstructive pedagogy by noting that its

purpose is to reinscribe the relationship between teacher and student--the teacher becomes an

"archi-student" who engages the difficult text with the student.[45] The students divide into groups

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[44]When asked about his own model for teaching, Derrida replied, "I don't think there is a
model for teaching and an alternative between, let's say, conservative and progressive teaching.
What we have to do, once the minimal requirements are fulfilled in terms of language, grammar,
comprehension, and so on, is to let each teacher have the maximum freedom for his or her idiom
in teaching, according, again, to the situation. And the situation depends on the audience and the
teacher, and the situation is different in New York and Florida, even in some sections in New
York and other sections. You have to adjust your teaching according to the situation. I call my
students in France back to the most traditional ways of reading before trying to deconstruct texts;
you have to understand according to the most traditional norms what an author meant to say, and
so on. So I don't start with disorder; I start with the tradition" (qtd. in Olson 11). (re-read notes
#7, 15, 36)

[45]As the reader has no doubt noticed, both threads (N#16) of this essay have taken as
decided turn for the serious. To "de-construct" or "de-fuse" (N#27) this unacceptable, to "this
author," situation, I will insert a bit of silliness, via Lewis Carroll.
                    JABBERWOCKY
'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,

of three or four and choose, within the group, a passage from the text--one that has not been

discussed--for discussion. The groups spend twenty minutes discussing the passage they have

chosen. A video camera is set-up beforehand, to tape the entire session. Next, one group is

chosen at random (draw straws, pick numbers, etc.) to play teacher/discussion leaders of the

passage chosen and discussed by the group. They can lead the discussion in any direction they

desire. During this discussion, the teacher becomes the "receptive student," reversing

conventional roles. LaGrandeur suggests that the teacher "sit[s] in a corner of the room--perhaps

on the floor to be literally in a marginal position" (74). Finally, he asks the students to write a

one-page response to what has happened in class that day, as they have seen it. At the following

class session, they replay the videotape of the student-led discussion, distancing the students

another step from the previous class. Again, he asks the students to write a one-page response to

what the camera records--the discussion, issues/questions raised, or anything else they see. The

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The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

"And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

scene of teaching can never be neutral, since the teacher must give some instruction, as Derrida indicates; however, this exercise does much "to decenter and dislocate the traditional didactic position teachers naturally occupy during the classroom discussion of a text" (75). First, it "defamiliarizes the teaching scene," both distancing the teacher from it and drawing her (N#4) into the scene as a student. Second, the teacher shifts from class focal point by allowing the students the choice of a passage to discuss and the leading of that discussion. In the subsequent class session, watching the videotape also replaces the teacher as center, becoming something of a "mediator" of the students' discussion. Further, the videotape dislocates both time and the students from the original discussion, creating a "gap" (N#5) in the "text" (N#35, 37, 43) in which the students "re-view," as if from outside,[46] their critical analysis of the text. This approach becomes something akin to Barthes' "floating discourse, which would not destroy anything but would be content simply to disorient the flow" (qtd. in LaGrandeur 75).

If it is possible to develop a teaching model the opposite of LaGrandeur's and still be deconstructive, Kaufer & Waller have done it. Re-calling the discussion above of the kinds of assumptions our students bring with them to class, Kaufer & Waller begin by allowing their students to approach a "difficult" text with the skills they then possess. When these skills prove inadequate, they introduce new skills and strategies (deconstructive) that allow the students to complete the tasks. In the first steps, the student approaches the text, armed with only his (N#4) cultural assumptions. When he discovers his reading/writing limitations, deconstruction begins as the student realizes that "with them [current assumptions] as guides, [he] won't, can't, meet the

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[46]An outside that is inside, Derrida might add, since the students are still caught within the language that constructed (N#30) the videotaped situation in the first place.

goals of the task--or will be able only to fulfill alternate goals . . . lower than the challenge

presented by the task" (76).[47] Each task gives the student new ways to analyze and deconstruct

her previous assumptions to accomplish the assignment. The authors note, "we assign tasks that

can show them to their lifeboats" (77).[48] An example of how this model works can be found in

the first directive they give students: "FIND A PROBLEM IN THE TEXT TO WRITE

ABOUT." Students tend to interpret this statement as a directive to summarize. Using a text on

the IQ test by Paul Hout, the students summarize Hout's position or writing problem. This leads

into a discussion of how they have simply appropriated Hout's problem, thus limiting their own

writing to a parrot-like paraphrase of Hout's text.

Ulmer approaches his model, called the "textshop," with the admission that it "may not be

possible to shift completely to a postmodernized pedagogy" (53). Ulmer sees his textshop as only

a "supplement" (N#18) to how we currently teach writing. The textshop focuses on the process

"to stimulate . . . the experience . . . of creativity" (58). He uses a famous poem, Blake's "The

Tyger," for example, and transforms it, first through antonymy and then through displacement.

> Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
> In the forests of the night,
> What immortal hand or eye

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[47]That is, assuming the student has enough of a "stake" in the task to be willing to face her
(N#4) limiting assumptions. In my experience, small though it is, I've seen few students who are
willing to face *and* overcome their reading/writing limitations. Most, unfortunately, give
mediocre (if that much) effort and are satisfied with the mediocre (again, if that much) grade (re-
read note #40).

[48]LaGrandeur says this approach simply "undermines student 'misperceptions'" and does
little "to dissipate the force of pedagogical authority's ability to operate as *logos* in the classroom"
(72). Too much of what Kaufer & Waller do seems (N#5) to maintain the unequal relationship
between teacher and student--it smacks too much of the controlling ideologies deconstruction
seeks to dis-empower.

> Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

Transformed by antonymy:

> Rabbit! Rabbit! freezing dull
> In the plains of the day,
> What mortal foot or ear
> Could copy thy timid disproportion?

Transformed by displacement:

> Tiffin! Tiffin! burlesquing brigandishly
> In the foreskin of the niggling,
> What immoral hanaper or eyas
> Could fragmentise thy feal symmetalism?[49]

Ulmer intends the textshop as "being to the sciences what the carnival was to the church. The ultimate goal is to deconstruct the work/play, serious/frivolous opposition and to redesign the current college catalogs that reserve language and literature to its own ghetto of specialization" (61). I believe Ulmer's textshop shows the inherent playfulness in language and further shows students that texts, whatever their form, are not unassailable cultural icons in whose presence the student should "walk softly" so as not to disturb them.

The one model of pedagogy that seems to best walk the line between LaGrandeur's and Kaufer & Waller's models, is outlined in an essay by Nancy R. Comley in which she proposes a three-step process. Comley develops three methods/assignments to move students from "reader-as-consumer" to "reader-as-producer." These are "Writing within the text: ghost chapters," "Writing through the text: possible worlds," and "the problematic text and the question of

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[49]I took these examples from Ulmer's text (58-9). The transformation was accomplished by looking up Blake's word in the dictionary and selecting the first word above it, of the same type. Tiffin: lunch; hanaper: receptacle for documents or case fo a drinking vessel; eyas: young falcon; feal: faithful; symmetalism: the use of two or more metals, such as gold and silver, combined in assigned proportions as a monetary standard.

authority." The first, "Writing through the text: Ghost Chapters," tries to get students to become producers of meaning. They must examine "what they bring to a text from their daily lives and from their schooling" (131); in other words, they must look closely at the views, both conscious and unconscious, that their cultural, emotional, and mental backgrounds bring to bear on the text. Comley borrows a term from Umberto Eco, "ghost chapters," to describe how this occurs. Every text contains elements that elicit responses and reactions in the reader, according to his or her "cultural baggage.": "As readers, we construct ghost chapters whenever there is a gap in the text; that is, whenever events are missing at the level of discourse but are presumed to have taken place at the story level" (131). The seminal example of this occurs in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. The reader is asked to "paint" the Widow Wadman, which Sterne follows with blank pages, then he asks how "uncle Toby" could resist someone "so sweet--so exquisite." To ask students to describe the Widow Wadman is to ask them to "enter into the process of the text" (132). They become actively involved in the construction of meaning.[50] In completing this type of assignment, in which the students are asked to "fill the gap" of some narrative, they discuss in class (or maybe read their descriptions) how and why they chose to describe her in the way they have. This discussion shows them that they each have an individual view of the gap in the text, which opens the possibility for them to examine the baggage they bring to a given text. To complete this kind

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[50]I must mention, only in passing I assure my reader, who is no doubt tired of all these digressions, that this model, along with much of the deconstructive project, sounds much like the theories of Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish, who promote reader-response. If space allowed, I would be inclined to somehow meld the two theories (reader-response & deconstruction) into a single theory. Although, on another level, it seems (N#5) that "close-reading" (N#19) subsumes reader-response into itself, since "all close readers are deconstructive readers." But that, my nodding reader, is a tale that must be saved for another occasion. Perhaps we'll meet again "hypertextually in cyberspace," where the voices that have tried to write, re-write, and un-write this essay will again try to fragmentize another project in the act of creating it.

of assignment, students must read more closely than they normally do, when reading simply for information. They "have to know the original from the inside" (133).

The second step, "Writing through the text: Possible Worlds," moves the students beyond the text. After working inside the text, the students move to examine the possible interpretations offered by the text. She asks them to write about what happens *after* the text ends--create a story that picks up where the author left off. This move also requires a "close reading" of the text, since they must intimately know the characters to create the possible world. An example of this occurs at the end of Ibsen's *The Doll House*. What happens to Nora (or Torvald) after the door slams shut? Comley notes that "Nora's or Torvald's success in a possible world is dependent on the reader's reactions to them, and these may be influenced by such variables as one's feelings about mothers who walk out on their children (for whatever reason), or about men who treat their wives as possessions" (134). Students inevitably draw comparisons between the possible world they create, and the world in which they live. This experience can be unnerving, since it leads them to question the assumptions and biases by which they construct their own worlds. Some students will encounter walls in the construction of their "possible world" that can only be surmounted by giving up some tenet of their own cultural existence. If they have the courage to do so, they can move another step beyond their own cultural moorings that limit their abilities to interpret texts.

In the third step, "The problematic text and the question of authority," Comley asks the students to read a text that defies their frames of reference and gives them the authority of interpretation. They are left to themselves and must supply the specifications of the interpretation. An example of this kind of text is James' *The Turn of the Screw*. We see that "the

text encourages the readers to construct ghost chapters that it does not necessarily validate and that it will in fact encourage the reader to deconstruct" (136). The governess gives a reason for Miles' dismissal from school while Mrs. Grose gives another; the reader constructs a possible meaning that the text immediately deconstructs. Thus, they revise the missing chapter in Miles' life again and again as the text ekes out new and sometimes confusing information. Shoshana Felman argues that "[t]he reader's innocence cannot remain intact: there is no such thing as an innocent reader of this text. In other words, the scandal is not simply *in* the text, it resides in *our relation to the text*, in the text's *effect on us*, its readers: what is outrageous in the text is not simply that *of which* the text is speaking, but that which makes it speak to us" (qtd. in Comley 136, emphasis original). She asks students to record their feelings as they read, which forces them to examine their relationship to a problematic text. Comley then inserts into the discussion what the critics have said about this text, showing students the kinds of battles critics have over the meaning of texts and "provid[ing] object lessons in the dangers of trying to fix language" (137). As we argued above, language resists closure and the students, in Comley's model, come face to face with this problem.

Over the sometimes fragmentary course of this paper, we have looked at how deconstruction undermines and collapses many assumptions that we as both teachers of composition and readers/writers of texts carry with us. The "close-reader" examines these assumptions and transforms them into something that will give new insights into this "prison house" in which all are born. The difficulty of this project, as the reader has no doubt recognized, lies in deconstruction's resistance to univocality: Not that any reading/writing is possible but that every reading/writing turns upon the cultural, historical, and lingual assumptions which the reader

brings to the text, the writer brings to the text, and the interaction between/among them. I did not

set out to try to re-present hypertext within the limitations of this two-dimensional medium, but

the very nature of the beast resists closure, readings, or even perhaps, simple coherence. Derrida

would no doubt add that this is as it should be: "That's why there is not one deconstruction, and

deconstruction is not a single theory or a single method. I often repeat this: deconstruction is not

a method or a theory; it's something that happens--it happens. And it happens not only in the

academy; it happens everywhere in the world" (qtd. in Olson 12). I will finish (or perhaps I

should just say stop, since the project resists final closure) as I began, with Garion, who, in the

(con)text of his story, is no longer a boy but grown into manhood, still wrestling with his identity-

-that he is one of the most powerful sorcerers in his world. His "grandfather" tries to teach him

something of the responsibility that goes with who he is.

> *"Why me?" [Garion asked]*
> *"Haven't we had this conversation before?" Belgarath asked drily.*
> *Garion's shoulders slumped. "Now I've got* this *to worry about again--on top of everything else.*"
> *"Oh, stop feeling sorry for yourself, Garion," Belgarath told him bluntly. "We're all doing what we have to do, and sniveling about it won't change a thing."*
> *"I wasn't sniveling."*
> *"Whatever you call it, stop it and get to work."*
> *"What am I supposed to do?" Garion's tone was just a trifle sullen.*
> *"You can start here," the old man said, waving one hand to indicate all the dusty books and silk-wrapped scrolls.*
> *. . . . .*
> *Garion looked around the library in dismay. "But, Grandfather," he protested, "this could take years!"*
> *"You'd probably better get started then, hadn't you?". . . .*
> *"Grandfather, I'm not really a scholar. What if I miss something?"*
> *"Don't," Belgarath told him firmly. "Like it or not, Garion, you're one of us. You have the same responsibilities that the rest of us do. You might as well get used to the idea that the whole world depends on you--and you* also *might just as well forget that you ever heard the words, 'why me?' That's the objection of a child, and you're a man now."* (Eddings *Guardians of the West* 67-8)

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