ONE

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN PRIVATE READING AND PUBLIC READING

> My parents introduced me to reading the word at a certain moment in this experience of understanding my immediate world. Deciphering the word flowed naturally from *reading* my particular world; it was not something superimposed on it. I learned to read and write on the ground of the backyard of my house, in the shade of the mango trees, with words from my world rather than from the wider world of my parents. The earth was my blackboard, the sticks my chalk.
>
> When I arrived at Eunice Vascancello's private school, I was already literate. . Eunice continued and deepened my parents' work. With her, reading the word, the phrase, and the sentence never entailed a break with reading the world. . . .
>
> Not long ago, with deep emotion, I visited the home where I was born. I stepped on the same ground on which I first stood up, on which I first walked, began to talk, and learned to read. It was that same world that first presented itself to my understanding through reading it. . . . I left the house content, feeling the joy of someone who has reencountered loved ones.
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> —Paulo Freire, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*

When the English teachers I worked with wrote about reading, they wrote about love. They grieved for dying friends in novels and they named their own children after characters in books. Jane doesn't know why, but she took *Moby Dick* with her to the hospital for the birth of her child. Philip used Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* to meditate on his

own experiences of love and death. As a teenager, April became preoccupied with reading about missing prisoners of war in Vietnam, and kept it secret.

A veteran English teacher, artist, writer, and graduate student, Jane wrote that from earliest childhood, "I was always reading." Of her family, including four daughters, she wrote, "We all talk about books when we are together, comparing our reactions and memories." Yet she also admits, "I didn't learn anything about reading in school, so I don't really know how to teach others what no one taught me."

> My own reading experience is no guide. I do not remember anything I read in school. I have no idea how texts were taught at the High School of Music and Art in the years 1946–1950, because I either had read the things already or I simply didn't do anything with them in any personal way. I know, for instance, that we read *Silas Marner* and *Ivanhoe*—and yet I came to George Eliot [recently as an adult] with delighted discovery and still am telling myself I want to read Scott. Reading in school just wasn't reading, that's all. And maybe it shouldn't try to be—maybe it should just be the material from which we teach skills. The trouble with that is, that it denies everything I believe in about literature, everything I have formed myself around.

Philip, an English teacher at a selective college preparatory school that emphasizes science and technology, wrote,

> I must have been reading before first grade. Reading was a mystical adventure of discovery, joy. Getting a story, people, feelings, ideas, from page to mind. A simple miracle—human. In first grade—Miss Jarvis—I learned phonics; I could do that. I learned to read—one word at a time. Still do. I remember anxiety and stress. I couldn't name the feelings. I could perform. The fun was gone. Reading for school was usually work. Reading for me was always pleasure . . . school assignments were tedious; in college and even in grad school the first time—I remember mostly not reading the books. Instead of feeling involved . . . I felt distracted.

April, a fairly new teacher in a private girls' school, wrote about a rich personal life with books:

> Books and bookstores have always been a special, magical attraction for me—My parents were always buying new books to read to us—it may be that in living overseas, we read and were read to more often than my peers who grew up with television—My sister and I devoured Nancy

Drew, the Hardy Boys, and a whole series of English boarding-school stories by Enid Blyton. When we read Blyton's "Adventures of the Famous Five," about four cousins and their dog, we assumed the characters' personalities, speech patterns, and quirks.

. . . I always reach a point in my reading when I look anxiously to see how many pages remain and I wonder if I should "save" the book, space it out over a few days—I look at the clock, and debate whether I should be prudent—one more hour? two? There is a satisfaction that feels slightly illicit when I decide no, this is my indulgence—I'm going to go for it.

On that night, with Antonia White's *Frost in May,* I read until seven in the morning, until my eyes ached and I had to close and rest them at times—but there was nothing about feeling tired, only a wistfulness as I watched the story coming closer to its end. During the next few days I carried the book about with me, picking it up again to reread—not quite ready to let it go. . . . That is my reading as a luxury and indulgence, a huge, fat chocolate candy bar. It frustrates me that I seldom have time to read like that—that it is so difficult to read an entire book through. I listen to my students with envy and disbelief—these voracious adolescent readers who can devour a book over the weekend, who casually hand back *The Europeans, Pride and Prejudice, Rebecca, Brave New World,* and ask "so what else do you have?"

But April has doubts about school reading too:

High school reading. A few reading experiences stand out vividly. My first high school class was a chilling introduction to the American system; but then the entire school—with a student body of three thousand, as opposed to my eighth grade class of eight students—was something of a shock. That [high school English] class was dominated by unruly, loud boys, and kept in shaky control by a mousy middle-aged woman, who broke down and wept in class the second week of school. . . . I don't remember the full reading list, though I think it included *The Diary of Anne Frank, The Catcher in the Rye, Brave New World,* and *Lord of the Flies.* I do remember *Lord of the Flies,* and the feeling of despair—repulsion—I remember slumped low in the back of the room, watching the boys in front of me rolling a joint, thinking that my worst nightmare would be to be trapped on an island with that English class—wondering who would be killed first.

It is not comfortable for the teachers to see the same disappointment they experienced as students in their own students. Philip wrote

about one experience teaching a novel, "Most students' written responses state: 'boring,' 'dull,' or 'uninteresting.' . . . I missed significant opportunities." In fact in writing about their teaching, the teachers continue to emphasize that reading in private is a world apart from reading in school. They assume it to be an occupational hazard that private reading has an authentic quality that cannot be matched in a public setting like school. Jane wrote,

> Since school isn't all of life, and since English isn't all of school, I have made some choices. One of them is to acknowledge the realm in which literature can touch one's own personality while concentrating on the more analytical, perhaps more appropriate and fruitful realm of language—how do words work? What choices does a writer make? What can one do with words that can't be done in other media? To do that even a little bit is enough; let unconscious activities go on in decent privacy.
>
> Since many of my kids don't seem to know how to engage with their reading at the personal level, I try to make them do it, (or pretend to do it) in their early journals and in many of their ongoing assignments: write a diary entry or a letter, etc.

In this last paragraph, Jane seems to prize private reading, but it is interesting that she exiles it to the unconscious or to a private diary. We can pick up this theme of exile in April's narrative as she makes plans to attend more to what is read *outside* of the classroom:

> Is there any doubt that reading is personal? That readers develop opinions about a text, and try to guide others to those views? . . . As I began to perceive that my students did a good amount of reading outside the classroom, and that perhaps that might be one area in which I could contribute, I began to look for ways to do this—hence the book talks and occasional journeys up to the library. (I make it a habit to read the middle school overdue lists, which are posted on the bulletin boards, to see what kinds of books they are reading.) The book-sharing of this year has been well-received and I am looking for different ways to expand it next year.

While April makes private reading more social by providing an opportunity for students to share their readings with peers through book talks, she too, sees private reading as different from public reading as she explains,

> My aunt, [a veteran teacher] again, has also greatly influenced the way I think of books, pointing out to me that it is not enough to simply give

students books—that you have to show them how to read them. Judy rejects the idea that teaching students how to read books stops after grade school—it's an on-going process, particularly as students approach more difficult texts. She feels that it is important to help students make transitions in their reading—from the personal, intimate family readings to public readings, away from picture books and so forth.

And Philip openly expresses conflict between the worlds of school reading and private reading. He remembers,

> During my elementary school years, I loved to go to the library to check out books. Especially in the summer, just for fun . . . I would read for hours. Time would suspend. I'd read at bedtime—especially at bedtime—long into the morning. My imagination would reach and gather and grow. School assigned readings were had to's, not want to's—a horrifying thought for a teacher.

Philip's concerns remind us that whatever our successes as individual readers outside of school, as teachers, our interests extend to large groups of students in school. We work at how we could bring reading to those who might not otherwise have it, and what we can do to make reading more meaningful to those who do.

WHAT DO WE DO IN ENGLISH CLASS?

These concerns have been most difficult for public school teachers who live with the knowledge every year that some students leave their care able to function as readers and some do not. Worried and even remorseful, they hope that the mandates that take up most of their professional development space—the directives for preparing students for standardized exams, the curriculum guides, and the "content" courses they take from college English teachers—are somehow addressing these problems. In many ways the culture of the secondary school English classroom comes to us through the pedagogies of college English departments and we find the same themes in higher education that plague the public school teacher. The individual reader is acknowledged, but hard to reach in a group, and certainly hard to negotiate with in class. Often, in theory and in practice, the professor has tried to address the collective quality of the classroom by focusing on those aspects of texts that are common to all. And like school teach-

ers, he or she has been tempted to rationalize the omission of the reader's viewpoint by characterizing individual response as private and irrelevant to public life.

Throughout the history of English teaching we see how the literary theorists' interests, the college teacher's interests, and the secondary teacher's interests intersect. William Cain reports that at the beginning of the twentieth century, prior to the advent of what is known as the "New Criticism," the study of literature was kept out of most academic departments because reading or appreciating texts did not employ rigorous scientific analysis, and reading was something people could do on their own (1984, 89). A stern discipline and training in the "scientific" study of literature was permitted in a few departments that primarily consisted of careful excavation of medieval facts. Cain reports that an editor of *The Nation*, Stuart Sherman, wrote a scathing attack on such academic source-hunting in 1913, which he claimed "divorced philology from general ideas" (p. 90). But along with such rebukes against sterile scholarship, were attacks against undergraduate English departments whose curricula consisted of only "a potpourri of 'facts,' spiced with impressionistic asides" (p. 92). Facts are still important in most literature classes. April taught etymologies and definitions of archaic words. The thirty or so teachers at the summer Shakespeare Institute where I met Jane, April, and Philip, eagerly anticipated sharing with their students the scholarship on the Court of King James. There is however, less wholehearted acceptance of "impressionistic asides," as Philip acknowledges:

> Central to my curriculum is students' making inferences and predictions. With responses [from me] such as, "That's a possibility," I encourage students to speculate; then I require students to support their hypotheses with evidence from the text. I am not as clear about how to respond when students go beyond the text to support their hypotheses with personal experiences.

THE INFLUENCE OF NEW CRITICISM

As Philip's comment illustrates, impressions that seem to come from the internal order of the text are legitimate, while impressions from experiential knowledge are suspect. Likewise, skepticism and dissatisfaction with the condition of both undergraduate and graduate English studies persisted well into the 1940s, preparing the field for an approach that did not emphasize ancient or medieval allusions, nor

the emotions of the reader, but focused on the structures of texts. Defending itself from attacks of both pedantry and shapelessness, the field welcomed a fresh approach in the "New Criticism." In "New Criticism," the literary work had autonomy, a solid and ideally penetrable structure that demanded from ideal readers a suspension of their own personalities and interests. "New Criticism" transformed literature into a very public commodity in two ways. First, it shifted focus away from individual, "private" subjectivities, and second, it located the text, not in its exotic, philological roots, but in its universality. Text became something "out here" for anyone to see and work on if they possessed the right tools.

New Criticism cultivated ideal readers who suspend their own beliefs, hopes, and intentions to better notice textual cues revealed through scrutiny of the structures of a literary work. Such tenets of formal integrity in New Criticism had been building and were sown in the fertile ground worked on by nineteenth-century theorists, like the novelist, Henry James, who envisioned the self-abdication of the reader. Slatoff articulates James' position:

> Like Henry James' ideal critic, he [the ideal reader] would seek to be the "real helper of the artist, a torch-bearing outrider, the interpreter, the brother . . . armed cap-a-pie in curiosity and sympathy . . . to lend himself, to project himself and steep himself, to feel and feel till he understands . . . to be infinitely curious and incorrigibly patient, and yet plastic and flammable and determinable." (1970, 59–60)

John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Northrup Frye, and Allen Tate are among the best known of the New Critics. Kaplan paraphrases Ransom's view of the ideal reading of a poem:

> As an autonomous object, a poem is a special kind of nondiscursive verbal structure that must be read closely for the complex meaning that is there only because it is inherent in style, technique, and form. (1986, 451)

Kaplan quotes Ransom,

> The poem was not a mere moment in time, nor a mere point in space. It was sizable, like a house. Apparently it had a "plan," or a central frame of logic, but it also had a huge frame wealth of local detail, which sometimes fitted the plan functionally or served it, and sometimes only subsisted comfortably under it; in either case, the house stood up. (1986, 461).

In his book about literary response, Slatoff writes of Bradley's similar ideas about the text becoming a public commodity with a general appeal:

> Enter that world [of the poem], conform to its laws, and ignore for the time the beliefs, aims, and particular conditions which belong to you in the other world of reality. (1970, 65–66)

Thus structural analysis was revered as a closed system that stood apart from reality, which gave the text more integrity as a form, but disconnected it from its past contexts and diluted its potential to help readers reconceptualize their present and future worlds. Practicing public school teachers rely on structural analysis as a closed system. For example, when Philip had students study Langston Hughes's "Dream Deferred," he asked them to define the word deferred, to list seven unpleasant verbs that refer to a dream deferred in the poem, and to identify five similes in the poem and one metaphor. When teaching Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, an objective is to have students know that by the end of chapter 2, Steinbeck has "created suspense through exposition and the introduction of conflict and complication." Complication is defined as "a person, event, or situation which tends to thwart the will of the main character or make the solution of the problem difficult." To get at the objective, students "discuss why Curley's jealousy over his new wife and why Curley's liking to fight bigger men could create a situation which makes the solution to Lennie and George's problem more difficult." One can see that in this type of analysis, plot events are selected for their ability to illustrate the terminology of literary structure students are supposed to learn. Students may never return to these events to study them in any kind of social context near to them today (violence in our public places) or far from them (the economy of the Great Depression).

Northrup Frye pushed the text out even further into the arena of objectivity—away from the subjectivities of not only readers, but of authors:

> The preliminary effort of criticism [is] the structural analysis of the work of art. . . . The poet's task is to deliver the poem in as uninjured a state as possible, and if the poem is alive, it is equally anxious to be rid of him, and screams to be cut loose from his private memories and associations, his desire for self-expression. (Kaplan 1986, 505–506)

The teachers who wrote about their classes carry out the exile of personal reading associations Frye dreamed of. They provide private

reading experiences through independent reading and writing in journals, but they rely on standard, public forms of objective analysis for the bulk of their literary activities that count in the classroom. Their lesson plans often stress the convergent aspects of vocabulary study or structural analysis, what everyone can agree on about the text. They feel that they don't want to disturb personal readings by addressing them in school. Philip wrote,

> When students' personal experiences seem related to an idiosyncratic interpretation (not clearly based on the text), I feel ambivalence about affirming students' experiences while interpreting the text. Are the "facts" of the text negotiable? Does an individual have the right to an interpretation? Who controls the interpretation(s)? The teacher (authority)? Is the teacher (text) open to interpretation(s)?

READER RESPONSE, SUBJECTIVE CRITICISM, AND POSTMODERNISM

These are the same questions Postmodernism and subjective criticism have recently posed as they criticize the pedagogical value of the object New Criticism had made of the text. Murray Schwartz argues the case against the objective status of the text in claiming that a responsible pedagogical position "cannot come from any methodology that avoids or denies the personal origin of the criticism it makes possible" (Schwartz 1975, 758). He rejects Frye's dualist, idealist critical methodology as an intellectualization removed from "the effective source of our organizing powers themselves" (p. 757). Feminist and historicist literary criticism argue the same point, that traditional literary theory has hidden the intentions of privileged interests by projecting them onto the texts themselves. In current literary theory, the New Critic's view of the text as "out there" as an autonomous object that is radically public, is challenged by subjective critics like Bleich, Holland, Fish, and Barthes (see Leverenz 1982).

In one of the earliest research projects on reader subjectivity, a study of five college readers reading, Norman Holland set out the means by which he thought readers came to interpret literary works:

> A reader responds to a literary work by assimilating it to his own psychological processes, that is, to his search for successful solutions within his identity theme to the multiple demands, both inner and outer, on his ego. (Holland 1975, 209)

Holland showed that readers experience a literary work so as to recreate their personal style, and that this personal style or identity is a fixed term of subjectivity (p. 214). He allows that subjectivity is unlimited, but that it will express itself within the confines of an unchanging identity theme or personality complex that is fairly stable. To analyze the readers in his study, Holland named four phases of reading response that reflect the reader's personal style or identity theme: (1) the way the reader makes what is read match the reader's defensive and adaptive capacities; (2) the way the reader uses the literary work as a source of pleasure, projecting onto it kinds of fantasy that unconsciously gratify the reader; (3) the way a reader transforms fantasies to themes that are of particular concern to the reader; and (4) the characteristic expectations the reader has of texts based on the reader's identity theme (p. 209). Subsequently Holland studied the reading responses of five college students to three short stories, and found evidence of these processes in responses to the stories. He concluded that a student is likely to demonstrate patterns of responses characteristic of the preoccupations of the reader's personality. Mauro (1980) found that in interviews, secondary students who articulated identity themes in response to the idea of death exhibited the same themes in their responses to death in literary works.

Subjective criticism progressed from the rather static categorizing of reader types and themes that tried to predict response. David Bleich (1978) asserted the primary importance of subjective responses by individuals, but advocated that they be negotiated by a community, like a class, or a group of critics, so that alienated subjectivities might be influenced by others, and so that collective interests can be scrutinized as well (p. 280). Bleich has developed a curriculum that provides readers the opportunity to resymbolize their responses to texts. He writes that resymbolization occurs "when the first acts of perception and identification produce in us a need, desire, or demand for explanation" (p. 39). In his work with undergraduates he has found that even distorted and banal responses can be negotiated into knowledge through dialogue with other members of a class and the teacher. He offers examples of the development of student response statements in which readers gradually reduce gross projections of their own fears and desires onto heros in texts, or reduce the tendency to identify themselves as just like fictional characters (p. 254). In starting with very subjective responses, the readers in Bleich's classes have material to offer teachers and class members as a basis for interpretation. Through negotiations about their interpretations, the readers develop knowledge about both texts and themselves.

Although the National Council of Teachers of English has published one of Bleich's books, called *Readings and Feelings*, and teachers interested in reader response respect his ideas, it is still difficult for them to justify the time taken away from structural analysis to focus on reader response, and to feel comfortable learning how to help students resymbolize their responses. Jane wrote,

> If there were not a county-wide final examination at the end of the year, I would diverge spaciously indeed from Butler County's requirements. I should at least stop complaining about the county's requirements, because mine are much more demanding, at least for my honors-level students. I teach a dual vocabulary, SAT preparation, a systematic language and usage program, a program in expository writing, and a program in literature. It is no wonder that I feel that nothing is done completely. (I should say here, however, that there is an unwritten curriculum guide behind that fat book, and that the message English teachers get from the county is that there is no limit to what we should be doing and doing thoroughly.)

Jane goes on to discuss how she chooses which works to include in her syllabus, and the message seems to be that an appropriate canon and preparation for objective exams leave the typical English teacher with little chance to develop response statements. She wrote,

> You ask about their individual responses, to what degree are these at the center of the curriculum, to what degree are they marginal? I guess the answer is both. The journals are preparatory; I believe you have to engage with the text first before you can analyze it. I suppose I am recapitulating my own reading history, a long period of unsupervised encounters at the level of emotion and fantasy, overlaid with the kind of analytical thinking I am now doing in graduate school.

Jane's experience illustrates that teachers find it difficult to guide the rich and often emotional responses individual readers bring to texts.

Another reader response theorist, Stanley Fish, is more interested in interpretive communities than in individual readers. He claims that "the meanings and texts produced by an interpretive community are not subjective because they do not proceed from an isolated individual but from a public and conventional point of view" (Kaplan 1986, 624). Fish seeks to highlight the purposes and goals, structures and assumptions which comprise the situation in which reading response occurs.

He stresses that meanings are made in contexts which are not idiosyncratic, but communal and conventional. His view suggests that readers are embedded in social situations that are public and shared and that determine their understanding of texts. If they have had experiences to which the text refers, they will understand it; if they lack the relevant experience, they will not be able to understand the text. In his scenario, the text activates a response that is typical of a conventional, situational context of the reader. An example he cites is that the question, "Is there a text in this class," can only be intelligible to those who are familiar with certain conventions of schooling, and that they will interpret the word "text" in a way that can only be called typical of the school community they represent.

Fish's insistence that texts and reading communities be historicized is compatible with the "whole language" philosophy in elementary schools that attempt to undo decades of decontextualized reading pedagogy. April recognizes this communal and historical context in her reading and teaching. But her experience shows us that communities' tastes are problematic and complicated as she finds herself wedged between different generations who seem to her to read *The Good Earth* uncritically:

> The curriculum I inherited seemed to be a hodge-podge of readings. When questioned, the members of the department admitted that these books were left over from various eighth grade courses, which had been organized around themes such as Mystery, Adventure, Fantasy. Somehow, these texts remained, but they didn't "hang together" in any way. I particularly objected to *The Good Earth*, which I consider poorly written and racist. . . . It fascinates me how many people in their late fifties extol the virtues of this book—and I have to wonder if their view is not colored by their memory of Louise Rainer in the film. But I have also considered how thirteen year-old girls respond to the book (—especially because I remember reading it when I was an adolescent, and loving it; for weeks my sister and I imitated the heavy and sorrowful tones of these characters . . .). In the first two years, the department implored me to "at least try it." so I gave in, assigning *The Good Earth* as summer reading. Most students responded to it with enthusiasm—they enjoyed the foreign setting, the elemental-ness of the living—life and death, starvation, floods. Only a few were disturbed by the portrayal of the Chinese and the women.

As a reader of *The Good Earth*, April feels alienated from the community of fellow teachers and from her students, and finding no way

to reconcile with them, she decided not to teach this text anymore.

Jane finds communal reading problematic since and she and her students come from different worlds:

> But, lord help me, I have read all of Ngaio Marsh and Dorothy Sayers and John Dickson Carr and Raymond Chandler and so on and on. I forgot to mention *Dracula* and Mark Twain. I read *Tom Sawyer* and *Huck Finn* before I was thirteen, then discovered a whole set of Twain in the attic Down South and read most of them. (How did I know they were funny, long before I was old enough to understand or explain their humor? How did a child understand Twain's laughter at childhood? These kinds of questions make me feel that there is an impassable gulf between me and my students. . . . Can a woman who remembers a time before there was frozen orange juice or instant coffee speak to sixteen-year-olds in any meaningful way? What questions could I ask to find out if their experiences were like mine?)

Identifying the historicity and conventionality of readers does not free us of the complexity of negotiation among groups and the work the individual must do to abstract conventional meanings from total contexts. Elizabeth Bates insists that symbols emerge for the individual reader in "the selection process, the choice of one aspect of a complex array to serve as the top of the iceberg, a lightweight token" that can stand for the whole 'mental file drawer' of associations" (Rosenblatt 1976, 11).

This look at the reader response theories of the New Critics, of Bleich, Bates and Fish, and so forth, and of the teachers' misgivings, reminds us that we swing wildly from focus on text to focus on reader, yet we have a hard time deciding what to teach. April describes the aimlessness and anxiety of composing the book list for the eighth-grade curriculum:

> Last spring I sat down with my department head for two hours, trying to discover the overall SENSE of the reading program, of the books chosen. And though, at the end of the session she had broken the books down into units and categories of "fantasy and exploration," "language and structure," and "exploration of the self," etc., it still seem/ed/s like artificial and arbitrary categorization.

Language and structure are separated from exploration of the self, and exploration of the self is separated from fantasy. Likewise, high school literature anthologies frequently use thematic categories

separating the individual from the social. April sees the categories as arbitrary, but do they reflect a bias in epistemology toward separation of the inside from the outside, and of interior and exterior life? Do they reflect the same sense of the self as exiled, asocial and not reliable?

We continue to get the same warnings from literary theorists. David Leverenz warns us that a desiring unconscious, an alienated phenomenological subjectivity, or a persistent idiosyncratic theme can dissolve into "mindless pleasure to derive similar insights again and again from different texts" (1982, 455). Grant Holly is concerned about subjectivist readings being too much like a stimulus-response situation in which the text activates readers' fantasies and desires which he or she fulfills through the text. He prefers a more Postmodern view such as those put forth by Roland Barthes or Jacques Derrida, in which we look for discord and incoherence within texts. Holly suggests that an appropriate reader response is not harmonious with the text. A text should shatter our placid beliefs (Holly 1980, 255). Furthermore, to "deconstruct texts" is to show that elements in texts are often in opposition to each other, and that meanings diverge so that multiple realities must be maintained.

MAKING SENSE OF LIFE THROUGH READING

However, while acknowledging that texts do not reflect uncomplicated and coherent purposes of authors or readers, Richard Rorty brings the focus of literary theory back to how humans read texts to get on better in the world. He insists that human beings want to identify with the struggles of finite men and women who have made sense of life through literature throughout history, and that this is purposeful. He critiques deconstruction as a process that throws into relief the vulnerability of texts. He points out that in contrast, New Criticism boasts the integrity of texts. What both have in common though, according to Rorty, is contempt for human finitude (1982, 158), and lack of interest in the human purposefulness of reading literary works.

In the autobiographical narratives of the teachers, I see them caught between the values of the child-centered, reader-response approaches, and the objective, more standardized approaches. We teachers vacillate wildly from the pole of objectivity to the pole of subjectivity, trying to protect both ends, by switching frantically from journal entries to multiple choice tests. In classroom life, we have drawn boundaries around subjectivity and called it private and drawn

boundaries around objectivity and called it public. The availability and widespread use of guide books like *Cliff's Notes* attest to the temptation to commodify the public text. The marginalization of students' interests and hopes for the text attests to the embarrassment we feel for our private thoughts. It is the contempt for human finitude that Rorty identified. I think Rorty is correct in his assessment that people want to read for a purpose, and that is, to get on in the world. They are not satisfied to be sold the beautiful and coherent, but untouchable, text of the New Critics, nor are they satisfied to notice how easily texts can be dismantled through deconstruction. Readers may be attracted to reader response as a critical approach that does not treat texts as concrete, but as functions of reader subjectivity, but teachers need to know how to negotiate reader subjectivity in the very social setting of a classroom. Reifying a particular critic's response or a particular student's response is as abhorrent as "solidifying" the text. As reading theorist Murray Schwartz suggests, concretizing subjectivity outside the world or outside the text is as false as concretizing the text as an autonomous object (Schwartz 1975, 60).

All three teachers who wrote about their pedagogy try to honor the thoughts, feelings and interests of their students. But their curricula are dominated by facts, information, literary terms and vocabulary drill, and tests and assignments focusing on how authors make texts and how critics evaluate them. They try to provide space in private journals for students' perceptions, but these are often left unread, ungraded, and underdeveloped. These private forms are usually marginalized from mainstream curriculum activities that are "counted" for grades. Students' personal responses are written as exercises and facts about literature are learned for grades, but reading literature is rarely brought to bear on the reality and future of the world. The teachers recognize a sad irony in that they remember how important books have been in helping them imagine their futures, but they do not know how to bridge the gap between students' private reading and the public classroom.

What I have come to question from reflecting on their work and my own, and from reading feminist theory, is whether the nurturance and protection of what we call the private and its separation from public life, is hurting our chances to do meaningful classroom work with literature. In her autobiographical writing, Jane thinks it important to pair what she knows about literature "with everything she has formed herself around." Actually I believe that we come to know something *as* we form ourselves around it. Therefore we cannot separate what is to be known, from ourselves. In bringing relationships back into the pic-

ture of how we know, feminist theorists also show that we cannot separate what is to be known from *those* around whom we have formed ourselves. Feminist theory shows us how the dichotomies of objectivity/subjectivity and public/private are in the way. Even more exciting, feminist theory's epistemologies founded on relationships present a guide for practice. How we provide the relationships and experiences for students to form themselves in our classrooms is the curriculum question this book addresses.