

Original Paper

Writing Trauma: Rita Dove, Willa Cather, and Toni Morrison

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Abstract

Case Study Research

Cultural Poetics identifies literature as a social text or discourse. My paper argues the significance of the works of Cather, Morrison and Ehrenreich as models for cultural change. Literature is a social text or discourse which dynamically interweaves multiple strands. My creative approach to teaching blends metacognition and hermeneutics with a concentration on social justice as a paradigm for the English classroom which resounds with tension and resolution dependent upon the silent resilience of the individual. Through student-directed pedagogical model, writing class fuses into a learning community for reflection, discovery, and peer editing for student motivation and success. We actively engage students to explore archetypical universes created by current imaginative writers. Mythological Literary Criticism and Film Theory as a lens into archetypes. We also engage in analysis of personal essays on identity. Metacognition and a student-directed pedagogical model. Through the paradigm of active learning, we engage in reading key articles by scholars in the field in blogs, wikis, web sites, books, pamphlets, newsletters, or journals or other material demonstrating techniques of close reading in order to explicate a text with terms of the literary scholar that apply to writing across the curriculum and differentiating among major literary genres to converse, to analyze, and to use cultural heritage. Students possess qualities of memory based upon human every day experiences similar to those experiences within literary works they read. I play pod casts of sample student essays that show how students recall events or conditions based upon the relationship of reading to memory. One of my students recalls her own beliefs in mercy killing and relates her heritage based upon family and cultural beliefs in the right to life. Students use life story writing next to recount experiences that may help them find thesis. We write for a global multiethnic and ageless audience. Stories can indeed reach all readers. To write, we engage memories of readings, life experiences and imagination. Accordingly,

these three patterns compose voice on the written page. But, writing is an essential skill needed for human dignity.

My claim emphasizes the importance of reading, writing, and analysis of short stories by Toni Morrison and Willa Cather as well as poetry by Rita Dove as a doorway to practicing social justice in your community and to developing a consciousness and awareness of social justice praxis. I perform case study research on a single subject, myself. Dove was born in 1952. She is an American poet and fiction writer. My model in writing is H el ene Cixous. A visionary, H el ene Cixous (“The Laugh of the Medusa”) realized that we are writing to find ourselves. Applicable to the study of Willa Cather, Toni Morrison, and Barbara Ehrenreich, the writing of oneself represents our search for words to describe situations. Based on the study of Aristotle’s Poetics (free online text), a good companion work to interpret “art as imitation”, I argue that Cather, Morrison, and Ehrenreich use language in specific modes of discourse, such as fiction, essay, and dialogue, for the purpose of reaching readers. In doing so, they absolutely attempt to motivate and to teach us. In fact, through the art of poetics as a practice, they capture emotions or actions. Then they apply language as metaphors of our actions, ethics, and attitudes. The works portray the human condition. Cather, Morrison, and Ehrenreich create the poetics of language essential to the significance of the messages. In this context, all three writers portray actions and indicators that are significant to us as readers

First, the significance of the message of Willa Cather is suffering, in her book, My Mortal Enemy. My readings signify the message of Cather as a writer who designs poetics as the cause of the work. Recent research in the area of stylometrics...explores the ways in which the voice of Cather, in her correspondence, differs from the voice she used in her public writing. Conclusions point to similarities between Cather’s novel, My Mortal Enemy, a work noted for both its economy of style and autobiographical features, and her recently published letters (Dimmit et al.). The researchers acknowledge that Cather was very private. She did not want her letters shared with the public. Only recently have her letters finally been published. Arguably, in the model of H el ene Cixous, we suggest that the writing of the work certainly brings a new voice that carries the message of the feminine myth.

Introduction

Cultural poetics, intersectionality, intertextuality, modernism and semiotics, function to decipher clues about multiple strands of complexity in the works of Willa Cather who migrated to Nebraska from Virginia as a child and Toni Morrison. My presentation focuses on a chapter from my new book entitled American Women Writers, Poetics and the nature of gender study. I am editor and contributor as well. Applicable to the study of Cather and Morrison, the writing of oneself, the lonely island of the self, represents our search for words to describe situations. Based on the study of Aristotle’s Poetics (free online text), a good companion work to interpret “art as imitation”, I argue that Cather and Morrison apply poetics as a methodology to capture and apply feminine myth as an island of

selfhood in creation of works of fiction and non-fiction to create the poetics of language, essential to the significance of the messages. First, the significance of the message of Cather is suffering in her book *My Mortal Enemy*. My readings signify the message of Cather as a writer who designs poetics as the cause of the work. Island of lonely voice and female selfhood are components to the work of Cather. Recent research in the area of stylometrics...explore the ways in which the voice Cather... in her correspondence differs from the voice she used in her public writing. Morrison's *Beloved* is a signifier of the importance of the spiritual in writing and language. In fact, Morrison creates the voice of a dead child to represent spirituality through myth. Ultimately, writing is a personal journey determined by the Baby Sugg's room becomes an island place of worship. **Through the lens of Cultural Poetics or New Historicism, a text has meaning residing in a cultural system composed of interlocking discourses.** Cultural Poetics and archival study of primary sources is the center of my research and argumentation technique.

The philosophical theory of the functions of signs and symbols of literary texts gives meaning to the literary work and particularly to its least apparent and deepest significance, which would presumably be missed by most readers without the help from the critic, and which explains the work as a totality: a presentation that will be delivered to an international conference emphasizes the importance of reading and writing analysis of poetry as a doorway to practicing social justice in your community. Moving forward toward the goal of praxis, I argue that hermeneutic arcs are useful to organize and to interpret information to prepare critiques. Through the arc which employs case study methodology of research questions, record keeping, reading, writing reflections, and analysis, I offer my reader the chance to experience, with me, as I journey into the efforts of poetic literary space.

Method

Rita Dove was the Poet Laureate of the United States. Viewing the poet's works as a social discourse, we attend to the ultimate vision of cultural poetics, which looks at cultural signs. Arthur F. Kinney suggests that to obtain the fullest possible reading "we first attend closely to all we can recover of the originary moment itself" (Kinney, 221). This researcher intends to redefine herself through reading the poetry of Rita Dove. The goal of gender studies is to challenge and to reflect, to grow and to change. I apply gender studies, Feminist Theory, and Cultural Poetics as I build an argument based on case study research techniques. I argue that examination of social and historical conditions under which the reader lives also make understanding possible.

Considering the impact that researchers make on their readers, we can change the researcher by studying cultural landscape as praxis. Place is essential to a cultural vision. Poetry cracks through a mental block and revisits the past to bring new insight. Dove is often home. She resides in a home that she builds for herself as a narrator. Based on truth, the poet invites us to enter mythic imaginative imagery. She teaches us to live with ourselves and to be the social change we seek by sharing our

truths. She uses poetics of human dignity related to identity. The poet creates poetic language of truth and beauty. The poetics verify the melodious nature of poetics of social justice and integrate community and ancestral memory.

Presence of history, autobiography, and myth reveals poetics of respect for life. We gain hope from Dove's deep love that resides in her language and poetics. Dove creates poetry of social change to bridge the common with the uncommon, the dead with the living, the past with the present. I'm seeking to share my writing during the pandemic that I shared with my students to inspire them. Lack of socialization during a pandemic changes us. My studies include letters, documents, social media, and acknowledge a methodology to teach peace and to initiate hope for survival.

Teaching during a pandemic is also a suffering state, because humans need social contact. I begin to heal with the poetry of trauma. Trauma.

It was a sudden opening in a burst of spiritual awakening. This surge of healing only comes from insight, but the words of poets change us, offering us a way to focus on memory and metaphor that reminds us of all the years that we lived without a pandemic.

Case Study

The case study begins on March 8, 2020 upon finishing the NeMLA conference presentation in Boston, Massachusetts and ends on March 10, 2021. The one year case study on a single subject, myself, uses a journal to record my reflections. I anticipate healing and growth as this is my eighth case study during the period of high researches commencing with my Doctor of Education Dissertation 'Pairing Music and Linguistic Intelligences' in 2003. Other case studies include healing from Vertigo through the study and practice of QiGong, studying works by Thomas Merton to heal, healing from grief through reading the works of Emily Dickinson, researching through case study research to prepare to write literary critiques for my monograph titled *Spatializing Social Justice*, creating videos to practice Blended Learning Pedagogy during the pandemic in 2020, and a year of case study research about teaching during a pandemic that results in a new monograph Ebook published in the United Kingdom in 2021 *Teaching Radiantly*. The reason we heal in the reading of poets such as Rita Dove centers within our own relationship with love; love comes in the heart through contemplation with the words of poet to respect life. Crafting our own visions of telling our social justice stories through poetry may enhance our understanding of the concepts. Using the poetry of Rita Dove has engaged my students in activities that create a context to allow issues of race, class gender, and sexuality to be freely questioned and affirmed.

Results

I have been teaching poetry to my students K-12 weekly for the entire pandemic year where I have been teaching online for tutoring services to enhance English Language Arts curriculums. According

to David Stovall, author of “Urban Poetics: Poetry, Social Justice and Critical Pedagogy in Education” young people need means to analyze and make changes in their realities. He studies four poetry educators to “encapsulate their philosophies through researcher observation and participation.” He also suggests that teaching social justice through poetry is conscious-raising and helps young people to develop understandings of their world to engage as agents of change. She creates tragic plots which are a reversal of situations and recognize human suffering.

“In the Old Neighborhood” Rita Dove writes imagery of the “suds bath of worries” of her mother and the “reticent glory” of her father. We feel these metaphors which offer social commentary. Going back with the poetic vision remains, because the poem was a sudden opening, a magnificent vision into a number of things about the house, the people of the past as metaphorical signs of our aging and our intimate personal pain that we gather from the memories similar to my own experience. I relate to the views of home as a barren wasteland of dissociated memories that are juxtaposed with scenes of home that are dissonant.

Investigating the useful social functionality of literature as well as the theoretical processes of the literary scholar regards the power of writing for cultural change. Consider participants’ views and knowledge. We discuss civic values through the hermeneutic arc and prepare to study through metacognitive activities. The most important outcome of hermeneutics and metacognition in writing is cultural poetics which seeks to identify literary works as social discourse. What is Metacognition? Metacognition is thinking about thinking. Flavell coined the term metacognition in the seventies of the last century (Flavell). We combine hermeneutic and metacognitive models to ask how a particular effect is achieved or why an ending seems right but also what a particular line means and what a literary work tells us about the human condition. In 2017, I published her article titled “Implementing Learning Strategies Based on Metacognition” in the *Journal of Modern Education Review*. I present strategies based on metacognition. To write, we engage memories of readings, life experiences, and imagination. Accordingly, these three patterns compose voice.

Discussion

As I approach the work of Willa Cather, I reveal the ways that she uses the poetics of mythic language patterns to share the pain of the main character in *My Mortal Enemy*. Poetics in the context of Myra’s last sentence: “Why must I die like this alone with my mortal enemy!” We may envision a mimetic view of the language of Cather. The final words of her main character, who dies alone, claim that she is her own enemy. Death becomes the condition or quality that is transferred with aesthetic action and nature. From poetic theory, we find the words of Cather as the signifier of the message of hopelessness.

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is a signifier of the importance of the spiritual in writing and language. In fact, Morrison creates the voice of a dead child to represent spirituality through myth. Ultimately,

Baby Suggs's room becomes a place of worship. Therefore the writer's mind is symbolic within the message of the words of the spirit. Morrison has an emotional ability to find a voice and hear the inner voice and listen. Writers listen to their own voices first. We touch upon different types of writing in the book. Of course, the healing process comes through words. Our poetics that generate the most healing are usually those coming from our inner core, which we think through in plain English or in our native language. The essence of the passages by Baby Suggs, who has been killed by her mother, is spiritual in nature. Plus, in the nature of the creative methodology of Morrison, we find the nature of gender study transcends time and space in context. As we learn from the analysis by Weir-Soley, the baby's ghost disappears after an exorcism. Baby Suggs may be the representation of the mythic realization that words cannot make a baby come back; words are not enough. No matter how many words we write, we are always at a loss after death. So, the writings of Morrison are a tribute to the poetic methodology that seems to give us a way to recall, remember, and never forget our tragedies.

Barbara Ehrenreich's article, "What a Cute Universe You Have!" demonstrates the poetics of truth. Through nonfiction, her prose uses poetics as a basic set of principles. We mythically create messages to imagine. Writing about the poetics of myth may work with our imaginations. We may think that we are free or humanitarians on a mission of truth, but Ehrenreich tells us to be cautious of myths.

Interestingly, let us apply the message of the work of Susan Levine, who offers us a lens into the past to re-create the future through analysis of language. Levine's literary criticism of the book, *The Feminine Mystique*, by Betty Friedan, discusses discontentment among middle-class American women, gender roles, and the author's insights on looking at the past. We may not know that we make assumptions. I agree with Levine. Linguistic tone often manipulates us. We must be determined to find our own truths based on our own experiences.

Perhaps our overview of such second-wave feminists as Zora Neale Hurston (the beginnings of second-wave feminism), Marjorie Shostak (second-wave feminist), and Jean Louise Briggs (the ebb of second-wave feminism) connects the determination of Cather, Morrison, and Hurston and Ehrenreich to engage human dignity for all women.

Amy Ahearn, for the Willa Cather Archive, in a biographical sketch of Willa Cather, remarks that "most serious readers of Cather will appreciate the judgment made of her by Wallace Stevens toward the end of her life: 'We have nothing better than who she is. She takes so much pain to conceal her sophistication that it is easy to miss her quality. It is in this area of appreciation Cather's sophistication that current scholarship continues to develop' (Ahearn). In fact, the Willa Cather Archive also features pages such as the Rediscovering Serena's Album. "In February 1887, Serena White of Nuckolls County, Nebraska, received a friendship album entitled Mental Portraits, probably as a 16th birthday gift. These books, also known as autograph albums or confession albums, were enduringly popular in the late 19th century, usually purchased in stationery stores rather than

bookstores, and widely given as gifts to women and girls. Serena's album has long been an object of curiosity because one of its more colorful entries was made by a precocious 14-year-old signing herself 'Wm. Cather M.D'. This entry by Serena's classmate Willa Cather was first published in 1951 in *The World of Willa Cather* by Mildred Bennett, founder of the Willa Cather Foundation. For its fascinating look at the writer in adolescence—and her world—Serena's album is a treasure; the full scope of that treasure grows clearer when we consider this extraordinary album in its entirety." Willa Cather is remembered for her depiction of pioneer life in Nebraska. She established a reputation for giving breath to the landscapes of her fiction.

Intersectionality

As a scholar, my passionate devotion to the writing of Zora Neale Hurston, for example, has driven me to share the importance of her works. I have presented papers on Zora Neale Hurston for International Conferences since 2000 and have used her works to teach Freshman English at three major Universities: Penn State University Lehigh Valley campus during writing classes in 2006; University of Maryland University College Online classes from 2010 to the present, and Lehigh University from 2007 to the present. I used the works of Zora Neale Hurston, based on her studies in Haiti, to teach civil rights ideas at the Northampton Community College (2003 to 2007) and Lehigh Carbon Community College (2005 to 2007).

Zora Neale Hurston's mythic representation of the second wave feminist and the theme of domestic abuse is the center of my newest work entitled: *Domestic Abuse and The Lonely Island of the Self*, breaking down interior interpersonal borders through the study and practice of writing. Zora was born on Wednesday, January 7, 1891, in Notasulga, Alabama, and died on Thursday, January 28, 1960, in Fort Pierce, Florida. In the essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression" (1934), she describes her rich and flexible uses of folk expression. My first paper on Hurston—which I presented at the College English Association conference in 2012 in Richmond, Virginia—featured a statement on her story, "Magnolia Flower," in which I found the use of the river as redemptive.

Yet, I am now experiencing the third wave. However, in texts from *Third Wave Agenda to Colonize This!* grapples with women's intersectional identities, and demands an end to all the forms of oppression that keep women from achieving their full humanity. Post feminism and the third wave are entirely different entities. Rebecca Walker's 1992 essay, "Becoming the Third Wave," articulates these differences powerfully; the essay documents the virulent and persistent sexism of the early 1990s and calls young feminists to rally to the cause. Intersectionality has received increased attention in part due to the Women's March on Washington. The march's platform is called "Unity Principles" which include the belief that "gender justice is racial justice and economic justice" (Dastagir, Alia. USA Today. January 19, 2017).

Modernity

“Morrison is one of the great portraitists of the orphan in world literature” (Conner). Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha finds Morrison as the epitome of the postnational, postcolonial, ethnic writer. Modernity views the work of art as the new location of the sacred (Conner). Morrison crafts “theology of narrative” as Conner points out in his chapter *Modernity and the Homeless*, Toni Morrison and

Fictions of Modernism in the 2014 book *Toni Morrison: Memory and Meaning*, by Seward, Adrienne Lanier, Tally, Justine, Denard, Carolyn, Published by University of Mississippi Press August 2014. Moreover, central to the study of modernism is “grasping the sacred in the work of art: Morrison’s art brings the sacred into this world” (Conner). Modernism means that period of the early twentieth century connected to the first world war, when Morrison states that “alienation is a definition of this century” (Thesis 1-2). “Her novels give eloquent and heartrending representations of this alienation...the figure of the outcast, the exile...” (Conner). Further, we find the writing of Zandition-Selassie, K. in her book entitled *African Spiritual Traditions in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, as a support to the use of complexity and metanarratives in episodic installments useful to understanding the intricate portrait of self.

My writing in the area of semiotics and intertextuality continues about the cultural poetics of Zora Neale Hurston. The short story “Black Death” which pre-dates second wave feminism, is a prelude to Zora Neale Hurston’s *Haitian folklore: Mules and Men* (1935) and *Tell My Horse* (1938). Hurston’s identity as a “literary Anthropologist” and her thematic messages rooted in folklore are based in expressions of space and language. Zora was writing about cultural contextual clues to decipher clues about multiple strands of complexity. Imaginative literature uses often, the spirituality of the author. Zora certainly used her powerful imaginative language to speak of cultural change. Through my own writing and imagination, I seek to prove that concentration on the art of writing is a mirror into cultural changes necessary for all humanity.

Hermeneutics

What is Hermeneutics? Hermeneutics is the practice and theory of interpretation and understanding of science, art, education, and philosophy. “A Hermeneutic Approach for Conducting Literature Reviews and Literature Searches” by Sebastian K. Boeil and Dubravka Cecez-Kecmnanoc inspires us to use the hermeneutic approach. The authors propose a hermeneutic framework that integrates analysis and interpretation of literature and the search for literature. Furthermore, the authors explain two hermeneutic circles: the search and acquisition circle and analysis and interpretation circle (Boeil et al.). Moving toward the goal of poetic praxis, teaching tolerance, we incorporate hermeneutic arcs into the curriculum to organize and to interpret information.

Applying hermeneutical approaches constitutes a text, a respect for history of the author of the text and the significance of the text, and understanding approaches to writing about the text. The hermeneutic arc offers us methodology for interpretation. “Hermeneutics, in France as elsewhere

abroad, is frequently associated with the work of Paul Ricoeur” (Frey, viii.). In 2011, in *World Applied Science Journal* 15(11): 1623-1629, Ghasemi et al. defined Hermeneutics as the science of interpretation. “In the field of education, hermeneutics has played a relatively important role in understanding text” (Ghasemi et al.). The authors site the hermeneutic method according to Paul Ricoeur. We accomplish understanding by explanation, understanding, and appropriation which Ricoeur called “hermeneutic arc”. Explanation explores the nature of the text; understanding explores the question which the text presents; and appropriation expands knowledge and perception. Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander, editors of *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, establish Hermeneutic origins, explain Hermeneutic thinkers, ask Hermeneutic questions, describe Hermeneutic engagements, challenges and dialogues, and conclude with the future of hermeneutics. Interpret literature as a social discourse. Rooted in the principles of the Aristotelian philosophy, she incorporates the theoretical basis of art as imitation. Her pedagogy results in teaching themes that enliven the 21st century student to create imaginative meta-fiction and to enhance classes with projects that are alternatives to essay, to inspire students. She advocates readings the *Poetics* by Aristotle. In doing so, she sets criterion for interpretation which reflects and questions fundamental assumption. “Poetry Festival Pedagogical Project” assigns a writing process journal format with drafting, reflections on music lyrics as poetry, and the three attributes of hermeneutical arc including text, explanation of the text, understanding in reflections, and her original musicality contextual framework based on her case study research. Argument summary captures the use of the hermeneutic arc and metacognitive pedagogy. Her students participated in think, pair, share in a blog to introduce a themed unit of writing. Summary writing as a metacognitive writing pre-writing exercise allows students to use critical reading skills to enhance their next writing activity. Reading to doubt or exploratory writing in separate blogs with one theme offers reflective writing practices to discover style and personal voice or alternative topics. Thinking about literature through the lens of the hermeneutic arc and with metacognitive activities may enlighten us to better writing. In fact, we promote the use of metacognition to begin the outlines and purpose, hermeneutics to approach the research, and finally, cultural poetics to see the literary work as a social discourse.

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‘Hermeneutics, Metacognition, and Writing’ by Maryann Pasda DiEdwardo (Ed.)

‘Hermeneutics, Metacognition, and Writing’ investigates the social functionality of actions as an essential criterion of study. It focuses on hermeneutics: interpretation through the lens of philosophy of metacognition.

Vital contributions to the book include several chapters by Dr. Maryann P. DiEdwardo herself, which explore various facets of the central topic, including the intersectionality of hermeneutics, metacognition, and semiotics, as well as social movements.

This collection of critiques and case studies examines the imagined cultural landscape of specific works and associated activities such as fine art, music, poetry, and digital humanities, which aim to initiate self-monitoring as metacognition, or meta-reflection, by creating interior interpersonal space to overcome adversity. This edited volume will be of particular interest to scholars and students of textual hermeneutics as it relates to prose writing and artistic works in non-verbal media.

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