Exploring Literary Perspectives of Poetry

through an

Interactive, Multimedia, Learning Environment
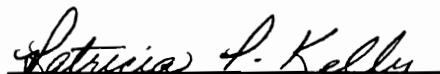
by

Timothy David Paulsen

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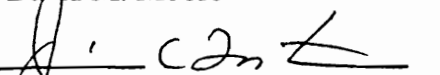
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Timothy David Paulsen

Patricia P. Kelly and Glen A. Holmes, co-chair

Curriculum and Instruction

(ABSTRACT)

This dissertation focuses on the development and evaluation of an interactive, multimedia learning environment intended to help college students learn how to interpret poetry from various literary perspectives. Four literary perspectives-- feminist, psychological, religious, and reader-response--were thoroughly explained and applied to a poem through the use of "hot words". As the students chose a hot word or phrase in the poem that they wanted to explore further, they then chose which literary perspective that they wanted to see. A literary interpretation, then, was given below the poem from that perspective. At the same time, responses from other students who had gone through the program before also appeared. The current student participant had the choice of responding in writing to the poem itself, the given literary interpretation, or the other student responses. There were also photographs, videos, and music clips that could be accessed which illustrated the literary interpretations of the particular hot words chosen, and the students could respond to these as well.

The research questions that were being asked through the development and evaluation of this program were:

1. Can such a technological approach help students to learn something as non-technical as evaluating and interpreting poetry from various literary perspectives?

2. Will students become more sensitive and understanding of the opinions of others, even when extremely different from their own, through such a computer program?

3. Will students be able to analyze a poem in greater depth because of going through this program, instead of just looking for the usual, surface level. literal meanings?

The results of the program were very encouraging, with ninety-eight percent of the student participants indicating that the program was effective, and the desired results were achieved with the majority of these. The students overall showed remarkable growth in understanding literary theories, in becoming more sensitive to the opinions of others, and in being able to interpret poetry at a much deeper level. Due to these exciting results, several ways of adapting this program to other educational and economic pursuits were explored, as well as ways to improve the current product.

Acknowledgments

One of the unique qualities about this dissertation is that it incorporates so many different disciplines into one final, focused product. It includes computer technology, literary criticism, poetry, feminism, psychology, religion, collaborative learning, and multi-media illustrations. Such unified diversity is the result of being inspired and guided by my early educational mentors, Rosalie Slater, Verna Hall, and James Rose. They gave me the vision for seeing the teaching of English as sharing an interconnected web of knowledge, instead of just an isolated, limited core of learning within one narrow subject. For this vision, I owe them my deepest gratitude.

Next, I wish to thank each member on my committee for their guidance, encouragement, and wisdom in helping me to get past each barrier on the way to this final victory. I want to thank Dr. Pat Kelly, my co-chair and advisor, for helping me to stay on track through the different stages of this educational pursuit. I really appreciate the way that she believed in me from the very beginning, and helped me to believe in myself. I want to thank Kathleen Carico, also, for being on my committee from the very beginning, and for her taking copious notes at all of our committee meetings, which helped me immensely. I want to thank Dr. James Fortune, who was graciously willing to join my committee at the last minute, after much of the preliminary work had been done, to help me in focusing and developing my assessment methodology. I want to thank Dr. Mike Moore, for many of his ideas in the multi-media development class helped me to get really excited about the great potential involved in the use of educational technology. My last

committee member, and co-chair, Dr. Glen Holmes, without a doubt, is the main reason that this dissertation research project was made possible. He spent countless hours helping me to design a workable system, putting up with my inadequate technological abilities and desperate calls for help, and constantly encouraging me with his contagious sense of humor, which helped me to keep going even when things did not always work out right. I have come to respect and admire him as both a teacher and a man, and I will never forget his self-sacrificial contribution in helping my vision become a reality.

I would like to thank the many lab assistants and graduate students in the Educational Technology Lab for helping me fumble my way through what seemed like learning a foreign language, at times, as I struggled with making the computers do what my brain and heart wanted them to do. I only know many of them by their first names, but I would like to thank Sally, Karl, Su, Tom, Michelle, Jane, Jim, John, and Zeke for their many hours of fixing what I could not fix.

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I want to thank all of my students in my American Literature classes who were willing to volunteer to go through the computer program, to be interviewed, and to help me analyze the learning process. They self-sacrificially gave of their time, and I just hope

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Art versus the Machine

As scientists, entrepreneurs, and educators all seem to be racing along the information super highway and flying through the exciting cyberspace of high tech, multimedia innovations, it is easy to forget that many people from a wide variety of perspectives feel threatened by the newest technologies as being enemies to their values or world views. This fear or abhorrence is not something new. Matthew Arnold, (1885, p.1466) in his essay on "Literature and Science, speaks of Plato's denunciation of "the base mechanic arts" as bringing "about a natural weakness in the principle of excellence in a man". Arnold reiterates this sentiment when he insists that we are in "bondage to machinery", and that our love for the newest technology amounts to nothing less than "idolatry" (p.1427). Arnold's perspective, though, is not based on a religious paranoia, as much as an apparent conflict between art or literature and science. He questions, "How...are poetry and eloquence to exercise the power of relating the modern results of ...science to man's instinct for conduct, his instinct for beauty? (p.1478).

Although many might be tempted to belittle this criticism of technology as merely something out of the dark ages, there are many today who also question the true value of modern scientific inventions. For example, even though Gerald W. Bracey (1992, p.60) is

basically glorifying the modern uses of computers in his article, "The Bright Future of Integrated Learning Systems," he expresses a deep-felt sensitivity toward one of the greatest criticisms of modern technology when he writes, "I hated B.F. Skinner's teaching machines because they seemed to me so anti-human". It is this "anti-human" aspect of technology that makes many even today struggle with the growing prominence of machines in our society, particularly those who are involved with the more humanistic or artistic endeavors of mankind. As Simon Holland and Gordon Burgess (1992, p.267) express in their article, "Beauty and the Beast: New Approaches to Teaching Computing for Humanities Students at the University of Aberdeen", "some humanities scholars appear skeptical of whether mechanical procedures and devices can offer much of real value to the proper study of the humanities".

Even though for many this conflict is a very philosophical confrontation between art and science, for many others it is merely "the fear of being 'replaced' by computers and their programs or, more likely, by someone else who is knowledgeable about such matters...Humanists, who by tradition and training have long been somewhat apart from most advanced technology, are certainly susceptible to this fear"(Tannenbaum, 1991, p.266).

Yet, fear is not the only motivating factor behind the avoidance of technology by many. There are many teachers, for example, who see the use of computers in the classroom as a poor substitute for the more personal qualities of traditional teaching methods. As David McGrath (1995, p.42) effectively expresses in his essay, "Computerize or Bust", "thirty years ago, if someone walked into a college classroom,

assigned busy work, and then waltzed around the room, he was a teaching assistant or a sub. Now it's teachers doing that same thing, but it's supposed to be legitimate because it's "hightech" busy work".

Since there seems to be an obvious tension between those who are more technologically-inclined and those who prefer to emphasize what they perceive to be more humanized concerns, the obvious question then arises, "what is the rationale for choosing an interactive computer environment for teaching" something so extremely personal, artistic, and humanistic as "literary theories about a poem"?

First, it may be necessary to point out the important fact that just because something is "non-human", like a machine, it does not mean that it is "anti-human". Although this may seem blatantly obvious, it brings up one of the greatest pastimes of human nature, and that is the tendency to blame other people or things for our own shortcomings. There is nothing innately bad or good about technology. It is only a tool which can be used by humans in either constructive or destructive ways, depending on the values or characters of the people involved. If a more traditional teacher, then, merely uses computers as a tool for rote memory of literary facts that will be forgotten as soon as the test or semester is over, it is truly only "high-tech busy work." Yet, this is the fault of the teacher's philosophy of education, not the fault of the machine.

One of the main causes of the frustration and intimidation that is felt by humanities teachers in particular, then, is not the technology itself, but in the teacher's concept of what makes a good teacher or a good teaching environment. If the teacher feels threatened by a machine, it may be that they are "reluctant to give up the expert status or

authoritarian role. Many teachers need to feel in charge and to be "on top of things" and may have a prevalent fear of "losing control"(Ertmer & Russell, 1995, p.26).

This fear of losing control is partly based on a misunderstanding. Computers are not meant to replace teachers, for even though "computers offer new and far more powerful methods in the humanities," they can never be considered as "a substitute for professional wisdom and insight" (Tannenbaum, 1991, p.266). No matter how advanced the technology gets, they will never be able to deal with the complex nature of social interactions within the classroom, or to give the kind of individualized guidance that a compassionate mentor can provide.

The Teacher's New Role

The problem is that many teachers view themselves as rulers in a mental-microcosm, and see their role as a teacher as being a human database with a gigabyte of memory trying to transfer information to small student mental disks that are often so hopelessly "floppy" that the teacher spends most of their time reprogramming what should have been "saved" in permanent files long ago. The ironic thing about this situation is that it is really the teachers who need to be reprogrammed. They need to get away from the idea that a teacher is mainly a "dispenser of information," and learn to see themselves instead as "a facilitator of learning" (Kalmbach, 1994, p.29). As Alexander Laszlo and Kathia Castro (1995, p.9) remark in their article, "Technology and Values," "the world no longer needs human databases or robots--it needs learners [meaning both teachers and

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students] who can adapt their activities to what is happening each new day". Laszlo and Castro go on to say that the teacher should be "a partner in the promotion of positive group interaction and a guide to the discovery of life. He or she will be the source of motivation--not the source of knowledge--for the self-development of the learner"(p.12).

This new perception of what it means to be a teacher is necessary to meet the needs of the current generation and the generations to come. Since "the changes in information technology will make virtually all knowledge immediately available, and ...usable to individuals"(Bracey, 1992, p.60), students will not need to go to the teacher as a "depository of facts," neither does the teacher need to feel that they need to be a knower of all facts or an "expert" in all the subject areas that they are asked to teach. Instead of spending a great amount of wasted time either memorizing facts themselves or trying to cram them into the heads of the students, their time can be much better spent learning about how to tap into the vast technological data banks, and guiding the students on how to do the same. The problem here is that even though many schools spend large amounts of money on buying new technology, they spend almost nothing on training the teachers how to use them. "Teacher training is critical. If teachers can't use the technology, they won't...Every dollar spent on technology should be matched dollar-for-dollar on training, yet few schools have made such a commitment"(Pack, 1994, p.366).

Yet, throwing more money into the system is not the sole answer either. Unless both teachers and administrators can get a new vision for what education is all about, more machines and more training will not make the learning environment more effective. The problem is that our society has gone through so many drastic changes in the last thirty

years, that many of the people who have grown up during this time and who are now in positions of authority, have yet to learn how to adjust to the new demands being made upon us all. "We have experienced a major societal transformation from the industrial machine age to the postindustrial information/knowledge age. These changes and transformations have shaped our thinking and recast the way we view ourselves, the systems of which we are apart, the environment in which we live, and the way we view the world" (Banathy, 1995, p.53). However, even though so many changes have taken place, we still often attempt to approach our problems and tasks as educators in the same mentality of the past. This is a fatal mistake. As Albert Einstein brings out, "No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it. We have to learn to see the world anew" (Banathy, 1995, p.53).

We, as educators, must not hold our students back from reaching toward a meaningful, fulfilling future by continuing to use the teaching techniques and philosophies of the past. "The learning facilitator accepts the responsibility of conveying the message that each person can develop into whatever his or her aspirations suggest. Individual aspiration should not be limited by the values and visions of a teacher, since human potential is intrinsically unbounded" (Laszlo, 1995, p.12).

One of my main reasons for choosing a technological environment for teaching literary theory, then, is because we need to adjust our teaching techniques to meet the demands, needs, and expectations of a generation that seems to be rushing into a world that refuses to be bound by the limitations of the past. We either must grow along with

our students and the society that we share, or we will be committing professional suicide, and end up being left behind.

Beyond the need to keep up with the times, however, is the growing realization that the technology that is available now will help us to be better teachers than we could ever be without it. The possibilities are endless, even as humanities teachers, and we should want to explore every one of these possibilities to the best of our abilities. Choosing a computerized environment to teach literature, then, is just one of the many avenues that can be used in the future, and this paper only represents step one in an embrace of the exciting world of tomorrow.

Description of the Computer Program

One of the main ways that computers can be used in teaching is through programs like the one that is being developed and analyzed in this dissertation which will allow for the individual student to study on his/her own, yet also gain the benefit of interacting with others. The system that is being referred to will allow the student to go to a tutoring lab where she will be able to learn how to analyze a poem based on various literary theories by being able to see how others have interpreted the poem according to their own perspectives. The student then has the opportunity to respond to the poem itself or to the various interpretations of the poem. The student has complete control over the direction and focus of the study, choosing either a linear approach that goes straight through the poem, or a more varied approach, which can go back and forth throughout the poem,

studying only lines or interpretations that she is interested in finding more about. Various words throughout the poem are highlighted, and if they are chosen, the student can then choose which interpretation of those words she wants to see: a feminist interpretation, a psychological interpretation, or a religious interpretation. These different interpretations are dealt with in more detail in the second chapter. When the student chooses some highlighted words and the interpretation desired, the student has access to a formal interpretation based on research about the topic and an informal interpretation given by another student. After the student has read these two interpretations, she can then give her own interpretation or reaction to the others, or she can choose another interpretation to look at before responding. The student can choose to go through the entire program only looking at one formal perspective, such as psychological, or she can go back and forth between different views. There also is the possibility of choosing a photograph, music clip, or video illustration of the particular highlighted words.

Advantages of the Computer Program

There are several advantages to this particular interactive computerized environment. First, this program allows for interaction between students outside the classroom situation without the students having to be in the same location. "In the past the social interaction about the content has most often only been between instructor and student; but it is increasingly possible for students to interact with one another, even when

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geographically separated" (Berge, 1995, p.23). There is not enough time during the regular class time for the students to discuss the various works of literature in small groups, for there are just too many stories that need to be analyzed. The computerized environment allows the students to analyze the works without the constraints of time. They can go to the computer lab at their own convenience and spend as much or as little time as they wish to go through a particular assignment.

One obvious constraint here is the confinement of this program to a particular computer lab, which requires the student to make a special effort to go to the lab during its hours of operation. It is recognized that this is a serious limitation, but it is not a limitation caused by the computer program itself, but by constraints in the overall learning environment where the teaching is done. The ideal would be to have each student to have their own computer in their dorm rooms which is connected to either a campus-wide or extended network, with complete access to all of the humanities' programs at anytime during the day or night, without ever having to leave their room.

However, at this time there is no such networking access for either the students or faculty on campus, although they are planning on implementing such access in the near future. When the campus is finally connected to the Internet, the computer program that is being developed will be usable by all who have this connection, and the current limitation of space will no longer be an issue. The goal now is merely to make the best of a bad situation, as well as to incorporate strategies that will be adaptable to the future. The program is also very adaptable to meet the needs of other institutions that have these same

limitations, and , therefore, the program may meet a very real need for many who could not have such a program otherwise.

Regardless of which setting that is used for this program, however, the computer lab or the dorm room, it helps both the teacher and the student in many ways. For the student it helps by providing her with the opportunity to be exposed to a variety of literary interpretations, which may help her to develop her own view, or at least help her to learn from the examples of others how to think critically. "Interactive learning technologies give you the opportunity to figure things out by yourself, thereby personalizing the learning experience and making it all the more significant and meaningful to you" (Laszlo, 1995, p.10). Also, by encouraging the students to respond in writing to the various interpretations, it provides for a way of immediate reinforcement of the ideas expressed in the different literary theories, as well as helps the student to feel that their own interpretation or opinion is valued. Even though the program only seems to present three literary theories, then, feminist, psychological, and religious, it really is also supporting a fourth-- reader response theory, for it places the students' responses along side the more formal responses as being equally important or valid. This philosophy of reader- response theory will also be discussed more in depth in chapter two.

One of the greatest challenges as a teacher, no matter what the academic discipline, is to help each student to feel that they are important or valued as an individual, instead of just a number. This is particularly difficult, if not impossible, in the large literature classes that are sometimes mandated by the budget-minded administration. Even when the teacher tries to break these classes up into smaller discussion groups, the

classrooms are often too overcrowded to move desks around into circles, and too noisy to hear what others are saying. Also, it is usually only the more aggressive students who take part in such discussions, while the quieter students feel intimidated by being called upon to share. "Some students are uncomfortable working with others. They may be intimidated by more experienced or more outspoken peers and may be unwilling to speak up and open themselves to criticism" (Ertmer & Russell, 1995, p.27).

The interactive computer environment, however, provides a way for each individual to have a chance to share without feeling that they are competing with other students. They do not have to speak orally, so if they are shy, they do not need to be embarrassed in this way. There are no right or wrong answers in this environment because the emphasis is not on memorizing factual information, but on theories and interpretations. The student does not need to feel afraid of failure or mistakes, then, and even grammar or spelling is not considered important in this setting. Everyone's opinion is valued, and the purpose of sharing with one another is personal growth and becoming sensitive to the perspectives of others. "Assuming the overall principle is to create an environment of cooperation and trust among students"(Lauzon, 1992, p.21), this interactive environment can create a sense of open communication and oneness within the group, even though only one person may be actually present and communicating at the time. Having this program connected to the Internet, of course, would provide even more opportunities for meaningful sharing through "computer conferencing...virtual classroom discussions, group projects, keeping personal interaction journals, and socializing" between students in the group (Berge, 1995, p.23).

"Interactive learning environments can help generate the attitudes necessary for personal development. They encourage the learner to engage in activities that boost self-esteem, self-control, self-efficacy, and achievement motivation" (Laszlo, 1995, p.11). The student should learn self-esteem by being encouraged to share her own interpretations of literature, and by having her opinions appreciated and valued. The student should learn self-control by keeping her responses to the interpretations of others at a level of objective, scholarly analysis, instead of yielding to personal attacks. The student should learn self-efficacy by learning to think at a deeper level of awareness and appreciation of the opinions or perspectives of others and the complex world around her. The student should also become more motivated to learn as she struggles with various world views and perceptions, and search for the foundational basis for her own beliefs as she shares them with others. As Holland (1992, p.273) clearly states, the humanities are "supposed to expand students' awareness, stretch their imagination and their intellect, and open their eyes".

Although some skeptics may question how much students will really learn in a computer environment, in contrast to a traditional classroom situation, research has clearly shown that the opposite is true. "In contrast to 'teacher dominant' approaches typified by traditional textbooks, 'student dominant' approaches are considered to be appropriate for fostering higher cognitive functioning" (Carnine, 1993, p.29). Instead of the rote memorization required from the traditional method of "spoon-fed knowledge" by the teacher, interactive computer environments invite students "to think about, discuss, and extend their ideas and questions, rather than emphasizing facts and procedures. Students

are engaged in tasks that involve complex reasoning where they must articulate and examine what they think" (Hawkins, 1992, p.65).

How Each Teacher Can Individualize the Computer Program

This does not mean that the teacher just steps out of the picture and lets the computer do the teaching for them. The computer is meant to be a teacher-aid, not a substitute. "The teacher isolates the main themes and organizing principles assumed to be essential for a proper understanding of the subject and prepares questions which require the student to think about these themes by showing the relationship of topics within and between them" (Mitchell & Grogono, 1993, p.60). Each teacher that uses this program can create her own questions or organizing principles and give them to the students to look for specific answers or interpretations as they go through the program. This approach individualizes the program to each class's situation and teacher's priorities.

Another way that this program may be individualized according to the teacher's guidelines or needs will be in the choice of which interpretations will be accessible by the student. In its initial format for this project, only the feminist, psychological, and religious interpretations are available. However, it is a goal of this researcher to add to this list several other formal literary theories, and the teacher can choose which theories she wants the students to study at any particular time. This allows for the flexibility that is needed to make this system more appealing and useful for each teacher's own emphases or area(s) of focus.

The one drawback that can be seen to providing such flexibility is that it allows the teacher the opportunity to limit the student's access to learning within the narrow boundaries of the teacher's own biases, instead of allowing an open-ended exposure to a wide variety of complex, often conflicting views. Hopefully, the teachers who use this program will not put such boundaries upon the students, but will allow them to explore all of the varied possibilities, or to choose the interpretations that they as students wish to investigate. Realistically speaking, though, not every situation may deem the various perspectives appropriate for their student body, such as a public high school not wanting to include the religious interpretation for constitutional reasons.

Since the computer interface does not have enough room for all of the possible options, there will be an options page in the future at the beginning of the program which will allow the students to choose which interpretations that they wish to include, up to a maximum of three at a time. However, at any time during the program, the student may choose to change these choices by using a pull down menu titled "Select". Of course, as stated above, these options will only include those interpretations that the teacher wants to make available to the students.

How this Computer Program Compares to Others

The program that is being discussed here is vastly different from what has traditionally been done with computerized literary analysis. In the past, the computer has mainly been used for textual analysis, where the emphasis is placed on quantitative studies,

such as "word frequencies and phonetic patterns, structures which can be easily identified by computer programs" (Olsen, 1993, p.311). Yet, since the emphasis in this program is not on factual information transfer, but on qualitative analysis and personal response, the computer acts as more of an automated mediator in a complex discussion, rather than just a digital data base.   Another program which is similar to this one is "Daedalus", which is used in the English department at Virginia Tech. "Daedalus" is similar to this program, in that, it encourages student responses and interpretations of literature through the use of computer interaction. However, it is different from this program in a couple of very important ways. First, "Daedalus" is an on-line system, where students in a computer lab environment can all respond to the literature and to one another simultaneously; whereas, this program involves one student at a time using the program, responding to other students only in the form of pre-recorded or saved files. Second, "Daedalus" merely gives a piece of literature which is scanned into the computer by the professor, with a few probing questions to inspire discussion. This program exposes the students to a wide variety of literary perspectives or interpretations, with the students' responses being only some of these, so the students can learn various literary theories and how to analyze literature from a multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary methodology. It is not being claimed here that this system is any better than "Daedalus". It merely serves a different function. However, the primary purpose here is not to compare this program with other computer programs, but to explain the rationale or need for such a program, and how it can be used as a vital part of the overall instructional environment, in a supportive role of the teacher, not in competition with them.

How this Computer Program is better than Textbooks

Instead of trying to replace the teacher with computers, the emphasis is more on trying to replace the traditional textbook with a computerized, interactive analysis of the literary works. Computers are far superior to books in several ways. "They are able to present not only text and pictures, but also animation, video, and sound. Their interactive capability, their ability to withhold, reorganize, and search information contained in vast, decentralized, world-wide digital libraries, and their ability to deliver feedback contingent upon student response make them more effective than print alone" (Siegel, 1994, p.49).

Computers are also superior to books in the study of literature because works in a book are "usually read in sequence from beginning to end, " whereas, in computer programs, "the hot spots in hypertext allow users to move about and explore information by making their own choices. Hot spots enable users to access wanted information on demand and provide access to new experiences which help them understand the information. Hypertext can allow the user to literally read 'between the lines'" (Sweeter, 1994, p.48).

Since so much more can be done in the interactive, computer environment, than with the traditional text, the student senses an exciting feeling of discovery as she explores the various possibilities within her grasp. This encourages her "to become independent learners" (Line, 1995, p.54), and "learning becomes learner driven. The learner sets the pace, creates the agenda, and charts the course" (Laszlo, 1995, p.11). The students are

able to "participate effectively in adapting the nature and shape of the learning activities to their motivations and needs as learners. This means that a diversity of approaches may be used in an activity, appropriate to the learning needs of different individuals; their questioning and extended reasoning" (Hawkins, 1992, p.65). In this particular program this means being able to choose different options in literary theories based on the student's interests, being able to explore a text through its hot spots in a non-linear, interest-focused manner, and being able to interact immediately with various interpretations based on the individual's own perspective and world view.

When a student is just reading a traditional text, it is very easy to thoughtlessly skim through it or day dream, missing much of the important content, and not really preparing properly for class discussion on the text. Using an interactive, computer environment to go through a text instead, encourages and guides the student to a deeper understanding of the complex meanings and themes, helping her to get past just a superficial overview of the plot. "Each student must do something with the knowledge he or she is attempting to learn. Interacting with content means actively processing and combining this content with prior knowledge" (Berge, 1995 p.23). This helps the student's own personal growth, and helps the other students and teacher as each one comes to class better prepared to analyze the literary work orally, and to share well-thought out conclusions and personal applications to the questions that arise.

How the Computer Program Contributes to the Class

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The contribution that each student makes to the others in the class can be accomplished in different ways. One way is to divide the class into discussion groups before they are introduced to the computer program. In this case, when the students are responding to the computerized interactive analysis of the literature, they are only interacting with the formal interpretations and the perspectives of those other students who are in their discussion group. When all the people in a particular group have completed the program individually, they can then take a printout of all the responses and meet together as a group to discuss the various perspectives orally, and to try to come to some consensus as a group. The benefit of this approach is that it "provides an experience in learning to listen to the views of one's peers and in learning how to express one's self and perhaps to persuade others to one's point of view. The method provides an opportunity to gain confidence in one's own judgment, but also a degree of humility as well" (Ertmer & Russell, 1995, p.24). "Designers of learning environments need to take into account how both synchronous(real time) interactions and asynchronous interactions are valuable tools when meeting various instructional goals" (Berge,1995, p.23), and this method of combining both computer interactions and in-class group discussions can help to provide for this need.

"In many learning communities, students are provided with opportunities to plan and organize their own research and problem solving, plus opportunities to work collaboratively to achieve important goals" (e.g. A.L. Brown et al, 1993; The Cognition & Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1994, in press; Collins, Hawkins, & Carver, 1991;

Lamon, 1994) (Lin, 1995, p.54). It is not necessary for every step of collaborative learning to take place as a group at one time or place, for "social interaction doesn't necessarily require real-time(synchronous)communication. Thus, interaction among learners or instructor can be independent of time and geography" (Berge, 1995 p.23), and still be considered collaborative learning. It is also possible, though, that the teacher can organize their system where each student has access to every other student's written responses and interpretations in the whole class, and they can pick and choose how many or which interpretations that they want to respond to. After everyone has had an opportunity to go through the computer program, then, the teacher prints these out for the students to see and discuss as a whole class together, rather than in small groups. Of course, they would need time to read through these on their own before coming to class. The advantage to this approach is that each student is exposed to a much larger variety of perspectives than just the few in a smaller group situation. However, it would be more time consuming for the student, and probably would be too tedious to go through all the responses.

Regardless of which approach is used, there should be an obvious behavioral change that takes place in the classroom "resulting from the use of instructional technology" and in-class group discussions, and that is "an increase in peer interaction in the classroom" (Carney, 1986; Dickinson, 1986) (Scholfield, 1994, p.581). Students should feel more inclined to share their views orally in class if they have already had the opportunity to think through their own views and the views of others before coming to class. "The student can work with other students, learning interpersonal cooperation and

the skills of being a follower and a leader" (Siegel & Sousa, 1994, p. 50). Also, if the group is asked to come up with a consensus interpretation of a literary work, or to answer certain questions about the various meanings of the work, the students can "capitalize on a diversity of skills and knowledge," developing "mutual respect because they realize that they need one another to accomplish important goals" (Lin, 1995, p.56).

Just because this computer program is being developed so that the individual student works alone, then, does not mean that the importance of group interaction or collaborative learning is not valued. It is well known that "learning is inherently a social, dialogical process(Duffy & Cunningham, in press) in which learners benefit most from being part of knowledge building communities both in class and outside school" (Jonassen, 1995, p.61). Yet, it is also recognized that some individuals seem to learn more, at least initially, when given the opportunity to explore various avenues of knowledge or personal awareness expansion when alone, where they feel less intimidated by the self-confident or more aggressive students in a group. This computer program provides opportunities for both personal discovery and group cooperation.

Alternative Uses of this Computer Program

Another way that this program can be used effectively is by the student who must study through a correspondence course, where she is not able to hear the students in a classroom environment discuss the various works of literature, but through the computer program she can still have access to the different views of the students, and be able to

interact to them through the Internet, or through getting their own personal disk from the teacher, and sending the printed results to the teacher through the mail. This could also be used by home-schoolers, whose own parents may not be that knowledgeable about literary theory, and could use the reinforcement that this program would provide.

Goals of the Instructional Design

In other words, this computer program attempts to meet the needs of a variety of different kinds of students and situations, which should be the goal of an instructional designer, and the goal of every teacher. So often the teacher feels confined in what she can do because she is limited by time and space to try to meet the needs of each one of her students at varying skill and knowledge levels. The ideal would be if she could "design a separate course for each individual student in the classroom based on the...changing needs of each pupil as they follow their separate learning trajectories" (Laszlo, 1995, p.11). This computer program can help towards that goal as it helps relieve the intimidation factor of the shy student, gives the aggressive student opportunities to explore new knowledge at her own pace, as well as lead in group discussions, provides the needed support for the distance learner, and helps the teacher to develop a more meaningful classroom learning experience as each student comes into class better prepared to share from a variety of perspectives.

"The use of instructional technology creates a less teacher-centered classroom. The teacher's role changes as one observer aptly characterized it "from sage on the stage

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to guide along side" (Schofield, 1994, p.581). "Teachers work with students as helpers rather than authorities" (Hawkins, 1992, p.65). Since the teacher is presented as learning along with the students, and the students' interpretations of the works of literature are valued as being just as valid as the more formal literary theories, "teachers can create a safe environment for trying out new ideas. By welcoming comments, suggestions, and even constructive criticisms from all participants, teachers can help students value others' perspectives" (Ertmer, 1995, p.27).

One of the most important questions that the instructional designer needs to ask herself is "what will students know or be able to do when they finish this activity that they couldn't do before. If there isn't a good answer, then what we have encountered is probably entertainment", not education (Dick, 1995, p.10). The computer program that has been developed here does not fit the typical "tutorial" model, where students are taught a certain body of information or tested on new skills, but they still should learn a lot through this program. They should learn a lot about various literary theories and how they are applied to analyzing literature. They should learn to be more sensitive and aware of different people's perspectives and world views. They should come to a more in-depth understanding of the many layers of meaning within a particular work of literature. They should become more at ease in sharing their own views, without feeling intimidated by the views of others. They should learn to get along with others better as they work together in groups to reach consensus on their interpretations. Yet, even though all of the above goals should be met, it is the primary job of a teacher to help the students to reach a goal that could, ironically, put her out of a job: teach the students to be independent, critical

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thinkers, having the tools to learn on their own, and the motivation to see themselves as life-long learners, ever striving toward their own understanding of truth.

The computer program that is dealt with here will help reach each of these goals, and the purpose of the fourth chapter in this dissertation is to demonstrate how these goals, indeed, were met. "Technologies alone or in isolation very rarely themselves transform educational settings" (Hawkins, 1992, p. 63), but together with other teaching techniques, the possibilities are endless.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Understanding the Problem

Although many college students have the view that the study of literature is basically a waste of time, something that they just need to get through in order to get to where they really want to be, literature can be, if it is approached correctly, one of the most dynamic, meaningful, life-changing forces in a person's life. It has the potential to help "us grow, both personally and intellectually...it helps us to connect ourselves to the cultural context of which we are a part; it enables us to recognize human dreams and struggles in different societies that we would never otherwise get to know; it helps us to develop mature sensibility and compassion for the condition of all living things...it provides the comparative basis from which we can see worthiness in the aims of all people"(Roberts & Jacobs, 1986, p.2).

Yet, unfortunately, many literature professors choose to teach their subjects in a lifeless manner, where boring facts, technical jargon, and formalistic, structural analysis are put on a pedagogical pedestal where only the expert, authoritarian teacher can ever hope

to stand, and all others are forced to bow down in subservience just to get a passing grade. It is time for this type of teacher to come out from hiding behind their pious podiums of elitist methodology, and start teaching literature as the vital, inspiring, personal, dynamic force that it is.

One way to make the study of literature more alive and relevant to the students' lives is by studying various literary theories which deal with issues, questions, or struggles that the students themselves can identify with. So often the teachers are caught up with theories, like Structuralism, Formalism, or New Criticism, which tend to emphasize some system of analysis that is totally obscure to the students, that the students feel like they are studying a foreign language instead of English. Is it really necessary for students to become linguistic or hermeneutics experts in order to understand a work of literature? Many of the more traditional literary theories try to force a particular work of literature into a box or form, with certain rules and characteristics, and if it does not fit, it is not "good" literature, as if putting the right frame around a painting of Leonardo de Vinci is what makes it good art. Perhaps it helps the teachers to feel more secure if they are able to put everything into nice, neat little packages, but the students know from their own experiences that such actions are merely games that some professors like to play, and that they have nothing to do with real life or real learning.

The students know that "there are qualitatively different ways of modeling the world...in the sense that each person can choose to shift perspective and see different "realities" (Mitchell, 1993, p.56), so they are not fooled by any system which tries to explain literature or life in a black or white, right or wrong mentality. What they need and

want, then, is a literature class which studies the complex issues that they are faced with every day in terms that they understand and in ways that help them to grow or learn about life, not just meaningless facts, dates, or some intellectualized "literology".

It should be our goal as literature teachers, then, to create an atmosphere in both our classrooms and computerized, learning environment, such as the one that is being explored here, in which students can feel free to explore and express their own understandings of literature, as well as the perspectives of others, in such a way that they learn to have "respect for multiple points of view, attitudes, and beliefs" (Ertmer & Russell, 1995, p.26). They need to learn how to look beyond the limits of their own narrow perspective and to gain "a holistic and expansionist way of viewing the world" (Banathy, 1995, p.55). Literature can help them to gain this new world view because it "can give us windows to the world" (Ryken, 1985, p.15). "Inhabiting a literary work, we can see how other people live; we can see, to a certain extent, through other people's eyes. We can momentarily transcend the boundaries of our lives" (Lynn, 1994, p. xvii).

One problem in trying to transcend these boundaries, though, is that education has become so compartmentalized that the study of English has become totally isolated from all other areas of knowledge, as if it exists somehow in a vacuum. Specialization extends this isolation even further, as each teacher becomes an "expert" in their selected field, and teachers often feel threatened if someone else seems to be coming into "their territory", as if learning was private property to be protected, rather than to be shared.

One negative result of this "over-specialization" is that many teachers do not take the time to show how different fields of knowledge are interrelated, and students end up

having a hodgepodge of facts thrown at them without any idea of their interconnectedness. "We study "education" in a variety of fragmented disciplines. This separating-into-disciplines approach can provide only partial interpretation of the system studied, and sets forth descriptions based on disparate theoretical frameworks" (Banathy, 1995, p.54).

The Value of Cross-Disciplinary Education

It is time that we moved away from this narrow vision of what education is all about, and start helping our students to see not only how the different disciplines are interrelated, but how they relate to the real world that we live in, in all of its complexity. "It could be argued that one of the chief objectives of the "post-modern" educational process is the formation of whole people who are prepared to deal with the social and affective areas of their lives, rather than to function merely as professionals with limited perception of life and social reality" (Blanco, 1982, Laszlo, 1995, p. 7).

I am not suggesting here that we try to force connections where there are none, such as trying to teach poetry in chemistry class, or calculus in art appreciation. Yet, there are many opportunities in the humanities and social sciences where interconnectedness can and should be shown. "A comparison or analog of disciplines constitutes a way of exploring and satisfying a legitimate scholarly curiosity about another discipline, promotes communication between disciplines, and can function as one method for dissolving provincial barriers between disciplines" (Chesebro, 1993, p.92). After all, "real world

questions that may be motivating and relevant to students often cross disciplinary boundaries" (Smith, 1992, p. 17), and one of the main functions of education is to help the students to relate what they are learning to their own lives.

This is why we should start every semester by telling our literature students that the class will not be "just another English class", where they might study grammar, spelling, linguistic terminology, or the structural elements of various genres. Instead, we should tell them that we want them to think of the class as "the history of ideas," where we move chronologically through various time periods discussing philosophy, religion, psychology, science, fine arts, sociology, ethnicity, gender, etc. as all being vital parts interwoven into the complex fabric of what we call "literature". "Content is multidisciplinary. Multiple rather than single perspectives are valued. Information is seen as a vehicle to solve real world problems, and small concepts are taught as variations on larger themes; insight is valued rather than memorization of unrelated facts" (Siegel ,1994, p.51).

Although what is described here may seem like an impossible task, requiring the teacher to be an expert in all disciplines just to be able to teach literature, this is not at all true. We should never try to give our students the impression that we are some kind of "guru grammarian" or "occultic octopus", magically able to juggle all knowledge at the same time. We merely know enough about each subject to ask the right questions, and to motivate or direct them to find the answers. Since the emphasis in our classes is not on memorization of facts, we should not feel the need to be a walking database system. We

are merely tour guides in an exciting adventure of discovery, where we are learners along with the students, not authoritarian dictators or knowers of all "truth".

The major focus of our classes, then, should be on group sharing, not on lectures. Sometimes small discussion groups can be formed, and each group can be given discussion questions about a particular work of literature. A spokesperson from each group then shares with the whole class the conclusions of the group. The teacher, then, serves as a moderator in an over-all class discussion of the various issues which were brought up by the groups. Students can be encouraged to bring in newspaper, magazine, or journal articles which they share with the group about how current events relate to the topic that is being discussed. Students can also share something which they are studying in one of their other classes which would help us to gain new insights about the work that we are exploring.

This does not mean that we should never "teach" in the classroom, or that the class discussion is so open-ended and loose that the students can just talk about anything that they want to. Discussions are always given direction and purpose by the teacher, and the students are always given or pointed toward any necessary information that they may need to make educated conclusions or interactions with others, but they are never given the impression that the teacher's, the professional scholar's , or even the author's perspective is the only right view, or even the best view, for "no one...not even the author, can be the ideal reader"(Lynn, 1994, 7).

They learn from the very beginning that "there are various ways of viewing the world of literature, and that we cannot settle the most important disputes simply by appealing to the "facts" (Bonnycastle,1991, p.110).

The Value of Teaching Literary Theories

One helpful way of discussing varying perspectives about literature is to study different formal literary theories or literary criticism. These theories are exactly what they say they are: "theories", not facts. They are merely different ways of looking at or analyzing literature based on the world view or presuppositions of the one doing the analysis. As we study the literary theories, then, they are presented as just some other ways of perceiving a work, just as we also have our own perceptions. The reason that we study them, then, is not so we can find out the "real" meaning, but so we can learn from their points of view, and so we can use these theories to help us to formulate and discuss our own perspectives. By learning what the various formal theories stand for, it also gives us a workable vocabulary of meaningful terms which help us to organize our thoughts and share common understandings. "We need to classify the various ways of looking at literature (or of speaking about it). Only then can we see what the main paradigms are, and work out some way of dealing with paradigm conflicts" (Bonnycastle, 1991, p.110).

According to Lynn Jordan Stidon, "We should study literary criticism and the theories of literature for the same reasons we read literature--to forever alter our perspectives, to escape our own vanities, and to extend the horizons of our limitations"

(Lynn, 1994, p.xvii). In other words, exposing the students to various traditional and non-traditional, formal and personal perspectives, helps the students to gain "a new awareness of their own ideological system and causes growth, questioning, or affirmation" (Cossom, 1991, p.149). They "develop the ability to recognize and appreciate complexities, to reason from data, and to suspend judgment. They are encouraged to examine complicated ideas in more critical ways" (Ertmer and Russell, 1995, p.26).

Studying literary theories also often helps the students to locate themselves within a cultural or philosophical community with common ideas, experiences, or emotional responses, which can bridge the gap between what they may perceive as their own isolated victimization and the strength of personal identity which can be gained when a commonality of shared experiences is recognized. This is why many groups, such as feminists and racially-oriented groups, often emphasize their joint identities, rather than their individual experiences, because there is a supportive nature to one's group identity. "Current literary theory is preoccupied with the notion of "interpretive communities"--groups of readers who tend to assimilate literature in a common way because they share the same set of assumptions and interests...They read literature through their own "lens" and are sensitive to certain aspects of literature because they approach it with their own set of "antennae" (Ryken, 1985, p.11).

Looking at literature through the lens of particular cultural perspectives can be very enlightening, and helps the student to be more understanding of those who have that shared identity, even though they may not agree with all of the presuppositions or conclusions of their world view. The problem with world views is that people tend to

become defensive about their own, and very critical of others. A big part of teaching literature and literary theory, then, has to do with teaching tolerance and understanding of others, using the poems, stories, or essays as springboards for meaningful discussions about the value of diversity, and helping the students to be more open to new ideas and new ways of perceiving, instead of being confined to the status quo, tradition, or their own biases.

As we teach literature, we should try to incorporate the various literary theories into the discussion through including statements about the theories or interpretive analysis by the scholars in each field in the discussion questions that we give to each group. As they talk about the work of literature, then, they do so in light of a particular perspective, and are encouraged to interact with this perspective from their own view. If each group discusses the work from a different perspective or literary theory, and then they share their thoughts with the whole class, then everyone can learn and benefit from the many points of view that are shared.

However, due to time constraints, there is not always the time to look at every work that we study from a multitude of literary theories, so we must often end up choosing just a few that we feel to be the most relevant to a particular work. It is recognized that this method can limit discussion to the views that the teacher values the most, that these views may be chosen because of the teacher's own biases, and that these limitations may not meet the needs or interests of the specific students in our classes. We also need to realize that such class discussions often are led by those students who are the most aggressive in their communication skills, and that many quieter students may end up

being just spectators, being forced to listen to topics that do not seem to relate to their own lives. Many students, in fact, both the aggressive and quieter ones, have difficulty thinking through a piece of literature critically and being able to discern any meaning or significance from what they are reading alone, particularly when studying poetry. When they come to class, then, it is like starting from scratch, even though they may have done the reading, and it is not until the end of class discussion that they have any understanding of the work at all.

This is why an interactive, computerized learning environment where each student can go through a poem, be exposed to various literary interpretations of the poem, and have an opportunity to either respond to the formal theories or to give their interpretation of the poem can be so helpful. They also can see the responses from the other students in their discussion group, so they can respond to these as well. When they come to class, then, they will be much better prepared to discuss the poem in depth, they will have the opportunity to share their own view, even if they are normally quiet, and they will have the chance to choose which literary theories that they want to study as they go through the computer program, so they can guide their study according to their own interests. There are no time constraints, so even the slower student can take their time until they understand what they need to know. This program is discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

Although it is in the plans to eventually include several literary theories in the computer program for the students to choose from, for the purpose of this project just four have been chosen: feminist, psychological, religious, and reader-response. These

four have been chosen because they all give the students the opportunity to respond to the theories and interpretations according to their own experiences or levels of knowledge, which helps the students to see the relevance of the poem, and to be able to respond on an emotional basis, instead of just an intellectual one. Many of the other theories, such as New Criticism, Structuralism, and Formalism, tend to limit analysis to the technical aspects of the poem, such as form, unity, logic, and linguistic meanings, and outside considerations, such as historical background, the poet's intentions, or what the poem means to the individual reader are considered unimportant. If our philosophy of education has to do with using literature to help people understand themselves and others better, though, it makes more sense to emphasize the more personal approaches to criticism. Each one of the four literary theories that have been chosen for this computer program, then, will now be explained according to their presuppositions, world views, and various interpretations of literature.

First, it must be confessed that the researcher does not pretend to be an expert on any one of the theories that will be discussed, because even though all of them have been studied, the researcher can never understand them completely because he has not shared the experiences that make them so real and important to those who have. Also, even those within these various groups have different ways of seeing themselves and applying the literature to their own experiences, so there is no "the" feminist perspective, etc.. So when the different perspectives are related to literature, they are only presented as one possible or probable interpretation within this philosophical framework, and it is in no way meant to be all-inclusive or authoritative.

Feminist Literary Criticism

One Common Goal of Feminism

The first literary theory to be discussed is feminist literary criticism. According to Margaret Fuller, the famous nineteenth-century transcendentalist writer, the goal of feminism and the feminist critics can be summed up as, "We would have every arbitrary barrier thrown down. We would have every path laid open to Woman as freely as to Man" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1985, p.297). This call for freedom and equality, though, is really only a part of what feminist theory is all about. It is hoped that in the following pages the complex issues that make up this very powerful movement will be clearly explained and better understood.

Feminism Against Patriarchal Society

One of the major concerns of the feminists is that they "believe that our culture is a patriarchal culture, that is, one organized in favor of the interests of men." (Guerin , 1992, p.182). This patriarchal favoritism is a dominant, controlling force in almost every area of our society, including the family, church, education, politics, and economics. Not only are

men dominant in these many areas, they are oppressive in their power. According to Fuller, "there exists in the minds of men a tone of feeling toward women as toward slaves" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1985, p.295). Men assume in this society "that women are the weaker sex (emotional, unstable, passive, irrational), needing protection, unable to compete with men" (Lynn, 1994, p. 194).

According to the feminists, this male-dominant mentality is programmed into the minds of both the boys and girls when they are very young. For example, "girls learn very early to connect their sexual identities with shame and not pride" (Hite, 1995, p.351), and "what causes pain for boys is society's imposition of "masculinity"--not the mother's betrayal of the son for the father, as Freud surmised" (Hite, 1995, p.349). "Boys are taught that women are the proper objects of desire, but also the objects of contempt, leading to a love-hate relationship with women/the mother" (Hite, 1995, p.349). As you can see by these statements, feminist theory is often blended together with other theories, such as the psychological perspective, in order to support their views on the pervasive patriarchal influences within our society, even down to the psyche, where male-dominance is perpetuated.

Different Kinds of Feminist Theories

Since there are so many different kinds of feminist theories as they join with other disciplines or philosophies, K.K. Ruthven (1984) has "identified seven types of contemporary feminists: sociofeminists, who study the social roles of women in literature;

semiofeminists, who look at how women are coded and classified as women...;psychofeminists, who focus on psychoanalytic and mythic theories of the feminine; Marxist feminists, who view women first as members of the oppressed working class; socio-semio-psycho-feminists, who combine the above approaches; lesbian feminists, who offer what they believe to be a distinctly feminine theory of writing metaphorically based on the female body rather than the male; and black feminists, who believe themselves triply oppressed as women, blacks, and workers" (Guerin ,1992, p. 190).

Although this list is very helpful, it is not complete. There are several other types of feminists, including other racial minorities, such as Native Americans and Hispanics, who often feel left out of the discussion, even by other feminists, because they do not belong to the more dominant feminist groups (Sommers, 1993, p.81). There are the radical feminists who are not interested in equality with men, but instead, will not be satisfied until the women are the rulers. Their discourse often concentrates on "their belief in the superiority of 'women's ways of knowing'" (Sommers, 1993, p.77). Then there are the spiritualistic-feminists, who focus on the common power they share through communion with the spirit world, the occult, Wicca, or ancient eastern religions. For example, there was a "spiritual conference organized by the Catholic feminist "Women-Church" movement. Feminist inclusiveness was the order of the day, and so all goddesses were honored equally--from Hera, Artemis, and Isis to Mary of the Christian tradition" (Sommers, 1993, p. 80).

Despite their diversity, feminist critics usually agree that there are three main purposes to feminist literary criticism: "to expose patriarchal premises and resulting prejudices, to promote discovery and reevaluation of literature by women, and to examine social, cultural, and psychosexual contexts of literature and criticism" (Guerin, 1992, p. 184). The first of these purposes has already been mentioned, and this used to be, in the earlier days of feminist criticism, the dominant focus of feminist criticism. However, contemporary criticism seems to have shifted toward a greater emphasis on supporting women writers than attacking the male writers. This is why Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have put together The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women. As they say in their preface, "no single anthology has represented the exuberant variety yet strong continuity of the literature that English-speaking women have produced between the fourteenth century and the present...Our collection seeks to recover a long and often neglected literary history" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1985, p.xxvii).

The Way Men Portray Women in Stories

Yet, there is still some strong criticism against the way that men portray women in their stories. Female stereotypes are particularly attacked by the feminists. They say that "females have been depicted in literature and culture as either Mary or Eve, the angelic mother or the evil seductress" , and they denounce both "misogyny (woman seen as monster) or idealization (woman seen as saint)" (Lynn, 1994, p. 198). What they want is

for women characters to be portrayed as being strong, complex, intelligent, in-control women, who need men not as protectors or providers, but as interesting partners, lovers, or friends.

Gilbert and Gubar (1984) suggest that not only are female characters usually portrayed as being weak and helpless, but women writers are also thought of by men as being incapable of writing good literature. Their works have traditionally been ignored and left out of the accepted male "canon" of so-called classics that fill our anthologies because of the stereotypes that tend to portray women as "beauty without brains." Bonnycastle(1991) makes the following list of these stereotypes, and most of them point toward the inferiority of women in the areas of leadership and mentality:

Masculine	**Feminine**
thinking	feeling
aggressive	compliant
rational	transrational
taking strong action	being passive or taking weak action
the conscious mind	the unconscious

It is no wonder, then, that Gilbert & Gubar (1984, p.3) ask the question, "Is a pen a metaphorical penis?". It seems that many men feel that it is, that only men have the ability to create truly great works, and that women can only produce a lesser "female fiction". Gerard Manley Hopkins, the famous puritan poet, expresses this sentiment when he writes, "The male quality is the creative gift" (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984, p.3), as if women are only good at creating babies and home-cooked meals.

"To read the canon of what is currently considered classic American literature",
then, "is per-force to identify as male" (Fetterley , 1978, p.xii), for many feminists feel that
male-dominant literature teaches women "to think as men, to identify with a male point of
view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose
central principles is misogyny" (Fetterley, 1978, xx). Although this may not be always
obvious on a conscious level, "feminist critics of literature and language have suggested
that the unconscious structuring of meaning is the primary means by which gender power
relations are linguistically encoded and perpetuated" (Olsen, 1993, p.312).

Feminist Theory in the Computer Program

In order to illustrate this "unconscious structuring of meaning", a poem called
"Birches", by Robert Frost, has been chosen to be included in the interactive,
computerized learning environment being discussed here. In the computer program, part
of the text of the poem is on the screen at all times, with certain words or phrases
highlighted. When the student clicks on one of these highlighted words, they then can
choose which literary theory that they want to investigate. If they click on "feminist", for
example, they will see in a window below the poetry text one possible feminist
interpretation of that particular phrase. The third chapter, which deals more with the
technical aspect of this program, will explain what this interface will actually look like,
but here just an example of the text will be given. For example, if the phrase, "like girls

on hands and knees ", is chosen from the hypertext, and the" feminist" button is clicked, the following interpretation would show up in the window next to the text:

"Women are often on "hands and knees", both literally and metaphorically, for they are often given the menial physical jobs while the men are busy doing the jobs which take thinking. Women are also on hands and knees in subservience to male dominance in other areas of their life."

In giving such an interpretation of this poetic phrase, the feminist critic would not necessarily be implying that the poet consciously intended this phrase to have this meaning, but subconsciously it is very probable, for in the feminist's mind, most men, if not all, are guilty of such male-dominant biases. However, even if the poet did not intend this meaning, consciously or subconsciously, the poem still lives outside the framework of its creator. A poem is like a baby. The poet may have given birth to it, but they cannot completely control how the baby or poem will change by the influence of others. The poem continues to grow or change with each culture and time period that it is exposed to, for meaning is only partly based on the author's original purpose, and mostly on the perspectives of those who read it. This concept will be developed more in the section on reader-response theory, but feminists rely very heavily on this theory as they seek to discover and express their own unique individual and group identities and ways of thinking which are very different from the patriarchal models which have been dominant throughout the ages.

As was said at the beginning of this chapter, the researcher is not trying to give the impression that the interpretations which are included in the computer program are in any

way authoritative, or that they are "the" feminist interpretation, for as it has been demonstrated in the previous pages, there is no "the" feminist interpretation. However, the interpretations that have been included are at least believable from the many ways of looking at feminism that are available. All of the text files from the computer program on feminist interpretations are included in Appendix A at the end of this document.

Whether the students agree with all of the presuppositions or conclusions of feminist criticism is not as important as the desire that they at least become sensitive to the fact that women feel "excluded, suppressed, and exploited" (Lynn, 1994, p.193), and that "simply taking gender into account, regardless of your social and political views, is likely to open your eyes to important works, authors, and issues you would have missed otherwise" (Lynn, 1994, p.18). Hopefully, they will not only have their eyes opened, but their hearts also, and real change can take place as both men and women work together toward a more understanding, compassionate unity.

Psychological Literary Criticism

Definition of Psychological

First, it might be useful to understand what is meant by the word psychological. The word is based on the Greek myth about a beautiful woman named Psyche, who fell in love and married Cupid, the son of Venus, who is the goddess of love. The word psyche

means "soul", the center of thought, the will, and spirituality. When Psyche married Cupid, the soul also became one with love, as well as the other emotions. So psychology is the study of the entire "inner self", and how that inner self is shaped by the "outer world". It is concerned also with how our inner image affects our attitudes and behavior through different levels of conscious or subconscious choices, and how through psychoanalysis we can discover who we really are and the reasons for our feelings and behavior.

Although psychologists themselves often focus just on mental or emotional illness, psychological criticism is more concerned with the inner workings of the authors and why they write what they write, or the inner conflicts of a story's characters, to try to discover their driving motives or the inner tensions which lead to either self-awareness or self-destruction.

Psychological theorists, like the feminists, are very diverse in their presuppositions and their approaches, such as the "Behaviorists, Connectionists, Cognitivists, and lately, Neuronists" (Kumar, 1995, p.58). The study being done here, though, focuses on the ideas and influences of just two psychologists, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, for it is believed by many that these two men have had the greatest influence on modern psychological theory and literary criticism.

Freudian Psychology

Even though Freudian psychology has come under a lot of criticism in recent years, many of the concepts and terms that he originated are still being widely used in literary criticism. For example, Freud's names for the three mental processes or "psychic zones, the id, the ego, and the superego" (Guerin, 1992, p. 120) have all become familiar terms used even in informal conversations. It is necessary, then, that we understand what these terms mean, and how they relate to literary criticism.

First, "the id is largely the territory of the unconscious, and the ego and superego are mostly conscious" (Lynn, 1994, p. 170). Since Freud's first major premise is "that most of the individual's mental processes are unconscious"(Guerin, 1992, p.119), the id plays an important part in the Freudian framework. "The id is, in short, the source of all our aggressions and desires. It is lawless, asocial, and amoral. Its function is to gratify our instincts for pleasure without regard for social conventions, legal ethics, or moral restraint" (Guerin, 1992, p.121).

Since in our society not all desires are considered socially acceptable, they are therefore subdued within the id. When this happens, Freud says that a couple of things may be happening. The first possibility is what he calls "denial", where the person "flatly and directly refuses to accept" the fact that the desires or feelings are even there (Lynn, 1994, p.174). The other possible response is what Freud calls "repression", which "buries the emotion and ...hides or disguises it" (Lynn, 1994, p. 174). Emotions never disappear, they are merely hidden. "Our desires, when they cannot be expressed and released, must go somewhere. Hence, the need for an unconscious, a kind of storage vault for psychic energy" (Lynn, 1994, p.168).

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The id, though, is not a very good storage container, for it is always "leaking" into our behavior, causing us to do things which we do not understand on the conscious level. One of Freud's main premises is that "most of our actions are motivated by psychological forces over which we have very limited control" (Guerin, 1992, p.118). One of the main purposes of psychoanalysis, then, is to expose "the effects of the unconscious, peeling back layer after layer of disguised and suppressed fears and desires...to enlarge the mental 'territory' of the conscious mind. When the patient, with the analyst's help, could expose these unconscious materials, Freud believed that their power over the patient would be lessened and even dissipated" (Lynn, 1994, p.166).

One of the main criticisms of Freudian psychology has to do with the id, for "contrary to traditional beliefs, Freud found infancy and childhood a period of intense sexual experience, sexual in a sense much broader than is commonly attached to the term" (Guerin, 1992, p.124). According to this view, "during the first five years of life, the child passes through a series of phases in erotic development, each phase being characterized by emphasis on a particular erogenous zone (that is, a portion of the body in which sexual pleasure becomes localized). Freud indicated three such zones: the oral, the anal, and the genital" (Guerin, 1992, p.124). However, because of "the powerful social taboos attached to certain sexual impulses, many of our desires and memories are repressed (that is, actively excluded from conscious awareness)" (Guerin, 1992, p. 119).

These sexual impulses, though, still act themselves out in various ways, even though we may not understand the reasons for them at the time. In fact, according to Freud, "all human behavior is motivated ultimately by what we would call sexuality.

Freud designates the prime psychic force as libido, or sexual energy" (Guerin, 1992, p.119). Many literary critics go along with this emphasis in their analysis of literature. Marie Bonaparte, for example, says that "almost all symbolism is sexual, in its widest sense, taking the word as the deeply-buried primal urge behind all expressions of love, from the cradle to the grave" (Guerin, 1992, p.124). Other critics tend "to see all concave images (ponds, flowers, cups or vases, caves, and hollows, as female or yonic symbols, and all images whose length exceeds their diameter (towers, mountain peaks, snakes, knives, lances, and swords) as male or phallic symbols" (Guerin, 1992, p. 123).

On the other hand, Freud designates a second mental or psychic force, and that is the ego. "The ego...is the rational governing agent of the psyche. Though the ego lacks the strong vitality of the id, it regulates the instinctual drives of the id so that they may be released in nondestructive behavioral patterns. And though a large portion of the ego is unconscious, the ego nevertheless comprises what we ordinarily think of as the conscious mind" (Guerin, 1992, p. 121). "While the id stands for the untamed passions," according to Freud, "the ego stands for reason and circumspection" (Guerin, 1992, p. 121).

The third mental dimension or psychic force , according to Freud, is the superego. "Whereas the id is dominated by the pleasure principle and the ego by the reality principle, the superego is dominated by the morality principle...The superego serves to repress or inhibit the drives of the id, to block off and thrust back into the unconscious those impulses toward pleasure that society regards as unacceptable...Largely unconscious, the superego is the moral censoring agency, the repository of conscience and pride" (Guerin, 1992, p. 122). It is the part of the mind that "retains the character of the father," and

"comes to stand for the restraints of authority, religious teaching, schooling, and reading"
(Lynn, 1994, p. 169).

The Psychological Novel

Since conflict is one of the main ingredients of all fiction, one of the main kinds of
modern fiction is the psychological novel, which has a built-in system of conflicts going on
within the main character's own heart and mind. The protagonist in a story is the main
character, and the antagonist is the person, circumstance, or force which tends to work
against the protagonist or to cause the conflict. Within the psychological story, the
protagonist becomes his or her own antagonist, because they are struggling inside between
their own id, ego, and superego. The psychological critic, then, often spends most of their
time analyzing the protagonist's own psyche, trying to determine all the conflicting internal
forces which cause the tensions within the plot. They also have a tendency to project the
protagonist's own psychological struggle with what they perceive to be the author's, or
use the internal journey in the story to relate their own personal struggles as critics.

Jungian Psychology

Not all psychological literary criticism, though, follows the Freudian model of
psychoanalysis. One of Freud's own assistants, Carl Jung, turned away from Freud's
system of sexual psychoses to start his own approach to understanding the mental

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processes. "Carl Jung downplayed Freud's emphasis on sex and supplemented the individual unconscious with the idea of a "collective unconscious" that contains themes and images inherited by all humans. Jungian approaches to psychological criticism look for such recurrent themes and images across time and across cultures, seeing them as clues to the structuring of the collective unconscious mind" (Lynn, 1994, p. 170). Jung maintains that the collective unconscious is "older than historical man" and has "been ingrained in him from earliest times...eternally living, outlasting all generations" (Guerin, 1992, p. 167).

One way of understanding Jung's idea of the collective unconscious is by comparing the mythologies or archetypes of the various cultures around the world. The fact that many of these myths and archetypes are similar demonstrates that there must be something going on at the unconscious level that tends to unite these cultures beyond time and space. Not only do the myths have similar plots or characters, but they "tend to have a common meaning...tend to elicit comparable psychological responses and to serve similar cultural functions" (Guerin, 1992, p. 149). The archetypes are "not inherited ideas or patterns of thought, but rather...predispositions to respond in similar ways to certain stimuli" (Guerin, 1992, p. 167).

When someone refuses to respond to the stimuli according to the predispositions of the collective unconscious, this causes psychological problems. "Jung theorizes that neuroses are the results of the person's failure to confront and accept some archetypal component of the unconscious. Instead of assimilating this unconscious element to their consciousness, neurotic individuals persist in projecting it upon some other person or

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object" (Guerin, 1992, p. 169). The author or great artist, on the other hand, "is a person who possesses the 'primordial vision', a special sensitivity to archetypal patterns and a gift for speaking in primordial images that enable him or her to transmit experiences of the 'inner world' through art" (Guerin, 1992, p. 168).

Literary criticism that deals with Jungian psychology, then, usually deals with these archetypal patterns which stretch beyond barriers of time and space, in other words, what are often termed "universals". The collective unconscious responds to these universals in similar ways because each person inherits the same three structural components of the psyche: the anima, the persona, and the shadow. In many ways these three components are similar to Freud's id, ego, and superego, but there are also many differences.

The anima is "the most complex of Jung's archetypes. It is the 'soul-image', the spirit of a man's elan vital, his life force or vital energy" (Guerin, 1992, p. 170). Although the anima has the vital energy that Freud's id possesses, it is never portrayed as untamed passion as the id is. Rather, it is more like "a kind of mediator between the ego(the conscious will or thinking self) and the unconscious or inner world" of the id (Guerin, 1992, p. 171).

One of the most controversial aspects of the anima is Jung's insistence that it is "the contrasexual part of a man's psyche, the image of the opposite sex that he carries in both his personal and his collective unconscious" (Guerin, 1992, p. 170). In other words, the human psyche, according to Jung, is bisexual, "though the psychological characteristics of the opposite sex in each of us are generally unconscious, revealing themselves only in dreams or in projections on someone in our environment...As an old

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German proverb puts it, 'Every man has his own Eve within him' " (Guerin, 1992, p. 170). Jung gives the anima a feminine designation in the male psyche. In the female psyche this archetype is called the animus.

"The persona is the obverse of the anima in that it mediates between our ego and the external world" (Guerin, 1992, p. 171). It is our social personality, or the self that we show to the world, which may be very different from our inner self. In literary criticism, the persona is the character that the author speaks through, which may be very different from the author's own personality. Often critics confuse the two, and make the mistake of claiming that the character's values, feelings, and philosophy are really the author's, although they may be very different from one another. The study of the differences between a character's own persona and their inner thoughts or feelings is often a very fascinating study because it often concentrates on the main conflict of the story, an internal struggle between the "real me" and the "social me", and it often brings out such things as irony, hypocrisy, inhibitions, and the inner workings behind our complex social interactions.

The "shadow" is "the darker side of our unconscious self, the inferior and less pleasing aspects of the personality, which we wish to suppress" (Guerin, 1992, p. 170). In some ways this correlates with the "id" because the id includes such passions as lust, anger, and

jealousy. Yet, the ego and the superego also have unconscious levels, and these also are not always very pleasant. They would include pride, judgmentalism, and heartless rationalism or legalism. The shadow is the darker side of our entire unconscious self, and

it may or may not be a part of ourselves that we try to suppress, based on our values and world view. Some people actually try to glorify their darker side, and suppress everything that the society values as good. This type of character in a story is often called the anti-hero, if they are the main protagonist, or the villain, if they are the antagonist.

Psychological Theories in the Computer Program

In the computerized study of literary theory, psychological criticism is one of the choices that a student can choose to explore. If they choose a particular highlighted word in the poem, "Birches," and they click on the "psychological" button, they would see a typical psychological interpretation of that word. It might be a Freudian perspective, a Jungian response, or a combination of psychological views. For example, if the student clicked on the highlighted word, "birches", the following interpretation would show up on the screen in a window below the text of the poem:

"Often when we are young we become fixated on certain objects which represent to our subconscious various strong emotions, such as fear, love, security, or anger. It might be a teddy bear, a security blanket, a photograph or any other object that ties us to some deep felt experience. In Frost's case, the birch trees have special significance. Somehow he relates these to a time in his past when things seemed simpler, less complex, or more innocent."(see Appendix B)

Such an interpretation is not meant to be a highly technical, clinical, psychological analysis. However, it does deal with some of the themes which are discussed above, and in such a way that the students can relate the interpretation to their own lives.

Some people do not value or appreciate psychological literary criticism or even the psychological effect that literature has on the reader. Plato, for example, "noted that poets indulge in a kind of madness when they write, stirring up the audience's passions and emotions. A well-ordered republic, Plato thought, would be better off without poets." Aristotle, on the other hand, "countered Plato's argument with the position that literature has a healthy psychological effect; in the case of tragedy, it purges excessive fear and pity", which purification he called "catharsis" (Lynn, 1994, p. 171). In one view, not only can the literature itself produce catharsis, but the psychological interpretations can also help the students work through their own subconscious fears and passions as they try to struggle with the writer's or character's psychological journey.

It is in no way being implied here, though, that the psychological method of literary criticism is the only way or even the best way of literary interpretation. It is only one of the many tools that can be used to help us as readers to gather a fuller, more meaningful understanding of the works that we are studying. "The crucial limitation of the psychological approach is its aesthetic inadequacy; psychological interpretation can afford many profound clues toward solving a work's thematic and symbolic mysteries, but it can seldom account for the beautiful symmetry of a well-wrought poem or of a fictional masterpiece" (Guerin, 1992, p. 117).

Another criticism of the psychological approach is that "the practitioners of the Freudian approach often push their critical theses too hard, forcing literature into a Procrustean bed of psychoanalytic theory at the expense of other relevant considerations" (Guerin, 1992, p. 117). This is particularly true in the critics' attempt to force sexual imagery upon certain texts. Part of this problem of forcing imagery is caused by the fact that "many critics of the psychological school have been either literary scholars who have understood the principles of psychology imperfectly or professional psychologists who have had little feeling for literature as art: The former have abused Freudian insights through oversimplification and distortion; the later have bruised our literary sensibilities" (Guerin, 1992, p. 118). Hopefully, this computer program does not fall into either one of these categories, and this study will be truly helpful to the students who seek a deeper understanding of the psychological implications of the texts that they read.

Religious Literary Criticism

Negative Religious Connotations

Religious literary criticism is often referred to by other labels, such as archetypal, mythic, moral, or philosophical, partly because the term religious carries such a negative connotation in the secular, scholarly world, and partly because they do not want to be confused with those scholars who are studying texts which are considered by some to be

sacred. The term religious has been chosen here because the computer program will be used at a private school where the term does not have a negative connotation, and it is hoped that all aspects of religion can be included in the interpretations of the poem that the computer program deals with, not just archetypes, myths, or morals. Some very personal responses to God, faith, spiritual awareness, and honest doubts will be included. It is desired that spiritual understanding from a wide variety of formal religious systems can be presented, such as Protestantism, Catholicism, occultism, druidism, and the New Age movement. All of these systems will not be explained in the scope of this paper, but their perspectives will be used in the various interpretations of the poem. All of these religious perspectives and interpretations are included in Appendix C at the end.

First, it is important that we understand what is meant by the word "religious". The New American Heritage Dictionary (1987) defines it as "Adhering to religion; pious; godly". "Religion" is defined as "an organized system of beliefs and rituals centering on a supernatural being or beings." Although these definitions may be technically correct, they are very limited, and actually give the wrong idea of what religion is all about. Religion can involve belonging to or identifying with an organized system of beliefs, but that is not the essence of religion. Religion is a quest for spiritual understanding "of the inner meaning of the universe and of human life" (Guerin, 1992, p. 149). It is an on-going process of "personal discovery and personal doubt" (Gardner, 1971, p.162), not a stagnant resting place of settled dogma set in concrete. It is about learning to see things differently, with a spiritual perspective. As Merlin, the magician, explains to young

Arthur, "The true voyage of discovery lies not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes" (Monroe, 1992, p. 77), and with these new eyes, we hope to see God.

Yet, even the term "God" means different things to different people. To some God is a personal being who knows us, and whom we can get to know. God in this form is a being who reaches down to man, just as we reach up in search for God. Yet, this personal God is perceived by some as a tyrant trying to control our lives like puppets; while others have learned to know the divine as a God of love and mercy. The Greeks and Romans believed in the personal aspect of the divine, but believed that the supernatural deities were many, and were often in conflict with one another. The transcendentalists, on the other hand, did not believe in a personal God at all, but instead spoke of a supernatural presence or universal spirit called the "over-soul", which lives in and through all living things. In other words, we are all part of the divine.

Religion includes all of these concepts and many more, for it involves the ways that people try to make sense of the world around them. As we look around us, sometimes the mysterious aspect of the unknown seems to pull us toward a recognition of a divine force, even though we may not be sure what that supernatural presence is or means. Albert Einstein reflects on this tendency when he writes, "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom the emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand wrapped in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed. The insight into the mystery of life, coupled though it be with fear, has also given rise to religion. To know what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull

faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms--this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness" (Monroe, 1992, p. 81).

Religion, then, involves a sense of awe, beauty, wisdom, and an "impenetrable" mystery which causes both adoration and fear, faith and doubt. It is a search for truth, though some, like Nietzsche, end their search by concluding, "Truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions...There are no facts, only interpretations" (Wright, 1988, p. 38). Yet, many others throughout history have continued to find meaning, purpose, and hope in a belief in a supernatural dimension to our universe, even though we cannot understand its infinite complexity.

It is because of this infinite complexity and the diversity of beliefs that people often find greater insights into the spiritual world through imaginative literature than through what are considered to be the sacred texts of various religions. Somehow we find it easier to relate to "divine truths" when they are framed in the everyday language or common experience of literature, rather than from what we may perceive as being out-dated scriptures. As Emily Dickinson expresses in poem "1545", "The Bible is an antique Volume--/Written by faded Men" (McMichael, 1993, p.2302). St. Thomas Aquinas shares a similar sentiment when he writes, "Since we cannot understand God as He is, we are forced to talk of Him indirectly, in terms of analogy or comparison with more directly observable phenomena" (Wright, 1988, p.131).

Religious Symbolism

The study of symbols or archetypes within literature particularly is helpful in providing insights into spiritual things by making comparisons between concrete objects and abstract ideas more understandable. "It is the freedom such symbols provide to explore their plurality of meaning which makes them so much more rewarding for poetry than dogma. They should not, of course, be seen as an alternative to doctrine but as a richer, more emotive mode of exploring the mysteries at the heart of the Christian faith, a complementary mode of theological reflection" (Wright, 1988, p. 152)

Although Wright is speaking only of Christianity's use of symbols, this same principle applies to other belief systems, such as the occult, Judaism, Islam, and ancient Druidism. For example, Druidic poetry "is always built upon intense and colorful descriptive imagery--'picture painting' with words. The Druids placed a great emphasis upon prose/poetry/verse in their teaching system, creating an entire rank of their order (the bards) solely dedicated to this ideal of expression" (Monroe, 1992, p.50). The reason that the Druids were such strong supporters of literature, symbolism, imagery, and even rhyme, was because they felt that it could have a certain magical effect upon the readers. "The specific technique by which their poetry became imbued with Magic, was called the illumination of rhymes. This technique involved becoming one with the forces of nature, by means of intense imagery and visual imagination; to be able to SEE in one's mind, the images being spoken of so clearly, that you actually become ONE with the pictures/elemental forces themselves" (Monroe, 1992, p. 50).

Whereas religious dogma or organized systems of belief often try to confine one's faith into a certain unified, but limited, structure, creative literature seems to be much more expansive and flexible to the beliefs or doubts of the individual, often helping the reader to grow and perceive much more, as their imagination allows them to even become one with the spiritual truths that they seek to possess. "Poems, stories, and plays...can express important theological truths. In some respects they provide a more acceptable means of talking about God than does systematic theology since they recognize more fully their own limitations as constructs of imagination and ideology. They claim merely to point towards a reality they cannot define" (Wright, 1988, p. 2).

Not everyone, however, appreciates or approves of authors trying to use imaginative literature to deal with spiritual insights. As Archibald MacLeish states, "A poem should not mean but be" (Wright, 1988, p.34). His call is for "Art for art's sake", rather than being a didactic tool in the hand of a mystic sage to teach truth. Writers throughout the ages have used literature to present their religious or moral philosophies, from Plato to Philip Roth and Flannery O'Connor, yet many, like MacLeish, feel that such religious sentiments somehow take away from the humanistic, artistic quality of the work. Critics on the other end of the spectrum, from the extremely conservative, religious view, often criticize literature as being inadequate to express supernatural truths. Samuel Johnson, for example, writes, "The ideas of Christian Theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestick for ornament" (Wright, 1988, p. 9).

Religion and the Arts

Regardless of one's view of the proper union of religion and the arts, though, one cannot escape the fact that "Western literature has been more influenced by the Bible than by any other book" (Frye, 1957, p.14). Greek and Roman mythology also have had a tremendous impact on our modern day myths, archetypes, and symbols. So, it is impossible to understand many of the symbols and allusions within literature, even if you do not like them being there, unless you understand their religious meanings at least on an intellectual level. In fact, you cannot fully understand our own culture without some perception of religious typology.

As an example of what is meant by religious typology and the variety of meanings associated with these types, a few of the symbols which have significance in a wide number of cultural settings have been included below. This list is based on a much longer version which is included in Wilfred L. Guerin's book, A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature (1992, p.150).

Symbols	What they symbolize
1. Water	1. purification, fertility, birth, growth
a. the sea	a. mother of all life, eternity
b. rivers	b. flow of time, death and rebirth
2. Sun	2. creative energy, spiritual vision, father principle
a. rising sun	a. birth
b. setting sun	b. death
3. Colors	3. emotions, levels of spiritual maturity
a. red	a. blood, sacrifice, violent passion
b. green	b. growth, fertility, hope

c. blue		c. highly positive, truth, spiritual purity
d. black		d. darkness, chaos, unknown, death, evil
e. white		e. light, purity, or death and terror
4. Circle		4. wholeness, unity, regeneration
5. Serpent		5. evil, temptation, sensuality

As you can see from the above list, religious typology does not always refer to things that you may normally associate with religion, like the cross or the Lord's supper. It includes many aspects of our every day lives. The examples above are not just symbols(objects which represent abstract ideas), they are also archetypes (universal symbols which have similar meanings no matter what culture you represent.

Besides objects, people also can symbolize different concepts, both in the Christian

and pagan traditions. For example,

Symbols	**What they symbolize**
1. Christ	1. humility, self-sacrifice, redemption, victim
2. Satan	2. evil, deception, impostor, temptation
3. Judas	3. betrayer, traitor, unfaithful friend
4. Mary	4. holiness, submissiveness, closeness to God
5. Ruth	5. loyal, faithful companion
6. Delilah	6. seductress, false friend
7. Venus	7. love, passion
8. Cupid	8. love, passion
9. Mars	9. war, violence
10. Atlas	10. one loaded with the burdens of the world

Basically, all of the Greek and Roman gods and goddesses are symbols for something, so even if someone may be writing from a Christian perspective, they may still choose to use allusions to the pagan gods because what they symbolize in our culture is very real, even if it is believed that the gods never really existed.

One group of critics who write from a religious perspective, the religious-feminist critics, often honor the pagan myths above the Christian beliefs because they feel that the Greek and Roman goddesses better represent their own womanhood and feminine spiritual energy forces. On the other hand, much of their criticism deals with denouncing what they feel to be a patriarchal Christianity and Judaism, which usually refer to God as a male, or the Heavenly Father. In their attempt at being politically correct, some religious groups are actually going back and changing the wording of the Bible so that God is now male and female. The fact that we need to remember, though, is that no matter what name we call God, the names for God in literature are merely metaphors which help us to understand the nature of the divine. "The point is not to replace one metaphor with another, addressing God continually as Mother instead of Father, She rather than He, or to invent a Goddess of our own creation, but to recognize the metaphorical status of all these terms" (Wright, 1988, p. 132). In other words, our names or metaphors for God should not be thought of as all-inclusive, competing references for the divine. God is a complex, infinite being, who paradoxically encompasses all of our metaphors at the same time.

Religious Theories in the Computer Program

In the computerized learning environment, then, the religious interpretation that is given is not meant to be a form of indoctrination toward one particular brand of religion, for literature provides an excellent opportunity for us to become more sensitive to the perspectives of others, and that understanding should be our goal in religious studies, not narrow-minded bigotry. When a student clicks on a hot word in the poem, and then chooses the religious interpretation, therefore, they may be exposed to a wide variety of religious views. For example, if the student chooses the word, "birches", the following interpretation would be seen:

"Trees in general have long been associated with the spiritual world. Aborigines believe that the spirits live in the trees, the Jewish mystics often speak of the tree of

life, and the Druids use different trees to represent different stages or levels of learning in their Druidic system. The birch tree specifically

represents the novice to the Druids, while the Yew (Ash) tree represents the next level, and the oak stands for the highest level of mastery. Frost's idea of the birch tree to signify youth, then, could possibly have originated with the Druids."

In fact, the poem "Birches" was chosen for this computer program specifically because of the multilevel of meanings both for the birch and trees in general. As Guerin (1992, p.153) states, "The symbolism of the tree denotes life of the cosmos: its

consistence, growth, proliferation, generative and regenerative processes. It stands for inexhaustible life, and is therefore equivalent to a symbol of immortality". Truly great literature also has an inexhaustible life, and inexhaustible meanings, as each individual reader perceives and creates the work of art, just as much as the author does, and the religious perspective, like the feminist and psychological, adds new depth of insights into another dimension which is important to many around the world.

Reader-Response Literary Criticism

Rationale for Including this Theory

The first thing that needs to be pointed out here is that reader-response literary criticism is not one of the literary interpretations that the students can choose in the interactive, computerized learning environment. In other words, there is no button for them to click which is titled "reader-response", as there is for the other theories. However, it is still one of the theories that is being dealt with in developing the computer program, because it is the belief in the value of reader-response criticism that has led to the development of this program in the manner that it has been done, where the readers' responses are encouraged and respected as being just as worthwhile as those of the formal critics, or even the poet himself. Since this theory is not one of the choices that the

students can make as one of the possible interpretations, however, it will not be dealt with as extensively as the others, and only a brief introduction to the topic will be given here.

First, in reader-response theory, "the text is not the most important component; the reader is. In fact, there is no text unless there is a reader. And the reader is the only one who can say what the text is; in a sense, the reader creates the text as much as the author does" (Guerin, 1992, p. 334). The reader not only creates the meaning of the text along with the author, but the text is re-created in the reader's mind each time they read it "according to the dominant needs of their personalities at the time of reading" (Bonnycastle, 1991, p.147).

Sometimes the reader may suppress their own feelings about a particular work and respond based on what they think the teacher may want or what they perceive to be the "normal", conventional, or ideal" response. Other times the reader may feel the freedom to express "that which is personal, subjective, perhaps even eccentric" (Lynn, 1994, p. 6). Whether the student feels this freedom to express their true feelings is often a matter of whether the teacher has created an atmosphere of trust and openness. If the student can sense that they are being asked to respond to a piece of literature just as an act of meaningless busywork, then they probably will only give the teacher the minimum that is expected. However, if the teacher can express the attitude that they are genuinely "interested in accounts of how people have actually responded to texts they have read...and how they have felt about and understood a poem" (Bonnycastle, 1991, p.11), then the students are usually more willing to freely share their ideas and opinions.

One of the main reasons that reader-response theory works so well is that "the desire for self-knowledge is the main motivation for students in literature programs" (Bonnycastle, 1991, p.149), and a genuine "response to a literary work always helps us find out something about ourselves" (Lynn, 1994, p. 49). In fact, according to Proust, "...in reality, each reader, when he reads, is the reader of himself. The work of literature produced by the writer is only a kind of optical instrument which he offers to the reader in order to allow him to discern that within himself which, without this work of art, he might never have seen" (Bonnycastle, 1991, p. 181).

The teacher , then, "encourages introspection and spontaneity, and he is not at all worried that different readers will see different things in a text. Every act of response...reflects the shifting motivations and perceptions of the reader at the moment. Even the most idiosyncratic response to a text should be shared...and heard sympathetically" (Lynn, 1994, p. 49). After all, one of the main purposes of teaching is to make the subject matter relevant and meaningful to the students' own lives, and reader-response literary criticism helps to achieve this goal.

The other literary theories, including the ones that have already been discussed here, can come across as being too authoritarian if they are presented as "the" right interpretations. According to Professor Fiedler, "the traditionally accepted standards and classics are...elitist, academic opinions and productions that have been forced on the reading public" (Guerin, 1992, p. 5). Reader-response theory, on the other hand, comes across as being more tolerant and understanding, and the students do not feel that they have to be an "expert" in order to contribute something worthwhile.

Another way of thinking about reader-response criticism is not on the individual level at all, but on what could be called "audience-oriented criticism", because the critic is mostly concerned with the over-all response of the group, rather than any one individual. In fact, the teacher who is using this theory in their class should "not imagine that the student's engagement with literature will end with a purely individual, purely self-oriented response; rather, he [should] expect that students will share their responses, and...examine together their individual responses, seeking common ground while learning from each person's unique response" (Lynn, 1994, p. 50). The end goal, then, is not an isolated individual on an island of self-awareness, but a person who feels the freedom to share openly with others within a group for the purpose of unified growth and understanding and collaborative learning.

Why Some Do Not Value this Theory

However, not everyone believes in the value of reader-response criticism. First of all, there are those "professors and students [who] are unwilling to discuss their personal responses to a work of literature, because these responses would bear on important issues in their own lives--so it would make them feel vulnerable" (Bonnycastle, 1991, p. 36). The open sharing can help someone feel better about themselves, but if their views are criticized, they could actually end up feeling worse. According to Pollitt (1994, p.19), "The notion that one reads to increase one's self-esteem sounds to me like more snake oil. Literature is not an aerobics class or a session at the therapist's".

Another criticism of this theory is that "to claim the meaning of literature rests exclusively with individual readers, whose opinions are equally valid, is to make literary analysis ultimately altogether relative" (Guerin, 1992, p. 341). Many people feel very uncomfortable in situations where there are no absolute answers, where, in fact, they may end up with more unanswered questions than answers. It would be nice, in one sense, if we lived in a world where everything was decided for us ahead of time, with no uncertainty. Yet, this world is not ideal, and those who try to fit everyone and everything into their mold or idea of what is the right way, often find themselves closed off toward any real learning.

Instead of trying to fit everyone into a one-size-fits-all box of perceptions, "reader-response criticism really liberates the reader. It's difficult to see how any response could be wrong...Some responses may seem richer than others; some responses may seem to deal more fully with the text; some responses may seem more authentic and honest than others. But any particular response may well help another reader to a more interesting or satisfying experience of the work" (Lynn, 1994, p.6), and any system which helps others to learn beside yourself is a worthwhile endeavor. To see examples of the readers' responses, see Appendix D.

Chapter 3

The Process of Development

Needs Assessment

According to the Students

Much of the needs assessment was done through personal observation of how the students participated in class as a whole and in small group discussions, how they did on their quizzes and exams, and the depth of insights in the papers that they wrote. What was observed was that for the most part students had a difficult time understanding the multiple levels of meaning in poetry on their own, that their uncertain knowledge led to poor quiz scores and lack of participation in class discussions, and that they tended to limit their interpretations of the poems to either a very literal meaning of what was happening or a narrow interpretation based on their own limited perspective. As expressed earlier, the researcher was a strong believer in reader-response literary theory, so there was a strong desire to encourage their very personal responses. Yet, they also needed to learn to look beyond themselves, to see things from other people's perspectives, and to see literature as an opportunity to explore new, deeper dimensions of meaning and truth. During class time, there was not enough time to do an adequate job of reaching each of these goals for each one of the students individually. So, a way was sought to help the students to explore different dimensions of meaning without just having them do more reading, which would lose many of the students' interest. Students generally learn better when they are asked to do some meaningful, relevant activity, rather than just to think

about something, so the thought of a computerized tutorial came to mind. Tutorials, though, can often be boring and uninspired because of their emphasis on linear learning and rote memory.

Then the thought of an interactive, multimedia, computerized learning environment came to mind, which would not only allow the students to have more control over their individualized learning, but present the new knowledge in an interesting, challenging format. Through hypertext, they could choose which hot words that they wanted to explore, go back and forth throughout the program at their own pace, choose which literary perspectives that they wanted to view, have a chance to see how other students had responded to the same situation, and have an opportunity to either give their own interpretation of a certain text or to give their response to the interpretations of others. This new program would help the students to learn the different formal literary theories, give each one of them a chance to interact and share their own personal feelings and opinions, and prepare them to discuss the poems at a much deeper level during class discussions and in their papers. Even though each student would be working alone with the computer, there would be a spirit of collaborative learning, as they interacted with one another in their responses in the computer program, and tried to come to some consensus opinion later in class.

These were the initial thoughts, but it was decided to test out the validity of the concepts, as well as their desirability, by giving surveys to the students in two American Literature classes (75 students), and conducting long interviews with five colleagues. The following is a copy of the survey that was given to the students in September, 1995:

Please circle the number which comes before the correct answer unless a space is provided.

1. What is your academic status?   1. Fresh. 2. Soph. 3. Junior   4. Senior

2. What is your major?   _____

3. How would you characterize your interest level in studying literature?

    1. non-existent   2. very little   3. average   4. very interested   5. enthusiastic

4. How would you characterize your interest level in studying poetry?

    1. non-existent   2. very little   3. average   4. very interested   5. enthusiastic

5. Do you write poetry yourself?

    1. yes   2. no

6. When you read poetry, do you have a hard time understanding the different meanings

    of a poem?

    1. almost never   2. once in a while   3. most of the time   4. almost always

7. Do you feel that it would be helpful if there was a computer program in the tutoring

    lab which would help you to understand different interpretations of a poem

    before coming to class and being quizzed on your reading?

    1. yes   2. no

8. If there was such a program, would you take the time to use it if it was not required?

    1. never   2. maybe once or twice   3. sometimes   4. a lot   5. every poem

9. Do you feel comfortable using computers using Microsoft windows?

    1. yes   2. no

10. How would you characterize your ability to use the computer?

    1. beginner   2. very little   3. average   4. above average   5. advanced

11. How do you feel about working in groups?

    1. I rather work alone   2. I like groups, but rather not lead   3. I like to lead

12. How do you feel about the feminist movement?

    1. they're crazy   2. too liberal   3. some good, some bad   4. I'm all for it.

13. How do you feel about interpreting a poem based on a psychological perspective?

    1. too weird   2. too confusing   3. within reason   4. sounds really interesting

14. How would you characterize your religious convictions?

    1. conservative   2. moderate   3. liberal   4. unsure

15. Do you consider yourself to be tolerant of others who are different from yourself?

    1. not at all   2. it depends   3. I try to be   4. most of the time   5. always

This survey was helpful in several different ways. First, it verified that 95% of the American Literature students were either Juniors or Seniors, which gave a certain amount of assurance that they should be capable of the higher level of critical thinking that they would be asked to do. On the other hand, only six out of the seventy students were English majors, so most of the students were not used to analyzing literature. Twenty students, however, said that they were either very interested or enthusiastic about studying literature, and fifty percent of all the students said that they wrote poetry, so even many of the non-English majors seemed to be very receptive toward studying poems. They do not usually understand it, though, for 70% said that they "almost always" had difficulty understanding the poems when they just read them by themselves.

The above statistics seemed to support the previous conclusions about the need for developing some kind of program that would be helpful to the students. In fact, 95% of the students felt that a computer program that would help them to understand the poems before the quizzes would be very beneficial. However, the same percent said that they would probably not go to the lab to use the program more than once or twice if it was not required. If the program that was developed ended up being effective, then, realistically speaking, it would need to be made mandatory in order to get the most benefit for everyone. For this project, however, only volunteers were used. See Appendix E for the consent form signed by the volunteers.

Eighty-five percent felt comfortable using computers with windows, so it should not be a problem eventually making the program a requirement. Since someone was in the lab when they were going through the program, someone was always there to help any students that needed it, but the few instructions that were given at the beginning of the program were enough for most students. There were also five students who indicated that they had "advanced" ability in computers, so these could have assisted with those who needed the help if it became necessary, but fortunately they were not needed.

There were only ten students out of the seventy who said they preferred working alone, and the same number who said they liked to lead. This computer program met the needs for both the loner and the leader, for it allowed the individuals to work alone in the lab, and yet gave the leaders an opportunity to direct discussion when the students came into class better prepared to interact because of the computer program.

The next three questions confirmed the inclinations that the students tended to be very conservative, with most of them expressing that feminists were too liberal, psychology was too weird, and ninety percent conservative in their religious beliefs. From their own perspective, though, they did not feel that they were too judgmental, for 80% said that they tried to be tolerant. One of the main purposes of the computer program, therefore, was to help the students to be more sensitive to the perspectives of others, and more tolerant of those who differed from their own.

Assessed Needs according to Colleagues

Although this student survey was interesting, it really did not reveal anything that was not already pretty much known because of experience working with the students through the years. However, the qualitative interviews done with colleagues were more enlightening. Five interviews with other English professors were completed, three with professors who teach American Literature , one who teaches British Literature, and one who teaches World Literature. Each interview took a little over an hour. All of the teachers felt that we should be doing more with computers to teach literature, but not one had any ideas on how to do that practically speaking. They knew how to use the computers as word processors for their syllabi, tests, and handouts, and status sheets for grades, but none of them used them to actually teach with, or had their students make use of the computer labs, except to write papers.

All of them liked the idea of having an interactive, multimedia computerized learning environment to teach literary theories about poetry, and they all agreed that they would be willing to test it themselves for evaluative purposes. They also all said, that if they found it to be effective, they would be willing to have their students use the program. However, not one of them said that they would make it mandatory for the students because they felt that the students already had too much work to do, and they did not have the time to help students in the lab who might need help. Since it was already known from the results of the student survey that most students will not use the program unless it was required, it can be concluded that most of the students that use this program will be my own. It is hoped, though, that the program will work so effectively, that the other students and teachers will be persuaded to use it too.

One of the things that was learned through the interviews was that teachers can be very possessive or protective of what their students learn, as if the program might be a threat to what they were teaching. Part of their willingness to evaluate the program was not so much to help the researcher, then, as to make sure that the content was acceptable and supportive of what they were trying to teach. Also, since the poem that was being analyzed was an American poem, the British Literature teacher did not want to have her students use the program until it was developed with a British poem. Plans do exist on developing the program to cover a wide variety of literature, not just poems, and not just American, but if the program helps the students to understand literary theories which are used around the world, it seems that it could still be useful now, no matter which literature class one is teaching. It has been established, then, that there is a need for this program,

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and that most students and teachers feel that it would be helpful. How many are actually willing to take the time to use the program, however, remains to be seen.

Assessment of Resources

The computer resources at the research site are very inadequate for what is required for this computer program. There are no multimedia computers on campus available for student use. It was necessary, then, to bring my lap top computer from home during the time that the program was tested. There were advantages and disadvantages for using this alternative. First, using my lap top computer was good, in that, I had greater control of the situation, since the lap top never left my sight. However, the negative side to this was that the students were limited in their time to use the program only during my office hours, and some may have felt intimidated by my constant presence, which may have affected the way that they responded to the program. However, for the purpose of this dissertation, and considering the time limitations involved, it was decided just to go with the lap top computer for now, in spite of its limitations, and to test out a desk top, tutorial lab environment at a later time when it becomes available.

Description of Computer to be Used

The lap top computer that was used for this program is a Toshiba Satellite Pro 405CS. It has a 486 Pentium processor with 75mhz, a 850 mb hard drive, 8 mb of RAM,

and a quad speed CD-ROM. The computer program that was used for the development of this project was Multimedia Toolbook by Asymetrix.

Description of the Computer Program's Components

Introduction

The introduction explained the purpose for the program and some of the things that were hopefully learned by going through it. The students were told that the computer program was designed to :

1. help the students to understand the many layers of meaning in a poem.

2. expose the students to a few of the main interpretations often given.

3. give the students the opportunity to respond to these interpretations.

4. allow the students the opportunity to read and respond to the responses or interpretations of the other students.

One of the important features of this program was that on every page except for the first one there was both a "previous" button and a "next" button, which allowed the students to go through the program in a non-linear fashion, exploring and re-exploring any area that interested them. This means that the students could go back and forth through the poem, adding to or changing their responses according to their growing awareness of the poem and its various interpretations. There were no right or wrong answers, but the

students could still change their response to a different answer any time that they wanted without detriment.

The next page of the program gave a brief overview of the four different literary perspectives that were dealt with in the program. The first three-- feminist, psychological, and religious-- were the formal interpretations that the students could choose to see according to any particular hot word that they desired to learn more about. The fourth perspective, reader-response, dealt with their own view and the possibility of their sharing their own perspective at any time.

The next page showed the basic instructions for the program. The idea of "hot words" was introduced, and the process of choosing interpretations was explained. The buttons which controlled the interpretations were only activated if that particular perspective had been applied. It was possible, then, that some "hot words" had only one interpretation, such as feminist, while others were interpreted from all three perspectives. If any students who had gone through the program before had written responses, then the current participant could also see these interpretations along with the others.

One of the most exciting aspects of this program was its versatility according to the varied interest levels of each student. The students chose their own path through the program and could make it into a very long experience if they chose every hot word with every interpretation, or they could choose to take a shorter route, and deal only with one of the interpretations, or only certain hot words. The multi-media aspect also lent itself to a variety of possibilities, and the students were encouraged to submit their own ideas for

pictures, videos, or music clips that they felt may coincide with the different meanings of a particular phrase, which could be added to later versions of the program.

Before the students began the actual program, they were asked to login by typing in the last four digits of their student ID number. There were several reasons for this. First, even though there were no wrong answers and the students did not receive a grade for going through this program, they were asked to give answers which were responsible and sensitive to others. Typing in their ID numbers hopefully helped the students to keep from blatant, cruel responses to other students, or to take this program too lightly with flippant remarks. Second, the ID numbers were used to evaluate the responses of the individual students that were interviewed after the program was over. Third, copies of the responses were given to the students so they could use them in the writing of their papers.

The following describes the basic design of what the main part of the program looked like. At the top left hand corner you will find the title and author of the poem, which in time will change as more poems are added to the program. If you look at the visual representation of the program in Appendix K, you will notice that in the poem itself the hot words are not only in a different color but in quotation marks. The reason for this is that sometimes separate hot words are right next to one another, and there needs to be some way of distinguishing between them. The students could click on a specific hot word, and then click on a corresponding interpretation of their choice or a multimedia illustration of the same. The poem, the interpretations, the other student responses, and the current participant's responses were all visible at the same time, making it easier to

compare ideas and make specific interactions. If the student clicked on the "save response" button, their response was automatically added to the other students' files for future participants to see. When they had finished going through as much of the program that they wished to see, within the time limit of one hour assigned by the teacher, they clicked on the "new poem" button to end the program.

Examples of Interpretations and Student Responses

One of the best ways to illustrate the different kinds of interpretations and responses that one might find in this program is to focus on a single hot word phrase that was interpreted from all three perspectives, and to show how they differed, along with some student responses to these interpretations. For this purpose, then, I have put the following examples, which all deal with the hot word phrase, "birches":

Literary Perspective   (feminist)

"The birch tree can be seen in this poem as a symbol for women. Its white bark can represent women's purity, and its flexibility can illustrate the flexible, more compassionate nature of females."

Student Response

This statement is sexist, in that, it implies that women are more pure and compassionate than men.

Literary Perspective   **(psychological)**

"Often when we are young we become fixated on certain objects which represent to our subconscious various strong emotions, such as fear, love, security, or anger. It might be a teddy bear, a security blanket, a photograph or any other object that ties us to some deep felt experience. In Frost's case, the birch trees have special significance. Somehow he relates these to a time in his past when things seemed simpler, less complex, or more innocent."

Student Response

This is so true. I still cherish the pocket knife that my dad gave me, which I used to hide under my pillow at night when I was young to protect me from the boogie man in the closet.

Literary Perspective   **(religious)**

"Trees in general have long been associated with the spiritual world. Aborigines believe that the spirits live in the trees, the Jewish mystics often speak of the tree of life, and the Druids use different trees to represent different stages or levels of learning in their Druidic system. The birch tree specifically represents the novice to the Druids, while the

Yew(Ash) tree represents the next level, and the oak stands for the highest level of mastery. Frost's idea of the birch tree to signify youth, then, could possibly have originated with the Druids."

Student Response

A tree is a tree, is a tree, is a tree--and by any other name it is still just a tree. I think Frost wrote about the birch tree because he remembers how much fun it was when he was young, not because he wanted to worship it.

As you can see from these responses to the very first hot word phrase in the poem that the emphasis was on opinion, not fact or scholarly knowledge. However, it was the hope of this professor that by the time that the students had gone through more of the program that they would catch on to what makes up a literary interpretation, and how it seeks to go beyond just opinion toward a deeper perception of possible meanings besides one's own. See Appendix D for additional examples of student responses.

Multimedia Illustrations

In order to understand how the multimedia illustrations worked in this format, I will give examples of each of the three types used, photographs, videos, and musical lyrics, and explain how they applied to various hot words and interpretations. The multimedia choices were only activated when a student had chosen a hot word and an

interpretation that was associated with an available media. For example, in the first photograph on the next page, there is a picture of a person with what looks like a mangled face hiding in her stomach. Since it is not clear whether it is a man or woman, it could apply to feminism, but it will be applied to the psychological perspective in this example. It could represent a troubled person who is all torn up inside, not sure of who they really are, or hiding their real selves from the view of others. This photograph and its interpretation could go with the hot word, "crazes", in the poem, which deals with one possibly going crazy or falling apart.

The bottom picture was used in the program to illustrate how some religious groups try to persuade their followers to carry literal burdens to show the heavy load of their spiritual burdens. This was applied to the birch trees which were bent over with burdens, and could not right themselves.

The following picture shows two people with heads that are shaped like masks. This picture was used in the program to show how some people are very insecure psychologically and religiously, and they feel like they need to put on a show to impress people, instead of just being themselves. This was used to illustrate the part in the poem where it talked about straighter darker trees or authority figures trying to make every one else fit into their mold, and how in order to belong to their group, you often have to pretend to be something that you are not.
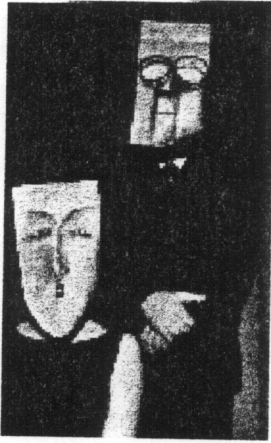
Although a visual clip from a video is not included here, it will briefly be explained how such a clip works within the computer program. One clip that is in the program is of a lady crying out, "Doesn't anybody care?" This clip was taken from a TV show called "Melrose Place." The feelings that are expressed in this clip can be seen as illustrating the "ice storms" in the poem that weigh the trees down with burdens that seem too heavy to bear, and cause them to break under pressure. A music clip from Michael Bolten's song, "Hard Times can Tear you Apart," is also included to go along with this sentiment.

Due to all the multimedia that will eventually be included, the entire computer program will eventually be put on a CD-ROM, but for right now it is being developed on a zip-disk, which has 100mb of memory. Since both Dr. Holmes and I have zip drives, we can easily transfer large amounts of data from one computer to another while in the developmental stage, which will continue even after the students are through going through the program. Especially with all of the multimedia involved, which takes up a lot

of memory, the zip disk has been an essential tool. It also allows for changes or additions to take place as time goes on, without having to worry about cutting a whole new CD each time.

The development of this program, then, has been a many-faceted ordeal. It involved needs assessment surveys, long interviews, learning how to use Multimedia Toolbook, planning an instructional design, designing the program, writing out original interpretations for all of the hot words from three different perspectives, finding pictures, videos, and music clips, and many long, tedious hours on the computer, both by Dr. Holmes and myself. Next comes the fun part—which was letting the students actually go through the computer program, and evaluating the results. The next chapter will explain the methodology that was used in such an endeavor, and the results of the evaluation.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Evaluation of the Entire Group

Pre-Tests and Post-Tests

All seventy-five students in the two American literature classes took an in-class, written pre-test(see Appendix F) that helped to evaluate their level of understanding literary theories, their ability to perceive the many-layered meanings of poetry, and their sensitivity toward those who may have different opinions than their own before they go through the computer program. Out of these original seventy-five, only fifty actually went through the computer program. The results, then, were compared later with a post-test(same as the pre-test), which was given after the computer program.

The pre-test was basically comprised of two parts: a quantitative measure of how many times they could identify different perspectives in a poem, and a qualitative, short essay approach, which allowed the students to actually try to interpret various passages from a poem according to different literary theories. The quantitative part asked the students to read through a poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," by T.S.Eliot, and to identify if they felt that the highlighted words could be interpreted from a feminist

perspective, a psychological perspective, or a religious perspective. They could also choose "N" for none of the above. They merely had to circle an "F", a "P", an "R", or an "N" next to each hot word, or a combination of more than one. At the time of the post-test, this same test was given to see if they were able to identify more perspectives, and which ones they were able to see.

The second part of the test gave twenty of the highlighted words from the poem and asked the students to try to write about the phrases from a specified perspective. There were no right or wrong answers, and if a student did not know how to write from a certain perspective, they just left it blank. See Appendix G for sample answers. .

The reason for using a different poem for these tests than the one that was used in the actual computer program was to see if the students were able to carry over their understanding of literary perspectives from one poem to the next. Besides, if they went through the same poem three times, the pre-test, the computer program, and the post-test, the students would get bored, and they would end up merely memorizing perspectives rather than making them a part of themselves. The results of the first part of the pre-test and post-test were tabulated on a spreadsheet which included all of the hot words and all of the student ID numbers, and each student's responses were recorded by putting an "F", "P", or "R" for the perspectives next to the hot words whenever they were chosen, or an "N" if none was selected.

Long Interviews

Purpose-   The purpose of the interviews was to go beyond the quantitative data that was available in the pre-tests, post-tests, and evaluation questionnaires that were given to all of the student participants. Even though these evaluations were helpful in general terms, it was the more in-depth, personal interviews with a few students before and after going through the computer program that proved to more helpful in giving qualitative insights into the functions of poetic language in everyday usage and the influence of the program on such usage. The students said more about the way they felt in a more natural conversational manner, than they did when merely asked to type something out. The audio-tape recordings of their answers also picked up some of the tonal inflections and attitudes that were not apparent in their written responses.

Setting-   The interviews took place in a secluded office area which was free from windows, telephones, or other distractions.   There were two comfortable chairs, a coffee table for the tape recorder, a tape recorder with a free-standing microphone, and a lap top computer to take notes.

Situation- The students signed up as volunteers for the interviews, which were held at predetermined times and in a very structured setting to avoid distractions. The interviews were done outside of class time during times that were convenient to both teacher and students. Each interview took approximately one hour long. The students did not receive any monetary reward or benefit to their grade for volunteering for these

interviews. Their only personal motives for volunteering might be the fact that they felt

that it may help them to better understand the topic of literary theories, and thereby help

them to do better in their analytical papers and tests.

Participants- Ten student volunteers from the two American Literature classes were

interviewed. Since they were volunteers, there was no way to be selective of who would

be interviewed, except that since part of the computer program dealt with feminism, it was

required that at least five of the ten students were females.

Event Sequence- As part of the dissertation process, fifty of my students went through a

computer program that was designed to help the students learn about various literary

interpretations of poetry. Before going through the program, a pre-test was given to all

seventy-five of the students in two American Literature classes to determine their level of

poetic understanding in literary theories. Interviews were given to ten of the students to

analyze these things in greater depth. All of the interviews were recorded on audio tape

and transcribed for evaluation(see Appendix H for an example). After the students

completed the computer program, they completed an evaluation questionnaire(see

Appendix I), and were given a post-test to analyze how much they had learned. The

same ten students who were interviewed originally were then re-interviewed to evaluate

the changes that had been made in their poetic perceptions(see Appendix J for a sample

re-interview). All of the original seventy-five students then were divided into groups of

five to discuss the responses that were given in the computer program, which they

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received printed copies of, and they were asked to come to some consensus opinion. These group discussions were audio-taped and transcribed for further study, but will not be included in this dissertation, except for a few sample excerpts later in this chapter.

Focus of Interviews- The interviews before going through the computer program were to determine the students' levels of understanding in poetic interpretation. The re-interviews dealt with the students' general impressions of the program, any specific problem areas that they observed, what it was about the program that helped them the most, any suggestions that they had for improvement, and any agreements or disagreements that they had with the interpretations or perspectives that were presented in the program. The students also were asked questions to help determine how much they had learned, and how much their poetic perceptions had changed because of the computer program.

Interview Strategies- The interviews started out by asking them some questions about their background, such as their major, class standing, experience in studying literature, and experience in studying or writing poetry. The interviews then moved more specifically into the area of their understanding of literary theories by asking them to explain their written interpretations of poetry that they included in the pre-test. There was no certain order for the questions, and they were individualized according to the specific remarks or interests of the students. The questions were conversational in nature. The interviews were all audio-taped, and written notes were also made on my observations of the

interview process and the student responses. Each interview took approximately one hour.

Re-Interviews- Based on the entire process of the students going through the computer program individually, the evaluative questionnaires, pre-tests and post-tests to see what they had learned, and the long interviews, the same ten students were re-interviewed to see if their opinions and perceptions had changed. The computer program and the re-interviews were done in the same office area, so the students could show me something on the computer if they needed to make a certain point. Having the computer program on during the re-interview helped to refresh their memory of different areas that they may have had difficulty with or did not understand, as well as different literary perspectives that they wanted to respond to.

Computer Program Evaluation Questionnaire

When each student finished going through the computer program, they were given a questionnaire that allowed them to evaluate the program based upon their immediate impressions. The purpose of this questionnaire was to find out whether they thought that it was an effective tool for learning literary theories about poetry, and what they thought there was about the program that made it either effective or ineffective.

As you can tell by the surveys and other assessment tools that were chosen, a variety of both quantitative and qualitative measurements were used. According to David Silverman (1993,p.8), there are "four major methods used by qualitative researchers:

Observation, Analyzing texts and documents, Interviews, and Recording and transcribing".
All four of these methods were used in various stages of the program development. First,
the students were observed in a lab setting going through the computer program, as well
as in their class discussion based on the program. Second, the texts of their responses
within the program were analyzed, as well as in the pre-test and post-test, to determine
their levels of perception and any problem areas that needed to be dealt with in class.
Third, interviews and re-interviews with ten of my students were conducted, and all
aspects of the interviews were recorded on audio-tape and transcribed.   In addition, the
use of evaluation questionnaires gave me statistical evidence to prove my hypotheses, that
an interactive, multimedia computerized environment can be a very effective tool for
teaching literary theories about poetry to college students, and that such a program can
help students who are prejudiced or self-focused to be more sensitive and more tolerant of
the opinions of others. It is recognized that "efficiency and structure are not stable
realities but are defined in different organizational contexts" (Silverman, 1993, p.5).
Therefore, it might be necessary to eventually test the computer program in other
organizational contexts than the one that was used here, to make sure that its effectiveness
was not just a limited, local phenomena. However, for the time being, my main goals have
been achieved, as will be clearly seen by the evidence which will be given below.

Evaluation Results and Conclusions

From the beginning of this project, there have been three main goals: that the students would gain a greater understanding of different literary theories, a sensitive open-mindedness to the opinions of others, and the ability to analyze poetry on a much deeper level than the typical, more obvious literal level that often characterizes the beginning literary student. As can be expected, not all of the students who completed the program benefited equally, for not all of the students came into the educational environment with the same level of intelligence, perception, background in literature, or openness to learn. However, the results overall were very encouraging, and the purpose of the rest of this chapter is to share some of these positive results.

First, one of the problems that students often have is being able to understand literary theories, for they often seem too technical or irrelevant to their lives. In other words, they seem boring. One of the positive results of using the computer program to teach literary theories was that most of the students thought that it was fun, like playing a video game while you learn. Some typical responses to the program on the evaluation questionnaire were, "I don't usually like studying this kind of stuff, but this was fun;" "My time was up too soon. I didn't want to stop;" and "I liked being able to skip around and try different things. It kept my interest a lot more than just trying to learn it through reading a book or trying to stay awake through listening to a boring lecture. No offense. I just learn more by doing than hearing." Ninety-eight percent of those who went through the program indicated that it was effective or very effective, and the same percent said that

they would like to try it again with other poems. Anytime that a teacher can help the learning process to be so enjoyable that most of the students want to go through it again, especially with a subject that is normally thought of as being boring, like literary criticism, it is a definite encouragement to continue or repeat the learning experience.

However, the question might be asked here, even though the students liked the program, did it really help them to understand more about literary theories? The answer is definitely yes. This can be clearly seen through their responses in the computer program itself, as well as the interviews, class discussions, and papers that followed. In order to demonstrate this, several examples will be given from each one of these four sources. First, the computer program stored the responses of the students as they reacted to each hot word, the interpretations, and the other student responses. Naturally, the students did not always agree with the interpretations that were presented according to the literary theories, but they were not supposed to. The intention was never to indoctrinate them into any particular way of thinking, but to merely expose them to different ways of viewing reality, and letting them come to their own conclusions. Their responses showed that they understood the theories that were presented, even though their own biases may have kept them from accepting them. For example, Ron was one of the students that was interviewed before and after going through the computerized learning environment. His responses often revealed a very clear bias against the feminist movement, and women's rights in general. He bluntly stated, "It would make me angry, you know, if the author said that feminist stuff." When asked, "How would you react to a poem that presented the idea that women are oppressed by men?", he stated, "I would probably, uh, I agree. I

think men do that to a certain point, but uh, it's okay (chuckle). I'm not saying that it's right or wrong, it's just their character, you know." Yet, this same student wrote as one of his responses in the computer program, "This shows that a lot of women feel like they're treated like slaves or servants. Us men can be pretty cruel sometimes, I guess." This shows that he is able to pick out feminist theory from a line in a poem, and understand its basic meaning, perhaps even becoming sensitive to the pain of its truthfulness.

Another student who was interviewed, Jen(see Appendix I), who as a woman was more sympathetic, still tended to be negative toward feminism. When asked what feminism meant to her, she stated, "Basically, it means standing up for the rights of women, but I think that some women carry this too far. They are so angry at men that they are not just pro-women, they're anti-men. I'm pro-people." Also, when asked whether she thought women were oppressed by men in our society, she said, "Yes, but I don't think it's all the men's fault. Most of the time it's the girl's mom who has taught her to be submissive to the men. She tells the girl that if she wants to get married to a good man, she better do whatever he wants. It's some stupid game that women play to keep from being an old maid, and the men merely take advantage of this." This shows a general negative attitude toward the feminist perspective, but after the computer program, her response seems to be more in tune with the feminist view(see Appendix J). She says, "This is why feminists are so angry with men, because the men think it's all just a big game, and the women are devastated. Some times the woman may have a bad experience with a guy, and they might think, oh well, maybe it will be better the next time. But, after

it keeps happening with every guy they meet, they just get sick of it, and they start fighting back, and the guy they are with doesn't understand that the woman's anger is not just against them, but a lot of guys." This shows a definite change from originally blaming the women for being oppressed, to understanding the desperate need for women to fight back against the oppressive men.

Similar indications of change occurred in the students' understanding of the psychological perspective. For example, many of the students had a very difficult time trying to define what was meant by psychological before going through the computer program, but they had a much clearer idea after the program. In Jen's interview, for instance, she admits, "I don't really know a whole lot about psychology. Isn't that just about this guy named Frood, or something? I don't know. It has something to do with blaming all of our problems on sex, doesn't it?" In the computer program, though, her response to the hot word phrase, "burns and tickles", shows that her understanding has developed quite a bit. She writes, "Psychologically, one of the hardest things to deal with is the fact that things are not all good, or all bad, but a mixture of the two. Our emotions, then, get all messed up inside because someone who we love both brings us great joy and great pain. Our emotions are like a roller coaster, going up and down, and upside down, and we are often unsure of who we are, where we are going, or whether we are capable of making it. Life's uncertainties and inconsistencies make us all into Linuses, desperately holding on to our security blankets, fearful of failure and rejection, yet pretending to the world that we've all got it made."

Another example which shows growth in understanding of the literary theories can be seen in a typical class discussion, which took place after the computer program was given. Some of the students in the group went through the program, and some did not. The ones who went through the program are indicated by (y) for yes, and those who did not by (n) for no. These discussions were taped and transcribed (see appendix). The following is just an excerpt from one of these discussions, which was about the poem, "The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock," by T.S.Eliot, which was used in the pre-test and post-test:

(Sam)(n)- "It seems like this line, 'a hundred visions and revisions," must be talking about the prophets in the old testament who had visions about the future, and the revisions come later, like in the new testament, when the apostles explained how Christ fulfilled the prophecies of the old testament."

(Justin)(y)- That might be true, but it doesn't have to be that way. Just because we're Christians doesn't mean we have to always interpret things from a Christian perspective. I mean other people from other religions claim to see visions and prophecies too."

(Sam)(n)- "Yea, but those are false prophets. The only real prophets are the ones in the Bible."

(Justin)(y)- "I'm not disagreeing with you, I'm just saying that that is not the only way that this poem can be interpreted."

(Amanda)(y)- "What about other kinds of visions? They don't have to be spiritual visions. Maybe it's talking about the kind of vision that one has when they get a dream of what they want to achieve in the future, and then later they change their goals."

(Joy)(y)- "Or since he's a writer, maybe T.S.Eliot is talking about having visions about what he wants his poems to be like, and how he has to make a lot of revisions in them."

This is just a small portion of a rather lengthy, and often heated discussion about the entire poem. It illustrates some very important points, though, for the students who did not go through the program tended to interpret the poem along the narrow lines of their own preconceived ideas or experiences, and those who went through the program tended to demonstrate a much greater ability to see things from different perspectives, or to understand the complexity of a particular literary theory. This was not always true, but for the most part it stayed constant.

Later in this same group discussion, the students talked about the line, "women come and go, talking of Michelangelo." Similar results can be seen.

(Twila)(n)- "So what? I don't see any special point that the poet is trying to make here. Some women are just talking about an artist. What's the big deal?"

(Sam)(n)- I agree. I don't think we should try to read anything into this. It says what it means."

(Joy)(y)- Sure. Everything can be looked at just literally, but that's not what poetry is all about. It's not a one level, flat pancake. It's a layer cake, and our job is to try to figure out what all the layers are."

(Sam)(n)- "What deep level of significance can you possibly see in some women chit chatting?"

(Justin)(y)- "It depends on how you look at it. If you're a feminist, you might be very offended by this statement, for women are pictured as having nothing better to do than

just chit chat or gossip. Their lives don't seem to have any meaning except when they talk about men."

(Joy)(y)- "I think that's probably right, but the thought just came to me that this might not be a put-down at all. After all, women are often thought of as being just "dumb blondes", but this poem has them talking about the famous artist, Michelangelo, which shows that they're well-educated. They're not talking about Oprah Winfrey or "The Young and the Restless."

(Twila)(n)- This is ridiculous. Sam says that it's offensive to feminists, and Joy says it's a compliment. It can't be both. Something can't be both good and bad at the same time."

(Joy)(y)- "Why not? Lots of things in life are both good and bad. The crucifixion of Christ was the worst thing that ever happened, but it was also the best, because without the death of Christ, we would all be lost."

(Twila)(n)- "I'm sorry, but I just don't see the connection."

This last statement by Twila illustrates a common occurrence throughout these discussions. On the one hand, the group of students who did not go through the program seemed to be unable to see the connections between the literal meanings of the words and the often symbolic or interpretive meanings behind the words; in other words, what they could possibly mean to different types of people. On the other hand, the students who went through the program were much more open to endless possibilities, or other options than their own. They seemed to understand the complexities of the different literary theories, enough to know that there was never just one right answer.

Along with this growth of understanding about literary theories came a greater sensitivity towards the emotional intensity behind each one of the perspectives. This did not mean that they always came to agree with other views than their own, but they did learn to appreciate or feel empathy toward the sufferings or struggles of those who came to different conclusions than themselves. For example, Matt, in his interview before going through the computer program, clearly demonstrated some very strong biases against feminism. He says, "I guess in my mind a feminist is one who is anti-male, and they, uh, look at everything as being anti-male, and not just for equality. I mean, everything that a guy does or says or writes, they see it as degrading to women. You just can't please 'em no matter what you do." When asked, "Do you think that all women should be dainty and proper?", his response was, "Of course not, but there's nothing wrong with a man wanting his own woman to be that way. I mean, what's wrong with some guy writing a poem like this about his ideal woman? If he likes 'em dainty and proper, then that's his business. Feminists don't have the right to tell anyone what kind of woman they should like. If feminists want to look like a man, that's their business, but I don't have to like 'em that way. That's my business." He expressed some very strong emotions and convictions behind his stereotypes of feminists, which made any change in attitude very unlikely. However, when he wrote his paper after going through the computer program about the poetry of Emily Dickinson, he seemed to have become a lot more sympathetic. He wrote in his conclusion, "Emily Dickinson was a hermit, who preferred staying at home reading and writing poetry, rather than being with other people. She often is glorified by feminists today because she chose solitude over getting married. Based on her poems, I think she

was probably hurt pretty bad by the men in her life, and became a hermit because she didn't want to be hurt anymore. It's sad, but some of the world's great poetry was produced because of great pain." There was no hint of criticism here at all, but empathy for the pain caused by oppressive men.

A greater sensitivity was also shown in the area of religion. Most of the students who went through the computer program came from conservative, Christian backgrounds, with very strong convictions about right and wrong. It was not surprising, then, to see some of the following responses in the pre-tests(see Appendix G):

"Somebody is being convicted by God and is unable to sleep because they are ashamed of their lifestyle."

"Spending time with prostitutes seeking to find happiness in life, which is wrong, according to scriptures."

"He is restless because he is fighting between what is right in God's eyes and what is right in man's. It's the flesh versus the spirit."

Most of the students perceived life as a battle, "the flesh versus the spirit", God versus Satan, the conservatives versus the liberals, or the true Christians versus the pagans or heretics. Other people's views were not just someone else's opinion, but the enemies'. This confrontational attitude was seen in the pre-interviews, as well as the pre-tests. For example:

"Jesus is the only way to God, and if someone doesn't accept Jesus as their personal savior, they will go to hell."

"I already told you what I believe, and I believe it because that's what the Bible says, and that's good enough for me. I don't care what anyone else thinks."

"Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are heretics, and if they ever come to my door with their blasphemy, I'll get out my shotgun."

Changing the religious doctrines of the students was never the goal of this project, but sensitivity and openness to learn from others who believe differently than ourselves. It was encouraging to note, then, that many did become more sensitive to others as a result of going through the computer program, as attested by the following comments from the post-tests and post-interviews(see Appendix J):

"Faith is supposed to be a personal thing, not something that you try to force on someone else. It's a gutwrench because it helps to tighten up your own spirituality. It's not meant to be a jack hammer, because jackhammers are used to break other things apart, or to force themselves into things outside of themselves. You shouldn't try to force your beliefs on other people."

"It's very easy to just accept your beliefs based upon the way that you have been brought up, without really questioning why you believe what you believe, especially if you always hang around people that believe the same way as you. We need to open our eyes and see things the way others see them, and try to understand their point of view, even in religion, instead of being so paranoid. I think this is what T.S. Eliot is saying when he asks whether he should dare to disturb the universe. Should he dare to expand his horizons beyond what makes him feel secure? Should he dare to take off the blinders that keep him a prisoner within his own self-righteous beliefs?"

One of the most exciting results of the computer program, then, was that most of the students were willing to take off the blinders, at least for a short period of time while going through the program, and were willing to see life from a variety of different perspectives. Many of them walked away fascinated with the multi-leveled perspectives that were shared by the computer program itself, as well as by the other students. It was like they could not comprehend before the fact that something, like poetry, could be seen from any other view than their own. Then when they saw from many different directions, through many different eyes, it was like they saw for the very first time. Their reaction was summed up in this one student's post-program evaluation questionnaire when she wrote, "Wow! When I signed up for this thing, I expected some boring program about some dead poetry that I was going through just to help my professor out. I never expected what I just went through. I feel like my insides have turned inside out, been thrown to the sky, and been carried away by eagles. I will never look at poetry or life the same again." Not all of the students expressed themselves so poetically, but most of them did express the same sentiment.

The third area of growth by the students who went through the program was illustrated through their ability to interpret poetry on a much deeper level than before. This was particularly evident by contrasting the first papers that they wrote, which were written before going through the program, and their second papers, which were written afterwards. Short excerpts from both papers, grouped according to each student, were included below for comparison purposes. They were not writing about the same writers in both papers, but their different depths of insights were quite apparent.

(Jacob)(First paper)-"Emily Dickinson was a pretty good poet. Her poems are pretty interesting because the lines are real short, and easy to understand. She writes about simple things, like birds and trees and children. I think she was a great poet."

(Jacob)(Second paper)-"Walt Whitman's poetry doesn't seem like poetry at first. It seems like he is just talking to you in a normal conversation. When you study it more, though, you realize that everything he writes is based upon his religious belief, called Transcendentalism, which teaches that everyone and everything are parts of God and part of one another. Everything that man does or that happens in nature, then, has some divine significance and affects everything else."

(Jessie)(First paper)-"This poetry is very boring. It doesn't say a whole lot. It's just like Edward Taylor was just writing down his thoughts at the end of the day, like in a journal. I don't know if he meant for anyone else to read this stuff, but he should have kept it better hidden."

(Jessie)(Second paper)-"The poem, 'The Road Not Taken', by Robert Frost, seems simple on the surface, but is really very complex. From a religious perspective, many use this poem to illustrate the choice that someone makes between the two roads of life, between good and evil, salvation or damnation. I don't think this really fits, though, for it says that 'both roads were worn really about the same', which implies that just as many people go to heaven as hell. I think that this poem could better be interpreted from a psychological perspective, where someone is struggling about making a major choice in their life, and both choices look very good. Their only regret is that they can't walk down both paths."

(Mike)(First paper)-"Ann Bradstreet's poetry is pretty good, especially since she is a woman writer, and women were not supposed to write poetry back then. They weren't educated like the men. Her poetry is pretty good, though. It uses rhyme a lot, and isn't too difficult to understand. She writes mostly about her family."

(Mike)(Second paper)-"T.S. Eliot's poem, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,' doesn't sound like a love song at all. It sounds more like a song of loneliness. Prufrock seems to be wandering around aimlessly, not sure where he is going, or really even who he wants to be. He is afraid of being himself because he thinks others will not like him. Psychologically, he is paranoid, and he lives in a constant fantasy world, because the real world is too threatening to his insecure self-image."

Even though the above changes in perception level were obvious for most of the students who participated, there were some students who made no change, and still others who seemed to go backward instead of forward. In those few cases, the students were so bigoted, that being exposed to the views of feminists, Freudians, and other religionists merely made them angrier and more set in their ways. Their responses at the end seemed more narrow-minded at the end than at the beginning. For the most part, though, the ninety-eight percent of the students who said the program was effective or very effective in the evaluation questionnaire showed evidence in their responses and in their second papers that the program was indeed effective in some very meaningful ways.

The question that must be answered now, of course, is what was it about the program that made it effective, so the same techniques or tools can be used again with other poems, or even other types of learning experiences. According to the students, in

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the evaluation questionnaire given at the end of the program, the following reasons were given for why they felt that it was effective:

1. It was fun.

2. The feminist, psychological, and religious interpretations were very interesting, and usually stated in such a way as to stir up an emotional response by the participant.

3. Being able to choose whatever hot words and whatever perspectives they wanted made them feel like they were in control, and they could skip around according to their own interest level.

4. Being able to see pictures that illustrated the different perspectives added meaning to the poem, and helped the visual learners get more out of what was being said.

5. Being able to see how the other students responded to the literary interpretations and to each other made the poem seem more relevant and personal. They felt like they were going through an adventure or treasure hunt with their friends, even though only one person went through the program at a time.

6. They enjoyed responding to one another's opinions even more than they enjoyed responding to the literary interpretations, as if they were carrying on a debate with their roommates. Some of the student responses were so extreme,

that it was like watching the Oprah Winfrey show just reading their responses and reacting to them.

7. It made it seem like they were playing a video game instead of just studying.

8. Everything was clearly stated and clearly laid out, so they did not have to struggle trying to figure out what they were supposed to be doing.

There were also a few things about the program that the students felt took away from its effectiveness:

1. The sound clips were too short and didn't really help to illustrate or expand the meaning of the poem.

2. The video clips were too short and not clear enough to see everything.

3. There was not enough time to finish the program. The students were given a one hour time limit because of the large number of students who needed to go through the program using only one computer.

4. They would like to be able to go through the program on their own time at their own convenience rather than during a scheduled time in the professor's office.

After looking at the students' suggestions for improvement, some changes were made to make it more effective. Since the video and sound clips were considered ineffective, it was decided to eliminate these features out of the program, leaving only the still pictures as illustrations. There was not enough time or the skill level to make these features more dynamic, and the money necessary to pay someone else was not available,

so elimination was the only alternative. Hopefully it will be possible to add them to the program again at a later time if circumstances are more promising.

As far as the time limit situation, this was not a weakness in the program itself, but merely a necessary short-coming in the testing of the program due to the large number of student participants. When this program is permanently put into place, there will be no time limit, and each student can work at their own pace.

It was quite obvious from very early on that there would not be enough time for each student to go through the program in one hour. Most of the students, in fact, did not get past the first page out of three. In order to find out exactly how long it would take for a student to go all the way through the program, looking at each one of the perspectives for each one of the hot words, and responding to as many as they chose to, one student was asked to do this as a trial. It took the student six hours to go through the entire thing. Of course, this was way too long of a period of time for one sitting, so he came three times and worked for two hours each time. Although this tremendous time commitment seemed at first to indicate that this program may be very good, but not very practical, it must be remembered that most students will not go through every hot word and every perspective. They have the freedom to pick and choose, skip around, and look only at those that interest them. Most of the students that went through the program went through linearly, looking at each hot word, each perspective, and each media occurrence through their own choice because of their curiosity, and they, of course, were not able to finish in the hour allowed. However, there were a few students who went through all three pages, looking only at the words and perspectives that interested them, the way that

the program was designed, and they had no problem finishing the program in the allotted time. The problem with the time limit, then, was not so much a matter with the program itself, but with the feeling by the students that if they skipped something, they might miss something important. In fact, they ended up missing a lot more because they never got to the last two pages.

As far as the students wanting to go through the program at their own convenience instead of according to a scheduled appointment, this problem will be taken care of when the program is permanently installed in the computer lab on campus this fall, so they will be able to use the program whenever they want, and take as much time as they desire.

Since the computer program was deemed as effective by most of the students, and their later work seemed to verify that the program had indeed produced the desired results, it seemed logical, then, that the next step would be to plan ahead toward future uses of this exciting new tool. The following list, therefore, was formulated to give a number of possible ways that either this program or the template that makes it work can be used in a variety of different fields:

1. expanded to include a number of major poems, stories, and plays, and a number of additional perspectives, so that the students can have a large assortment to choose from based on the classes they are taking, or their own personal interests.

2. used in Bible study, where a passage of scripture is the text, and different commentaries or interpretations by Bible scholars are given as the different

perspectives, with students being able to type in their own responses.

3. adapted by the medical profession, so that when a doctor or medical student clicks on the name of a certain disease or physical condition, they are presented with a number of different choices, such as symptoms, medications, treatments, surgery techniques, or theories about causes and cures.

4. adapted by lawyers or law students, where the text is the transcript from a particular case, the hot words are certain points of evidence presented in the case, and the perspectives would be the various rulings that have offered by previous judges in other cases that may apply.

5. adapted in job training for a lot of different kinds of jobs, where the employee could review different kinds of responses that may be appropriate for different situations. This same thing could be used in the application process to weed out those who do not have the necessary knowledge to make the necessary decisions required for their job. They are given a certain circumstance and a number of optional responses, and they have to choose the best response.

6. Of course, in the field of education, this program can be adapted to any subject that requires a student to be able to know or to choose between a variety of options, and that would encourage the student to make their own response to those options, such as philosophy, psychology, religion, sociology, history, etc. In fact, I could not think of a single subject where this system could not be used effectively.

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One of the most exciting things about this program, from the very beginning, then, was the tremendous possibility that it presented for each individual student to grow and to expand their world view beyond the narrow limits of their own experience and biases, to be able to see through the eyes of others and to become sensitive toward what is seen, to expand past the limits of a normal classroom situation, where each student can learn on their own, and yet feel that they are learning together with others. The examples that have been shared in this chapter not only have demonstrated that these possibilities have been enthusiastically and successfully fulfilled by most of the students who went through this program, but also that even greater possibilities lie ahead, as the program is expanded and adapted in a number of different fields, and each one who is willing to learn and grow will have their own exciting opportunity to "climb a birch tree" of hope and ambition to the top of their own dreams, one hot word of potential at a time.

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Feminist Interpretations

"birches"-The birch tree can be seen in this poem as a symbol for women.

Its white bark can represent women's purity, and its flexibility can illustrate the

flexible, more compassionate nature of females.

"left to right"-The term left is often used to represent liberals, with the

right representing conservatives. The impression that many men have is that

feminists are all liberals. This is not true, for women on both sides are

fighting for the equal rights of all.

"across the lines"-Men often try to keep women trapped in boxes of submission.

Women who are fighting for equal rights must often bend the man-

made rules and cross the lines of oppression into true freedom.

"straighter darker trees"-The men are the straighter darker trees who

- in their proud rigidity refuse to be flexible or sensitive to the needs and rights of

women.

"some boy's"-Frost's hope is that "some boys" have been swinging and

bending the trees. This is a sexist statement which completely leaves girls out

and implies that boys should have a much greater freedom to enjoy adventurous

pursuits than girls should. If the birch trees are symbols for women, the poem

also implies that Frost may wish that women be bent down and used for a young man's pleasure.

"doesn't bend them down to stay"-This is a typical male's response to the way that he treats women, as if it is alright for "boys-will-be-boys" and "they are just sowing their wild oats", and they don't think that they are really hurting anyone, or "bending them down to stay."

"ice storms"-As long as the male is in a playful mood, "swinging on the branches", using women for his own pleasure, he doesn't feel that he is doing any harm. "Ice storms", though, which can be symbols for anger, hate, or violence, are seen as possibly producing lasting damage.

"you must have seen them"-The male is often so caught up in his own ego that he thinks that everyone should see things just the way that he does, and often wrongly assumes that everyone already does.

"loaded with ice"-Women are carrying a heavy burden as men often dump their cold-hearted, self-centered problems upon the women as if it is the woman's job to carry the burden for both of them.

"sunny winter morning"-A woman's life is a paradox of winter-like worries and a sunny hopefulness that is able to persevere through the most difficult storms, in spite of being "loaded with ice."

"after a rain"-There is something special about the morning after a rain. The air is fresh and everything seems so clean and new. The vibrant life-force

of a woman can also have that same impact on those around her. She can give

forth a sense of newness of life, hope, and rebirth.

"click upon themselves"-Even though the "ice storms" caused by men are

often severe, women can still find joy and happiness in their relationships with

other women, "clicking upon themselves" as they often bond through their

joint suffering, as well as their common goals and desires.

"breeze"-The breeze or wind is often seen as a symbol for inspiration, and women

can help each other by inspiring them through their triumphs and their

words of encouragement.

"many-colored"-The cause of feminism is not a one race issue. As

women from every ethnic group combine together to join forces against the

oppression of the male-dominant society, their unity is strengthened by the

power of their diversity.

"cracks"-Women have not gained the victory yet in their struggle for

equality, but they have seen some positive "cracks" in the established male

domination.

"crazes"-To craze means to break or crush, and women are busy trying

to break or crush the chains of their oppression.

"enamel"-The enamel is the hardened core of the male's heart, as well as

the male's cold-hearted system of oppression. Enamel can make something

look nice on the outside, even when it is rotten on the inside. The male-

dominant system of the business world, for example, looks glamorous and

glorious from a distance, but it is almost completely without heart or

compassion, and the women need to break through this hard shell.

"sun"-The sun is typically a male symbol, as the sun-god is Apollo. The

moon, in contrast, is a female symbol. Occasionally a woman is able to find a

man whom she falls in love with who is sensitive and compassionate to her

needs and goals. When this happens, the warmth of this love is able to undo a

lot of the suffering caused by other cold-hearted males. However, it is not

necessary for a woman to experience a man's love in order to find fulfillment.

A woman can also discover and develop her own "masculine" inner self or

find these qualities in another female, thereby experiencing the warmth of love

without needing a man.

"crystal shells"-The crystal shells are made of ice and are now being

shed because of the warmth of love. Crystal is beautiful, even though it is

fragile, so it demonstrates how a woman can turn even the most difficult times

in her life into beauty and love. Crystal also has a mystical aspect to it, and

many women are able to grow in their spiritual enlightenment even when

physically they are being oppressed.

"shattering"-Even though love can break down barriers and increase life-

flowing energy, the suffering of the past still often leaves a "shattering" of the

woman's self-image, and sometimes even love is not enough to heal the pain.

"avalanching"-When a woman finally feels loved after being abused for

such a long time, it can seem like an avalanche of emotions all coming at once.

"snow crust"-The snow is beautiful, but it keeps "mother earth" in a

dormant sleep. Men also try to subdue women by putting them to sleep in the

comfort of their suppressed roles as housewives.

"broken glass"-The spirits and souls of women have been broken and

crushed like glass by oppressive men.

"sweep away"-Broken feelings like glass need to be swept away in order

to start a new, but unfortunately, the women are the ones who are usually

asked to do the sweeping or cleaning up after the messes that are being made

by the men.

"inner dome of heaven"-The inner dome of heaven could refer to the

womb of the world, where mother nature herself is feeling the results of being

ravished by man.

"fallen"-The fall which is being described here is similar to the fall of

man in the garden of Eden, except in Eden the woman was blamed for

bringing man down, and here the man is the one who has brought woman

down.

"dragged"-Being dragged implies by force rather than a willing

submission. Men often take advantage of their brute strength to force

women to do whatever they want.

"withered bracken"-Bracken is a kind of fern or a field of ferns, but

    it also means "broken" or "divided." This continues the metaphor of women

    being broken in spirit and divided by force from the male-dominated world.

    The fern are also withered, which shows that the life of women has been

    depleted, and their souls have become dumping grounds for broken feelings.

"seem not to break"-In spite of the heavy load or burden that women

    have been forced to bear, they still are able to persevere and not break

    completely. The strength of their characters only grows stronger through

    adversity, and their flexibility is evidence of that strength, not weakness.

"bowed"-"Bowed" has several different meanings which can be applied

    to women. One meaning is to be bent over, and the women are bent over

    with the burdens that have been asked to bear. Bowed also means to be

    bent over in subservience, as if bowing down to a king, and women have

    been forced to be the servants of men. Bowed also has a couple of positive

    meanings. One deals with the bow that is used by musicians to play stringed

    instruments, like the violin. The rod is strung tightly with horse hair in order

    to play the instruments. Women also have been "strung tightly" by their

    oppression, and yet have still been able to produce "beautiful music" in their

    lives. Another kind of bow is the rainbow, which is a sign of hope and

    rebirth after a storm, just as women are able to radiate hope after the darkest

    circumstances.

"so low for long"-When someone has been held down for a long time

   physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually, as women have been, it is

   very difficult to rise above their feelings of insecurity, loneliness, and

   hopelessness.

"never right themselves"-Many women are never able to "right"

   themselves after being knocked down so many times, as if they feel "what's

   the use?" Men are also constantly telling the women that they are "never

   right", that they are too emotional to make intelligent or rational decisions.

"trunks arching"-"Trunks arching" can refer to women being bent

   over under the burden of oppression. Yet, there are also some positive

   implications of an arch. One kind of arch is the rainbow, which is a sign

   of hope. Another kind of arch is the arch of triumph as one enters a city

   after a victorious war. A third kind of arch means "the highest" as in

   "archangel". Women have been bent over by their burdens, and yet have

   been able to rise above their oppressors in many ways in order to find hope

   and victory for themselves.

"woods"-The woods are often used in literature as a symbol for evil,

   and women have definitely been oppressed by evil. Yet, the woods or

   forest also imply the "untamed wilderness", and women being in the woods

   implies that they are not willing to be "tamed" by men.

"years afterwards"-The oppression of women is not a temporary or

an isolated circumstance. It has been going on throughout time.

"leaves"-Leaves are signs of a tree's life, and even though these women

are bend over clear to the ground with the weight of their burden, they still

are able to produce life.

"ground"-In one sense, the ground is the lowest point that the branches

and leaves can go as they are being bent over, which then becomes the lowest

point that a woman can be brought to by her oppression. Yet, the earth is

also a symbol for "mother earth", and the tree reaching down to touch the

earth can be a symbol for a woman getting in contact with her own female

life-force that is capable of rebirth or re-creation.

"like girls"-The boys in this poem are being adventurous, while the

girls are stereotypically doing nothing but drying their hair, trying to make

themselves pretty for the boys. Lifting up women on a pedestal of beauty

can seem like an honor or a symbol of praise, but women often feel just the

opposite, and want to be appreciated for their internal qualities and abilities,

instead of just their bodies. In other words, they want to be treated as

people and not just objects. The fact that "girls" are mentioned here instead

of women implies that submission is taught and learned at a young age

throughout our whole culture.

"on hands and knees"-Women are often on "hands and knees", both

literally and metaphorically, for they are often given the menial physical jobs

while the men are busy to doing the jobs which take thinking. Women are

also on hands and knees in subservience to male dominance in other areas

of their life.

"throw their hair"-In order to throw their hair over their heads, it

implies that they have long hair, and long hair on a woman has always been

a symbol for submission. Ironically, long hair on a man is a symbol for

rebellion and independence.

"over their heads"-The head is a symbol for rationality or authority,

and the woman's long hair is a symbol for submission. So a woman

throwing her long hair over her head is a symbol for placing the importance

of submission above that of rationality and authority for the woman. When

a woman tries to do a job which is typically done by males, she also is often

said to be in "over her head," which implies that women are not as capable

as men.

"to dry in the sun"-The girls or women are bowing down to the sun

here, and the sun is a male symbol, so once again this implies subservience.

"truth"-The truth means different things to different people. Men and

women often have a difficult time communicating because they see "truth"

from different perspectives.

"broke in"-It is implied here that the man in the poem would rather not

listen to the truth. He would rather play his boyhood games and pretend the

real world isn't there. Men are often portrayed as being the rational ones and

women being too emotional, but this poem shows men as being irrational,

impulsive beings.

"matter of fact"-Truth is portrayed as a female here, not in the sense

of sublime truth, but in "matter of fact" truth, or reality. When men are seeking

to play their little games or act like children at times, it is often the woman,

mother or wife, who seeks to bring the man back to reality.

"ice storm"-The man doesn't always appreciate the female's sensibility,

and views her nagging reality as an "ice storm" on a warm summer day.

"prefer to have some boy"-The boy is the "preferred" one, and the girl

is left out once again.

"out and in"-Boys from an early age are given much greater freedom to

go "out and in", encouraged to spread their wings, while the girls are subdued

and over-protected from the beginning.

"fetch the cows"-The cows are females who are being fetched for

milking by the males. Men are more than willing to use females for their own

benefit, but often do not value them above a pragmatic, physical usefulness.

"some boy"-Once again the emphasis is on boys rather than girls.

"far from town"-The town is a symbol for civilization, or the structured

rules and standards of that society. Males have much greater freedom to

break away from these standards, and are often praised for their unique non-

conformity as being creative geniuses. Women who try to break away from

the "norm", however, are usually frowned upon.

"baseball"-Baseball is typically a boy's game. Here the boy is not able
to play baseball because he lives too far from town. Girls, however, are
usually kept from many of the activities of the male society just because they
are girls, no matter where they live.

"whose only play"-The boy is limited here in his play options because
of where he lives, but the girls' options seem to always be limited.

"he found himself"-The boy is given freedom to find his own way and
to seek his own pleasure, while the girls' are more structured and controlled.

"summer"-Summer is a symbol for growth or the most productive
period of a person's life. The "summer" , then, for a man is usually spent
developing his talents and career opportunities. The woman's "summer" is
often confined or limited by household responsibilities or family, and her
talent's and career are often put on hold until the "summer" is past.

"winter"-Winter is a symbol for death or old age, and a man can often
sit back with satisfaction as to the accomplishments of a lifetime, while
enjoying the freedom and "play time" of retirement. For women, old age is
often a time of loneliness and a sense of despair as if she was somehow
cheated out of the fullness of life and the possibilities to pursue her own
private dreams.

"could play alone"-When the male plays alone, he is viewed as a rugged

individualist. The woman who chooses to walk alone is treated like an outcast or an old maid.

"one by one"-The male is seen as making progress here, as he achieves

his goals "one by one." The female's goals, however, are often left unfulfilled

as she is expected by society to help the males reach their goals and to sacrifice

her own.

"he subdued"-The male is brought up to subdue, and the female is

brought up to be subdued.

"father's trees"-The trees are symbols for the females, and the father

has taught his son how to climb or subdue the trees, or women, as if they are

just objects or trophies to be won.

"riding them down"-The male is riding or subduing the trees or women

as if it is all just a big game, but the end result is that the trees or women are

brought down or degraded.

"over and over again"-Men can be very abusive of women, and either

don't see it as abuse or feel that the abuse is somehow justified when the

women don't feed their egos enough. So, the abuse continues "over and

over again".

"stiffness"-Stiffness is a symbol for strength or stability, and many men

won't stop abusing women until a woman's spirit is broken or weakened to

the point of hopeless despair.

"hanging limp"-There is nothing so sad as to see a person whose spirit is

completely "hanging limp", as if there is no life left in them. A woman may

still be alive physically, but if she feels that she is merely an abused slave, she

can become like a zombie whose body moves but whose soul is dead.

"conquer"-The male often looks at the woman as merely a challenge to

conquer or a conquest to win. He is the big game hunter, and she is the

trophy on the wall.

"learned all there was to learn"-A man often prides himself in how

much he knows as the epitome of rationality, and feels very intimidated if a

woman tries to show him up by proving herself to be smarter.

"not launching out too soon"-The only reason that the male is cautious

about "not launching out too soon" or trying to subdue the female too quickly

is that he will do anything to gain the ultimate prize of "scoring" , even if he

senses that with a certain woman he needs to take it slow to win. Unfortunately,

many men are not patient at all for any reason, and they just take what they want

whenever they want it.

"carrying the tree away"-"Carrying the tree away" refers to subduing the woman.

The only concern he has is that he doesn't subdue her so quickly that

it takes away from the thrill of victory, as if an easy conquest is not valued as

highly.

"ground"-Males, even though they may be abusive and oppressive,

usually do not want their woman to be completely defeated down to the "ground". They like for her to still have some fight left in her, and the greater the challenge, the more the victory brings glory to their ego.

"kept his poise"-The male keeping his poise here is just a matter of his being cautious, as if he is a lion carefully stalking his prey.

"top branches"-The top branches would symbolize the woman's virginity, and the man is not satisfied until he has conquered it all.

"climbing carefully"-The male may be careful or cautious, but only if he is climbing or making progress. After a while, if there is no progress, he grows impatient, and often will not take no for an answer.

"pains"-The only pains that the male experiences in this process of subduing the female is that it might take longer than he hopes. He doesn't care about any pains that he might be causing the woman.

"cup"-A cup is a receptacle, just as a woman is seen as a receptacle. The male seeks to pour himself into the female or to completely dominate her identity with his presence.

"brim"-The brim is the same as the top branches here, for the highest goal is sexual intercourse.

"above the brim"-Many men are not satisfied even when they reach their goal of sexual conquest. They want to go "above the brim", making the woman into not only a sexual object, but a sexual slave.

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"flung outward"-"Flung outward" can represent the male sex act itself,

for he has reached the top branches or his goal of subduing the woman.

"feet first"-The male drops down "feet first" because he concerned

about his own safety as he falls. He doesn't care about what he is doing to

the tree, or woman.

"swish"-Something makes a swishing sound when it moves rapidly

against the air or wind. The wind is a symbol for the spirit, and when a man

subdues a woman, he is not only taking advantage of her physically, he is

attacking or raping her spirit.

"kicking his way down"-As the boy kicks his way down, it is almost as

if he is throwing a tantrum demanding his own way. He wants something,

subduing the female, and nothing is going to stop him.

"so was I once a swinger of birches"-The poet admits that this is not

just a fantasy, but that he too was an abuser of nature, using it for his own

pleasure, not caring about the consequences, which is typically a male response.

"dream"-Even if certain men never abuse women in the physical world,

in their dreams they often carry out atrocious rape fantasies where they

demonstrate their true feelings towards women.

"weary of considerations"-The male doesn't like being burdened down

by his responsibilities toward the women in his life, and often seeks escapes, in

reality or fantasy, where he feels more in control or dominant.

"pathless wood"-In the male's ego-centric world, he may be successful

economically, but still feel empty and directionless when he realizes that his

attitude and actions have caused great gaps between his loved ones and

himself. A woman also may feel "pathless" when she realizes that she has

been confined to following her husband's path, and has never been able to

pursue her own.

"burns and tickles"-"Burns and tickles" are both negative and positive

results that the male experiences as he subdues the woman. It may bring him

great momentary physical pleasure, but he is hurting himself as well as the

woman emotionally and spiritually far more than he may realize at the time.

"cobweb"-The cobweb is a beautiful, intricate trap created to trick and

subdue the spider's prey. The male also is like a spider as he preys upon the

woman with his cunning deceptiveness. The web hurts the male's face as

he goes through it, just as the male is often hurt when someone catches him

in his deceitful stalking of the female and has his trickery or adultery thrown

back in his face. One's face is a symbol for one's reputation, and that is all

that many men really care about. As long as they can do something and get

away with it, it is all right.

"weeping"-A male may shed a tear or two because of the pain or

problems that he may have caused himself   by trying to subdue the

woman, but he has no tears for the woman herself.

"open"-The twig or outstretched arm of the woman can only sensitize

the male to the consequences of his actions if his eyes are open and willing to

see. Unfortunately, the male only has one eye sensitized, and all that he sees

is his own pain.

"to get away"-What man wants to do is to escape his problems, or to

leave them in the hands of women to take care of for him.

"from earth awhile"-What the man wants is a new beginning, not a

new birth. He does not imply that he will change his ways or be more

sensitive to women when he returns, he merely wants to run away from his

responsibilities for a while.

"May no fate"-This is not a prayer of repentance to God for his sins

against women, it is merely a wish that even God would leave him alone and

let him do what he wants.

"misunderstand me"-He seems so concerned that God, who is

supposed to be omniscient, might misunderstand him, and yet he makes no

attempt to understand the needs of women.

"what I wish"-God is like a big Genie in the sky whom he expects to

give him his wishes, even though they are based on self-indulgence and using

others for his own pleasure.

"not to return"-The male is not wishing for death, because if he dies,

he loses everything that he has selfishly gained for himself as well as his

power over women.

"right place for love"-What he really means is that earth is the right

place for sex, for he doesn't know how to love anyone but himself.

"I don't know"-The male doesn't like being put into a situation where

he is not in control of the situation, or where he doesn't know everything

that he needs to know to be in control. Death, then, poses a problem for

him, for it represents the unknown and being subdued himself.

"where it's likely to go better"-He doesn't see the afterlife as being

any better than the present life because on earth he can play God over the

women, where in heaven he is no longer king.

"like to go by climbing"-The male seeks to escape his thoughts of

God, death, or accountability by creating his own fantasy world where he is

God and women are his servants.

"black branches...snow-white trunk"-This is a multi-colored tree

because the oppression of women is a multi-cultural problem.

"tree could bear no more"-The male uses the female as a pedestal

to reach his goals and pushes her to the edge of her endurance.

"set me down again"-The woman is like a rock of stability that the

man depends upon to keep his feet on the ground or to lean upon when he

feels insecure.

"both going and coming"-The man has the best of both worlds. He

can be free and powerful over women in a fantasy world of god-like

dominance, or he can melt into the protective and comforting arms of a

woman when he feels that his world is vulnerable. In strength or weakness,

he still comes out the winner.

"one could do worse"-Man knows that he has it good as long as he

can continue oppressing women, so he is not going to give up his dominance

easily.

Psychological Interpretations

"birches"-Often when we are young we become fixated on certain

objects which represent to our subconscious various strong emotions, such

as fear, love, security, or anger. It might be a teddy bear, a security

blanket, a photograph or any other object that ties us to some deep felt

experience. In Frost's case, the birch trees have special significance.

Somehow he relates these to a time in his past when things seemed simpler,

less complex, or more innocent.

"left and right"-The trees' ability to bend left and right fascinates Frost

for most trees just stand straight. The poet identifies with this flexibility for

he doesn't feel that he fits on the "left" or the "right" or the "middle", but

bounces back and forth in his opinions and emotions, making it impossible

to tie him down to any one view.

"across the lines"-Frost likes crossing the lines of the norm or the

expected, like a quiet rebel trying to break free from past experiences when

he possibly felt trapped or confined behind the structured walls of his parent's

or community's standards.

"straighter darker trees"-The straighter trees seem to represent the

authority figures in his life who seem dark and foreboding to his young, innocent mind. They want to make him into a straight tree also, but he would much rather be a bending birch.

"some boy's"-Even as an adult, whenever he sees the birches, he hopes that other boys have been swinging on them just as he did when he was young. He is projecting his own longing for freedom upon the other boys, for maybe he still feels resentment at his own lack of ability to completely break away from the straighter, darker trees or authority figures in his life.

"doesn't bend them down to stay"-He is very sensitive to the opinions of others, and makes it clear that his swinging on the birches wasn't meant to cause the trees permanent damage.

"ice storms"-Ice storms in his childhood have evidently left a deep impression on Frost, for he talks about them doing permanent damage. He has learned very early that Nature can sometimes be cruel, and that we are sometimes its helpless victims. The harshness of reality at an early age can rob a child of his innocence and idealism very quickly.

"sunny winter morning"-The fact that he calls it a "sunny winter morning" instead of a cold winter morning could be significant, for even though it is in the middle of a harsh New England winter, he still seems to have a note of optimism.

"click upon themselves"-When they click upon themselves it illustrates

how the flexible person often is very self-critical and changes moods and

opinions with the wind of influences around him.

"many-colored"-The poet may feel "many-colored" in his various,

contrasting opinions. His different colors of emotion also can reflect the fact

that he is attempting to identify with the struggles of all people, regardless of

ethnicity, in his poetry.

"cracks"-A person who is struggling emotionally or mentally is

sometimes said to be "cracking up", and there does seem to be a sense

of breaking apart or breaking away by the poet in the poem.

"crazes"-The word "crazes" can mean break, but it can also mean

crazy. A person who is crazy or crazed is disoriented and cannot seem to

cope with reality. The poet is expressing his desire to go back to a lost

innocence and to escape the present reality.

"enamel"-   The enamel could be a symbol for one's outward

appearance, reputation, or personality that is shown to the world. The

poet may feel threatened by the outside world trying to break through his

"public presence" to try to find the "real" man hidden within.

"sun"-The sun's warmth seems to be something positive here, which

may refer to the poet's warm reception from the critics in the later part of his

life. He feels loved and accepted.

"shattering"-In the early part of the poet's writing career, he was not

well accepted by the critics, and this could be represented by the ice and

snow that has formed on the tree's branches until the sun or positive

reputation comes. He has felt unappreciated for a long time, and this at

times has seemed like a "shattering" or "avalanching" to his psychological

stability.

"sweep away"-Broken glass can represent broken feelings and he does

have a lot of personal and public pain to "sweep away". He has not only had

problems with his writing reputation, but also with the psychological and

physical struggles of his family.

"inner dome of heaven"- The inner dome of heaven can represent

anything that we look up to or put our trust in, and often times even the ones

that we love fall or fail before our eyes, and our own worlds seem to fall apart

at the same time.

"dragged"- When one feels burdened down by the load of their emotion

or mental suffering. it can feel like their spirits are dragging on the ground and

too heavy to move.

"withered bracken"-The withered bracken around the tree can

represent the fact that when one is in deep depression, everything and

everyone around them also seems lifeless, meaningless, or "withered".

"seem not to break"-Unbelievably though it may seem, even when

a person is loaded down with pain or suffering from the greatest abuse, there

is something within the human spirit which helps them to fight back and to

persevere, subconsciously if not consciously.

"so low for long"-When a person has been under a terrible burden for

a long period of time, it can leave permanent damage or scars that can never

heal completely.

"never right themselves"-One of the hardest things for a person who

feels victimized to deal with is the fact that many times they convince

themselves that they must have deserved the abuse or problems, and even

after the abuse or problems are over, their feelings of guilt, self-condemnation,

or inadequacy linger. They may feel that they are "never right" and can never

be made right.

"trunks arching"-It is not just the branches of the tree which are bent,

but the trunk itself. This could refer to the fact that it is not just the outward

personality (the branches) of a person which is affected by traumatic

circumstances, but the very spirit or character of a person's inner self. The

outward body may still appear to be beautiful, while the inward soul is

crippled.

"woods"-The woods can represent trials that one has to face, or the

jungle of fears or fearful things which often seem to surround us.

"years afterwards"-One of the tragic things that happens when a

person has been traumatized is that the effects of that trauma often are felt for

the rest of that person's life.

"leaves"-The leaves are that which a tree produces and when a

person is under a lot of emotional or mental strain, they are not able to be

as productive as they would be otherwise. The leaves also serve the tree

by providing needed nutrients that they get from the sun. When a person's

productive qualities are dragging on the ground of despair, it robs the body,

mind, and spirit from the needed ingredients to stay healthy and to keep

growing.

"like girls"-The poet is a male, and the girls throwing their hair over

their heads can represent to him the feminine side of himself, struggling with

his emotional and creative genius, or what he may perceive as weaknesses

within himself.

"on hands and knees"-"On hands and knees" could represent a

possible feeling of insecurity in his writing abilities or personal acceptance

by the public.

"over their heads"-The poet may have often felt as if he was in

"over his head" as he took on various teaching positions at different

universities and received a multitude of honorary doctorates, for he was

not that well-educated and was merely riding on his reputation as a poet.

"truth"-Truth means reality in this context, and Frost had a difficult

time dealing with reality over a long period of time. He often sought different

forms of escape, such as moving to the country to be a chicken farmer, and

moving from college to college in different teaching positions, as if he was

constantly looking for the perfect utopia, but was always frustrated.

"broke in"-Truth is seen as breaking in here, as if it is not something he

really wants. This is unusual for a poet, for we often think of poets who are

philosophers searching for truth, not trying to run away from it. The paradox

is that truth is both his greatest ambition and his greatest perceived enemy,

and he is always torn between the two.

"matter of fact"-The "matter of fact" side of the poet's personality sees

the ice storm or nature in general in all its cold, scientific reality, but his

creative, imaginative side longs for a more romanticized, ideal nature which

is filled with innocent, child-like joys.

"prefer to have some boy"-Boyhood seems to be a relatively carefree

time for the poet with lots of memories of daydreams and fun, but in reality

Frost had to deal with the death of his father when he was young as well as

other trials. When we are older, sometimes we forget the negative aspects

of our youth, and remember only the pleasant things. Sometimes it works

just the opposite, and only the negative memories remain. Frost remembers

his childhood joys.

"out and in"-The poet had a lot of freedom to go "out and in", but not

without responsibility of fetching the cows. This seems to be an important

aspect of the poet's consciousness, for he often deals with the conflict that

he has between independence and duty in his poems.

"baseball"-There may have been some resentment on Frost's part that

he was never able to participate in the normal school boy games because of

his living out in the country. His father also died when he was young, so he

may have also resented that his dad wasn't around to teach him those games.

"he found himself"-One main question that people often have is "who

am I?" People are sometimes confused as to who they are because of the

complex nature of their personalities, with many conflicting components.

When someone is not sure of who they are or who they want to be, they

often describe themselves as feeling lost, and to find themselves is to find

unity or acceptance of their complex identities.

"could play alone"-When someone is forced to play alone all the time,

it can be positive, in that, it can help to develop creativity, which may have

contributed to Frost becoming a poet. Yet, at the same time, it also tends

to make someone self-centered or incapable of dealing well on a social basis.

Frost seems to have done well socially as long as he was the center of

attention, but was known to be jealous of other writers if the attention was

shifted to them. He also had difficulty relating to his own family members.

"one by one"-When it speaks of his subduing his father's trees one by

one, it implies that he set goals and was determined to do it step by step.

His father's trees are representative of a parent's authority over the child for

they belong to the father, and the child is desperately searching for his own

identity and sense of ownership.

"over and over again"-His father's trees are stiff, which implies that

Frost resented the inflexibility of his father's authority, and did everything that

he could, "over and over again" to break down that authority. When his

father died, it probably was even more important for him to subdue his father's

trees in order to establish himself as the new man of the family.

"conquer"-He is on a quest to be a conqueror, and he is not satisfied till

he reaches that goal. On one hand this could illustrate a great deal of self-

confidence, for he doesn't give up till he is a victor. Yet, on the other hand,

if one always feels that they must dominate others or be the "winner" in order

to feel good about themselves, it can also illustrate a great deal of insecurity

and need for reassurance.

"learned all there was to learn"-Frost quit school because he felt he

had learned everything that he needed to learn in order to be a good writer.

Since that was his primary goal in life, he didn't see the need for the rest.

"not launching out too soon"-Frost was very self-conscious about the

public's perception of his poetry, so before a new book of poetry was

published, he always tried to feel out the audience in advance for how they

would receive the book. He was very conscious about the right timing for a

project.

"carrying the tree away"-In subduing his father's trees, he was not

> trying to completely do away with the past or the authority over him. He just

> wanted to feel a greater sense of control over his own life.

"kept his poise"-Since he was very self-conscious about the opinions

> of others, he tried to always maintain a public poise that would be acceptable.

> His poetry style, then, was even on the more traditional side, for he wanted

> to be a creative individualist without being known as a rebel.

"above the brim"-When you fill a cup above the brim, it gives the

> impression that you are always pushing your limits and living on the edge.

> Frost did like having things his own way, and when anyone tried to limit him,

> he usually found a way to either get around the rules or to go some where

> else where he was in greater control of the situation. Yet, his rebellions were

> always done as if below the surface, away from the eyes of public

> perceptions, like an undertow in an ocean pulling away at the sand beneath,

> yet not visible to the people on the beach.

"feet first"-Frost was like a cat with nine lives, for no matter how many

> times he was knocked down by family trials or the fickle critics, he always

> seemed to land on his feet with the general public.

"kicking his way down"-Climbing the birch trees was in one sense like

> the inspiration of the poet who rises in his insights to sublime levels of truth or

unique perception. Swinging the branches back down to the ground, on the

other hand, was like the poet seeking to bring the heavenly truths down to

an earthly level for the common man to understand. Frost's poetry , then,

teaches us profound truths , yet in a deceptively simple, common manner.

"dream"-In order to be a swinger of birches, you must have the

idealism and strength of youth. When the poet becomes older, he still

admires the visions of his youth and dreams of fulfilling his dreams once

again, but at this time of his life, his focus seems to be shifting toward old

age and death.

"weary of considerations"-As an older person, he is tired of his

having to persevere through his trials, trying to complete the dreams of his

youth. He wishes for a way of escape for a while, but not a permanent one.

"pathless wood"-It might seem strange for Frost to be talking about his

life as a "pathless wood", for he has always known he was meant to be a

writer, and he has achieved a great deal of success in reaching his goal. Yet,

it is often after a person has reached their goals that they feel the greatest lack

of direction for their lives, for in many ways they have nothing else to live for.

Even though Frost knew that he wanted to be a poet, though, he never seemed

to be content in one place. He kept moving from teaching at one college to

another, as if he really didn't have any lasting direction for his life.

"burns and tickles"-Frost's life was a constant contrast of bitter and

sweet, "burns and tickles", for he experienced great alienation and frustration

in his own family life, while achieving great glory in the public domain.

"cobwebs"-While Frost sought to find his way in the "pathless wood",

he often ran into "cobwebs", which looked nice, but caught him off guard

and vulnerable, particularly his family problems.

"weeping"-The poet's one eye is weeping, but not the other one, as if

only part of him is affected by his family struggles, and the other part just

keeps on going and striving for his goals. When one is able to distance

themselves from the pains of others, it is usually because they have learned

to distance themselves even from their own pain by setting up certain defense

mechanisms to protect themselves.

"open"-It is one thing to get hurt unexpectedly and not be aware even

of the source of the pain. It is quite another thing to go into a situation with

your eyes open, knowing that you probably will be hurt, but feel that it is

worth the chance. Frost is not a masochist seeking after pain, but he is not

trying to avoid it completely here either. His climbing the birches can be

seen as a kind of escape from pain, but his swinging the birches down to

the ground is almost like a challenge to life to try to hurt him.

"to get away"-Getting away from the earth awhile is a privilege that

the writer often takes advantage of in his creative imagination. Yet, for the

writer, his works can also become a burden that he feels the need to escape

from, even if just for a short period of time, to renew his inspirational flow

of energy to be able to write again even better. It is a weary thing,

emotionally and mentally, to be constantly sharing in an intimate way all

your deepest thoughts and feelings to a critical public.

"what I wish"-His problems are not so great that he wishes to die, but

he would like to escape them for a while. This is a normal reaction to feeling

overwhelmed by stress, and is not by any means a death wish.

"right place for love"-It is interesting that Frost mentions that his main motivation

for not wanting to die is that "earth's the right place for love." Frost

was not known for being a very loving man, who kept at arms' length from

most people, including his family. He also did not use his creative talents to

write love poems, which would have been natural if this was such a great

priority. It may be that he felt a great need for love because of the death of

his father when he was young, yet was never able to really show that love to

others.

"black branches...snow-white trunk"-The black branches may

represent steps of escape which are "black" in the sense that they might be

perceived as being unacceptable by the critical public or watching loved

ones. Yet, the white trunk to Frost illustrates that even though his methods

might not always be approved by all, his heart and motives are pure.

"toward heaven"-He sees himself as going toward heaven, a positive

direction, what ever it may mean to him. This shows that he has a positive

self-image which doesn't see himself as perfect, but progressing.

"set me down again"-Dreams, visions, poetic inspirations, or

imaginative fantasy worlds are good things to the poet, but he never wants to

have his head so much in the clouds that he loses sight of the simple man or

the true values of life itself. He is proud of his achievements, but never to the

point where he forgets whom he's writing for--the common man.

"one could do worse"-Frost does not enjoy all the negative aspects

of his life, and at times would even like to escape them for a while. Yet, he

understands that to be a swinger of birches involves both the highs and lows

in one's life, and that both have certain value in making us who we are.

Religious Interpretations

"birches"-Trees in general have long been associated with the spiritual

world. Aborigines believe that the spirits live in the trees, the Jewish mystics

often speak of the tree of life, and the Druids use different trees to represent

different stages or levels of learning in their Druidic system. The birch tree

specifically represents the novice to the Druids, while the Yew (Ash) tree

represents the next level, and the oak stands for the highest level of mastery.

Frost's idea of the birch tree to signify youth, then, could possibly have

originated with the Druids.

"left and right"-Religion is often discussed in terms of "left and right"

or liberal versus conservative, and Frost found himself in the middle of this

struggle. He was raised in the Calvinistic Presbyterian tradition, which is

strictly conservative, yet his mother was also a strong believer in Swedenborg,

whose beliefs are very close to the more liberal New Age movement. He

may have found himself swinging back and forth between these two

throughout his life.

"across lines"-Religion tends to rely a lot on lines or rules to live by,

which are sometimes originated in some sacred text, but many times just

made up by people who have the power to control others. Frost may

admire the birch tree because it is constantly breaking across the lines of

the straighter trees, and he may wish that he too could break free from the

confining rules of others.

"straighter darker trees"-The straighter darker trees may represent

those who make the religious rules or who try to enforce them. They may be

straighter, which could be positive, but they are also darker, which implies that

there is a dark side to their "truth", or an emphasis on the negatives or "thou

shalt nots".

"some boy's"-If the birches are symbols for youth or new birth, then

Frost's desire or wish that boys have been swinging on them seems to imply

that they remind him of some very vital spiritual experiences of his own youth,

when the search for truth was still innocent and fresh.

"ice storms"-When a child or some one who has child-like faith

searches for spiritual truth, it can be a very invigorating, renewing experience.

When a more pessimistic adult searches for truth it often becomes an

"ice storm" of negative rationalism or hopeless skepticism. Frost speaks

from the perspective of an adult who has become bogged down by harsh

reality, and longs once again for the faith and idealism of his youth.

"sunny winter morning"-Religion often gives hope to the hopeless

and makes even the worst winter day seem sunny.

"after a rain"-The birch tree grows most often next to a river, and its

> roots love the water. The rain, then, can be seen as something positive to
>
> the tree, even though it is not always appreciated. When someone has faith
>
> or trust in God, even the darkest, dreariest days in their lives can be seen to
>
> have positive results, for the religious person believes that God has a purpose
>
> for everything that happens, good or bad.

"breeze"-The breeze or wind is often interpreted as symbolizing the

> Holy Spirit working in a person's life by Christians. The Druids viewed the
>
> wind or air as being one of the four basic elements of earth, air, fire, and
>
> water, with each one representing a spiritual force in the universe. The breeze
>
> in the poem turns the tree into many colors and cracks the enameled finish on
>
> the bark. If the enamel represents the hardened heart of the individual, then
>
> the wind could be seen as a spiritual force opening the heart to change and
>
> perceived truth.

"sun"-Some religions have actually worshipped the sun as a god. The

> ancient Greeks and Romans worshipped Apollo, the sun god, as one of
>
> their most important deities. The Druids view the sun and the moon as being
>
> the two most important spiritual forces in our world, with the spirit world
>
> flowing between the two. For Christians, the sun is merely a symbol for
>
> God's power. In the poem it is the warmth of the sun, God's power or love,
>
> which helps the ice storms of one's life to melt away.

"crystal shells"-Crystals are important to various religious groups as

    mediums for spiritual transference or power, with crystal balls used in

    fortune telling and communication with the spirits of the dead. In this case,

    though, it is the sun's warmth which causes the crystals to fall away from the

    trees, so it seems here that the crystals are negative things in a person's life

    that need to be shed before growth can occur.

"avalanching"-When snow or ice falls from a tree, sometimes it is in

    little pieces, like shattering glass. Sometimes, though, it is in great heaps,

    like avalanches. If the ice represents the negative things in one's life,

    sometimes God may be seen as chipping away at them piece by piece,

    while other times, it seems as though He is plowing through our life like a

    bulldozer, trying to get rid of a lot of things at once.

"inner dome of heaven"-There are many occult groups which speak

    of the forces of life and spirituality as being in a sphere or a sphere within

    spheres, where the spiritual forces are divided, with the good forces having

    power in the higher half of the sphere, and the dark forces or spirits of the

    dead dwelling in the lower half of the sphere. The inner dome of heaven,

    then, could be referring to the dome of the sphere in the higher half, as if

    Frost feels that his spiritual world is falling apart.

"fallen"-The fall of mankind is a major doctrine in the Bible, for it is the

    fall or the original sin that makes salvation necessary. Although this fall is

usually perceived as being something negative by most Christians, some

believe that it was actually a good thing, because they feel that man is wiser

due to his sin than he would have been otherwise. Many Christians believe

that when you are saved, you cannot lose your salvation. However, some

believe that if you have "fallen" into sin, you can lose your salvation, or be

"fallen" from grace.

"withered bracken"-Withered bracken are ferns, and ferns are used in

the occult world for creating magical potions, or curses upon one's enemies.

If Frost feels that he is being dragged down into the withered bracken,

maybe he feels that he has been cursed, or that God himself is against him.

Since his early childhood was spent in Calvinism, which teaches that people

are predestined by God to either heaven or hell, it is very possible that he felt

that he was not one of the elect.

"seem not to break"-In spite of the heavy burden that one may bear,

one's faith can keep him from breaking completely, for where there is hope,

there is strength.

"bowed"-The rainbow is a major religious symbol, for in the Bible it

says that God created the rainbow as a symbol of hope and as a sign that

God would never again destroy the earth with a flood. A rainbow is created

when the sunshine passes through the water particles in the air, which reveals

the many colors within light that we normally cannot see. The sun is a symbol

for God Almighty and the water is a symbol for the Holy Spirit, so the rainbow

is a symbol for how the multi-faceted beauty of God is made manifest through

the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

"so low for long"-When some one has been burdened down for a long

time by pain, depression, or abuse , they often will still bear the emotional

scars of their pain long after the cause of the pain has stopped. Yet, it is also

possible that a person may be healed emotionally through their faith in God.

"leaves"-If a person is burdened down by their pain or sorrow, their

"leaves", or their productivity, will also be low. Yet, if they are able to place

their burden in God's hands, they can concentrate on reaching out to others

around them.

"like girls"-The Bible calls the church the "bride of Christ", so in this

way all believers, male and female, are "like girls". This can be looked at in

a negative way, in that, it implies a sexist attitude on the part of Christians, as

if women should always be the submissive one in a relationship. However, it

can also be seen in a positive light, for if all believers are supposed to be the

bride, this could imply that we are all supposed to be givers and nurturers of

life and love.

"on hands and knees"-Almost all religions around the world emphasize kneeling as

a way of showing honor and submission to their God. In fact,

many Moslems go on a pilgrimage to their holy place while crawling on

hands and knees for miles.

"throw their hair"-A woman's long hair is spoken of in the Bible as

being her glory, as well as a way of showing submission.

"truth"-Truth means different things to different people. To scientists,

only things which can be objectively tested and observed with the senses can

be considered fact or truth. To believers of all religions, truth also is based on

personal experience, even if no one else has had the same experience.

Religious truth is usually based on a combination of what one observes to be

a consistency between what a sacred book or person says and one's own

experience. Believers would also say that they know what is true because

there is some kind of personal communication between God or one of his

messengers and their own mind and spirit.

"broke in"-Not everyone welcomes what is claimed to be religious

truth, for they feel that it is irrational or that it is an intrusion upon their

values and lifestyle. People do not like being told that they are wrong, and

believers of various religions are often criticized as being self-righteous

because they go around telling other people that their way is the only way,

and everyone else is wrong.

"matter of fact"-The conflict presented here is between realism and romanticism,

whether people prefer to look at the harsh, pessimistic side of

life or the idealistic hopes and dreams of all. The poet here, as most religious

people, prefer to think of themselves as being optimists or romanticists.

"far from town"-The reason that the boy is able to take the time to

enjoy swinging on tree branches is because he is too far from town to enjoy

organized group recreation, like baseball. Although some may feel that the

boy was deprived of normal childhood social development, there are many

religious people who value a child's communion with nature and nature's

God as being more important.

"whose only play"-The boy in the poem has taken time out from his

work to play and swing on the branches. There are some religious groups

that frown upon play and do not allow their members to participate in any

kind of entertainment or recreation as being too frivolous or even immoral.

"he found himself"-A person who is not a Christian is often said to be

"lost". So, when someone becomes saved, they have been "found" by God.

However, paradoxically, if one is to truly find oneself spiritually, they must

first "lose themselves", or deny themselves, in order to find God or fulfillment.

"could play alone"-Solitude is usually associated with loneliness and

feeling unloved. In many religious societies, such as monasteries and religious

communes, however, solitude is sought after as a means of escaping the evils

of worldliness, of taking time for quiet meditation, of seeking retribution for

past sins, or of committing oneself completely to serving and learning about

God.

"he subdued"-When God created the world, he commanded Adam

and Eve to "subdue the earth" or have dominion over all creation. In the

poem, the boy is subduing his father's trees, one by one. Since God is our

heavenly father, we also could be seen as subduing our father's trees, as we

seek to take care of nature, using it wisely, and using our God-given intellects

to devise better ways to make it more productive or fruitful.

"stiffness"-It is possible that the trees are symbolic of the commandments of God,

and the boy's trying to subdue them could be either a positive

or a negative thing. His riding them down over and over again could refer to

his trying to memorize or learn the words of God and master them until they

become a vital part of his life. Yet, it could also imply that he is purposely

disobeying the commandments because he feels that they are too legalistic

or "stiff".

"conquer"-The word "conquer" implies that there is a battle going on,

and religious believers often portray themselves as being in a spiritual battle

against Satan, evil, heresy, or immoral people trying to defeat the believers

in their spiritual quest. This "we versus them" mentality, though, often is the

cause of divisions within churches, communities, countries, and between

nations. The reason that the Jews and Arabs, or Irish Catholics and

Protestants, seem to always be fighting with one another is not just a social

confrontation, but a religious battle against what is perceived as a threat to

one's religious beliefs.

"learned all there was to learn"-One of the problems within religion

has always been that some people feel that they "know it all", or that they are

right and everyone else is wrong if they do not agree with them. Many feel

that we will not "know it all" until we reach heaven. Others believe in

reincarnation, where we keep on returning to the earth as new

creations, constantly evolving or growing physically and spiritually

throughout eternity, never knowing it all because the all grows with us.

"not launching out too soon"-Patience is a virtue, and yet is considered one of

the most difficult virtues to live by. Patience is not just a matter

of waiting for something that we want, which is difficult enough in our self-

centered, greedy society. It is also a matter of quietly enduring and not giving

up when we face trials in our lives. We live in a society where many people

feel that they have been victimized in some way by family members, crime,

the government, or even God himself. People have come to the point that

they are tired of putting up with all the garbage from others, and they are

starting to fight back. It is impossible to be patient when you are filled with

rage.

"kept his poise"-Keeping one's poise has a lot to do with self-control,

and self-denial is usually one of the main beliefs in most religions. However,

so many religious groups today emphasize raising money, building bigger and

better sanctuaries, and having more power, that one might conclude that the value of this important belief has somehow been lost in the translation from God's commands to the church's priorities.

"top branches"-One of the biggest problems in various religious groups

is pride. There is so much competition between religious groups that many of them, even if they believe in the same basic doctrines, will have nothing to do with each other because they don't belong to the same formalized group or organization. They all want to be on top and even argue about who is the most spiritual as if spirituality was a contest that they were all trying to win.

"above the brim"-There is a tendency by many believers to try to live

on the edge, or to get as close to worldliness as they possibly can without going over their self-determined limit of what might be considered sin or too great a sin for their conscience to live with. They want to live "above the brim" of the commandments, but not so far that it overflows and messes up their lives. Their lives are like a game of tag, and as long as they don't get caught, it's considered all right.

"flung outward"-When the boy is at the top, he kicks himself out-

ward, but he keeps holding onto the branch as he swings down. If the tree trunk symbolizes the commandments or creed of the church, then this could represent how many people have rebelled or no longer attend church, but still consider themselves to be members or believers. So, in a sense, they

are still holding onto the branch.

"dream"-The poet grew up in a Calvinistic church, with Swedenborgian influences.

When he was older, however, he grew further and further

away from the church. Maybe here he is like many people who talk about

going back to church "someday", especially when they are undergoing vari-

ous problems which they might need help from God with.

"weary of considerations"-Many people seek religion for two reasons:

help in time of trouble and the need for direction in their lives. Frost speaks

of life being like a "pathless wood" burdened down by "weary considerations."

Some people seek spiritual guidance through talking to religious leaders or

reading a sacred book. Some seek help directly from God through prayer.

Others go to psychics, fortune tellers, or horoscopes for help in making

decisions.

"pathless wood"-If you feel that you are following a "pathless wood",

you are bound to have "cobwebs" break across your face, for cobwebs are

symbols for temptations or trials which Satan has planned for your destruc-

tion. He tries to deceive you to think that his ways are filled only with plea-

sure, and it is not until you are in his control that you realize that you have

been trapped.

"burns and tickles"-Religious people experience trials just like

everyone else, but they try to see God's hand working somewhere behind

the scenes trying to teach them something, so even the worst experience can

  take on a positive perspective.

"cobwebs"-Satan is often compared to a spider in religious symbolism,

  and the cobweb is compared to his temptations. Just as the cobweb is

  beautiful, so temptations often lure us into their many pleasures. Just as the

  cob-web is really a trap, so temptations are traps to lure us into Satan's or sin's

  destructive control in our lives.

"weeping"-When a person is lost or living in sin, they are often

  compared to a blind man, for they are unable to see things clearly from a

  spiritual perspective. In the poem, the boy's one eye has been hurt by a

  branch when he is swinging down, which causes it to weep, and fogs up

  his ability to see.

"to get away"-There is a feeling on the part of a lot of religious people

  that this world is not really their home, but merely a temporary journey on

  their way to an everlasting heaven. So, when they encounter trials in their life,

  there is often a special longing that they could possibly go to heaven right then.

  Many people, such as those in the New Age movement, speak of experiences

  that they have had where their spirits have left their bodies for a short period

  of time in order to visit and commune with the spirit world in another

  dimension. It may be that Frost was longing for this kind of

  out-of-body experience here, for he does not want to die, he just wants

to escape for awhile.

"may no fate"-Fate is an interesting term to use for God here, for it implies that

God has complete control over our lives, and that we don't really

have a whole lot of say in the manner except to express our wishes.

"misunderstand me"-The view of God that is expressed here is a

negative one for it implies that God sometimes might willfully choose to

misunderstand people, which he would only do if he didn't really care about

people or the truth. This goes against the orthodox view of God as being

both truth and love.

"snatch me away"-The term "snatch me away" implies almost a kid-

napping, as if God has no right to take someone's life. According to the

orthodox view, however, God, as the creator and father of all living things,

has a right to do whatever he wants whenever he wants to. Beyond this is

the fact that if he is our heavenly father, he is not really snatching us away,

but merely bringing us home to be with himself.

"where it's likely to go better"-One of the best experiences that we

can have on this earth is the love that we can share with others. However, if

God is love, one can hardly say that one can experience love better on the

earth than in the presence of God. It's hard to think about losing something

or someone, though, that we know loves us now in order to possibly gain

something that we hope for, but still lies in the realm of the unknown or

unexperienced.

"black branches...snow-white trunks"-If climbing the birch tree

> toward heaven is a symbol for seeking spiritual transcendence, then climbing
>
> on "black branches" might be referring to trials along their spiritual quest, and
>
> the "white trunk" might imply the purity of their journey.

"toward heaven"-Catholics believe that the saved go to heaven, the

> truly evil go to hell, and everyone else goes to purgatory. Purgatory is sort of
>
> a "half-way-house", where people have a second chance to prove their
>
> worthiness to get to heaven. The prayers of those loved ones still on
>
> earth also have an impact on whether someone can move from
>
> purgatory to heaven. Protestants do not believe in purgatory. They
>
> believe that when you are saved, you are moving toward heaven in this
>
> life, but salvation is based on God's grace, not good works. Those who
>
> believe in reincarnation believe that one progressively moves toward
>
> heaven or a place of complete purity and bliss in one's spiritual
>
> consciousness called Nirvana as one moves through various levels
>
> of physical, emotional, and spiritual evolution. For some, heaven is an actual
>
> location where one goes to when they die. For others, it is merely a state of
>
> mind.

"set me down again"-Even though our entire life is a spiritual journey,

> we are not always in a climbing situation. Sometimes we are allowed to rest
>
> or brought back to earth where we can regain our strength and prepare for

the next battle or quest.

"both going and coming"-Those who believe in reincarnation believe

that a person's spirit leaves their dead body, but then returns to the earth in

another physical form, in order to give them another chance to grow spiritually.

"one could do worse"-Though we may complain at times about the

difficulty of our journey as we struggle for truth and spiritual growth, we still

have it much better than those who reject the spiritual light that has been given

to them.

Sample Student Responses from the

FEMINIST LITERARY PERSPECTIVE

"birches"- These trees seem to represent the "male" authority figures in his life who seem dark and foreboding to his young, innocent mind. They want to make him into a straight tree (a stereotypical, sexist male) also, but he would rather be a bending birch, or flexible person.

Student Responses-

--I believe that they want him to stand up for what he believes in; not bending in any way.

--I don't think that men are sexist any more than women.

--Birches I believe stands for believing. You don't get swayed too easily one way.

"left to right"- The term left is often used to represent liberals, with the right representing conservatives. The impression that many men have is that feminists are all liberals. This is not true, for women on both sides are fighting for the equal rights of all.

Student Responses-

--Strongly disagree -The direction in which the tree moves represents his personal struggle and is not an evaluation or stereo type to the feminist movement

--I agree that this refers to his personal struggle but also that it could mean a struggle between the right and the left politically which could include feminism. I do, however, believe that the feminists have given themselves a bad name and that not all women are fighting for the equal rights of all but for a personal gain.

--I believe people are pulled in many directions and this illustrates that. The reason a birch would bend left or right is because that is the way the wind is blowing. This can be compared to people who form their point of view by which way society is blowing the wind.

--For the feminists--I feel that this means from "good to bad".

--I disagree, people may have indecisive personalities, but not fixed on specific ideas.

--People are pulled in many different directions. I don't think that this statement of "left to right" has anything to do with women's rights.

"across the lines"- Men often try to keep women trapped in boxes of submission. Women who are fighting for equal rights must often bend the man-made rules and cross the lines of oppression into true freedom.

Student Responses-

--From a woman's perspective, I really don't think men are as control-hungry as the women's movement would like us to believe. Men are the dominant sex; however, this is not a dictatorial relationship. This is just the way it is and women need to accept the fact that we are a weaker sex. Keep in mind I said weaker - not lesser.

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--I disagree with the response from the student above me by saying that women are a weaker sex. The only way I can see that being true is by the physical aspects. Women do not have to take the back burner due to the fact that society defines males as dominant and women as a weaker sex.

-- Response to Feminist View- I believe the feminist perspective for this line is too strong. I don't believe all men trap women in submission. This statement is a stereotype.

--I do not believe that all men use power to their advantage, but many men do. Just because a women is fighting for equal rights does not mean she is a feminist. Ex: The work force many men are paid higher for their job than women are that can do the same thing.

--This is the kind of response that the feminist would want you to believe. Sometimes this is true, but not for the most part.

--Even though it is true that not all men oppress all women, it is also true that many women "feel" oppressed and trapped, and men should be more sensitive to this feeling.

"straighter darker trees"- The men are the straighter darker trees who in their proud rigidity refuse to be flexible or sensitive to the needs and rights of women.

<u>Student Responses-</u>

--I think that this view is a false stereotype of men. Some men may be insensitive, but this does not represent all men.

--I agree this is a little harsh on the men. I am a female and I feel that men can be flexible if they wanted to be. I do feel that a lot, not all men can, at times, be insensitive to the

feelings of women. Most men claim that they want to give the woman everything she needs. That is not insensitive.

--Not all men are this insensitive and rigid, but many are. I think there are more men like the feminists perspective described than are not.

--Men aren't the only ones who can be proud and insensitive. Women also can be self-centered and hard-hearted.

"some boy's"- Frost's hope is that "some boys" have been swinging and bending the trees. This is a sexist statement which completely leaves girls out and implies that boys should have a much greater freedom to enjoy adventurous pursuits than girls should. If the birch trees are symbols for women, the poem also implies that Frost may wish that women be bent down and used for a young man's pleasure.

Student Responses-

--I disagree that this is a sexist statement. I think that boys would be more likely to play in the trees than girls would. That is not to say that girls would not or could not play in the trees. As far as it meaning "that women be bent down and used for a young man's pleasure," what a ridiculous thought.

--I think that in the time that Frost wrote this poem, there was a much more sexist feeling in just about everyone of the time. I do feel that he probably meant that the birches represent women and that they should be used for young men's pleasure.

--Women should be used for young men's pleasure. In today's society women have gotten out of control with regards to this equal right stuff. Ever since the women have been

fighting for equal rights the family unit has gone to junk. Family values have dropped, our kids today have no values or morals all because the women wants equal rights. So it is the women of America who are bring this nation down.

--I do not agree with the feminists perspective. For the response above, it sounded like a man speaking. It is men like that who have forced women to get out of control. If women do not fight for what they deserve, men will not help.

--Boys should have more freedom than girls because it is important that we protect the girls from sexual abuse by strangers.

--some ladies may be upset by the use of the word boys but boys are more likely to play in trees.

--I would disagree with this being a sexist statement. It is just more likely for boys to be playing in the trees than women, it doesn't mean that women can't.

Appendix E

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent for Participants
of Investigative Projects

Title of Project: The Effectiveness of Learning Literary Theories about Poetry through an
Interactive, Multimedia, Computerized Learning Environment

Investigator: Tim Paulsen

I. The Purpose of this Research Project

Many students find it very difficult understanding the complex meanings of poetry.

The computer program involved in this research project allows the student to explore

various interpretations of a poem by clicking on "hot words" within the poem which have

different meanings. The student then has the opportunity to type in their own

interpretation of those words, or a critical response of the interpretations that have been

presented. The purpose of this research project is to analyze the effectiveness of such a

computer program in the teaching of literary theories, and to explore the many ways that

such a program might change the students' perceptions of literature and of life. There will

be 75 students who go through the computer program.

II. Procedures

Before the students go through the computer program, they will be given a pre-

test to determine their knowledge of literary theories. Ten of the total 75 students will

also participate in long interviews before going through the program to determine their basic understandings of how poetic language and meaning work together, and their ability to perceive various interpretations of a poem from different perspectives. After they go through the computer program, these same students will be interviewed again to determine what changes have been made in their poetic understandings. All 75 students will be given a post-test to help measure the amount of learning that has taken place. For the purpose of this particular research assignment, however, only the interviews will be evaluated.

III. Risks

Since there is no grade given for the program, the pre and post tests, or the interviews, there are no negative repercussions that can result from going through the program. The responses of each student will be anonymous. There are no right or wrong answers in the program or interviews, just opinions, so the students do not need to feel intimidated. The professor will be in the office during the time that the student goes through the program to observe the learning process and to answer any questions that need to be answered orally. Each student will go through the program one at a time, so the students do not need to be afraid of embarrassment from other students. Each student will sign up for a time to go through the program outside of class time, so they will not miss out on any class activity, and it will be done at their convenience. All of the participants will be consenting adults.

IV. Benefits of this Project

Each student should learn more about literary theories, the complex meanings of poetry, how to perceive literature from other perspectives than their own, and how to write out their own opinions in effective ways, if all goes as planned. There are no monetary rewards or grades given for participating in this project. However, if they complete the program, it should help them to be more effective when they write their analytical papers on the literature that they have been reading The results of this program will be written up and hopefully published for the benefit of other educators who may be looking for new, effective ways of teaching literary theories. If the students who participate would like to receive a copy of a summary of this research when it is done, they may do so by contacting the professor.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

When a student finishes going through the computer program, their responses will be saved under an identification number which only they know. When all of the responses are completed, a printed copy will be given to each student so that they can use the responses when they write their papers later on, and when they participate in group discussions in class. They will be able to identify their own response by the identification number, but the other students will only be able to identify their own, so there is no need for embarrassment. The student's name will never be used in the final evaluations or any published materials which may follow. Of course, the students who participate in the

interviews will be known by the teacher, but they will not be identified by name to any others.

VI. Compensation

There will be no compensation for going through this program other than the benefits gained through becoming more educated.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

Students are completely free to withdraw from this program without penalty, and they are also free to only answer those questions that they wish to answer, without any negative results.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved , as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and by the Department of Education.

IX. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

a. Taking a pre-test lasting one hour during class time.

b. If I am one of the ten who will be interviewed, participating in a one hour interview with the professor before going through the computer program and a second one-hour interview after the program during times outside of class time.

c. Going through a computer program for one hour to learn about literary theories at a scheduled time outside of class.

d. Taking a post-test lasting one hour during class time

X. Subject's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

_____   _____

        signature   date.

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

_____   _____

    Investigator   phone

_____   _____

    Faculty Advisor   phone

_____   _____

    E.R. Stout   phone

    Chair, IRB

    Research Division

Pretest on Literary Theories

Read the following poem all the way through one time, then come back to the beginning

and concentrate on only the highlighted words. If you feel that a certain word or phrase

can be interpreted from a feminist perspective, then circle the "F" at the end of that line of

poetry. If you think that it can be interpreted from a psychological perspective, circle the

"P". If you think that it can be interpreted from a religious perspective, circle the "R".

For some phrases, you may feel that none of the perspectives apply. When this happens,

circle the "N". It is also possible that you may wish to circle more than one perspective

for each phrase.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

by

T. S. Eliot

Let us go, then, you and I,

When the evening is spread out against the sky   F   P   R   N

Like a patient etherised upon a table;

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,   F   P   R   N

The muttering retreats

Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels   F   P   R   N

And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells;

Streets that follow like a tedious argument

Of insidious intent

To lead you to an overwhelming question. . .

Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"

Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go   F   P   R   N

Talking of Michelangelo.   F   P   R   N

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, F   P   R   N

The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panesF   P   R   N

Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening

Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,

Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys, F   P   R   N

Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,

And seeing that it was a soft October night,   F   P   R   N

Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time

For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,

Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;

There will be time, there will be time

To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;   F   P   R   N

There will be time to murder and create,   F   P   R   N

And time for all the works and days of hands

That lift and drop a question on your plate;

Time for you and time for me,

And time yet for a hundred indecisions,   F   P   R   N

And for a hundred visions and revisions,   F   P   R   N

Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go

Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time

To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"   F   P   R   N

Time to turn back and descend the stair,   F   P   R   N

With a bald spot in the middle of my hair--   F   P   R   N

(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")   F   P   R   N

My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,

My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin--

(The will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")

Do I dare

Disturb the universe?   F   P   R   N

In a minute there is time

For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:--

Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,   F   P   R   N

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;   F   P   R   N

I know the voices dying with a dying fall   F   P   R   N

Beneath the music from a farther room.

So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all--   F   P   R   N

The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,   F   P   R   N

And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,   F   P   R   N

When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,   F   P   R   N

Then how should I begin

To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?   F   P   R   N

And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all--

Arms that are braceleted and white and bare   F   P   R   N

(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)   F   P   R   N

Is it perfume from a dress   F   P   R   N

That makes me so digress?   F   P   R   N

Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.

And should I then presume?

And how should I begin?

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets   F   P   R   N

And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes

Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?. . . F   P   R   N

I should have been a pair of ragged claws   F   P   R   N

Scuttling across the floors of silent seas. . .   F   P   R   N

Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,

Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?   F   P   R   N

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,   F   P   R   N

Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald)

    brought in upon a platter,   F   P   R   N

I am no prophet--and here's no great matter;

I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,   F   P   R   N

And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and

    snicker,   F   P   R   N

And in short, I was afraid. . .   F   P   R   N

. . . Would it have been worth while,

To have bitten off the matter with a smile   F   P   R   N

To have squeezed the universe into a ball   F   P   R   N

To roll it toward some overwhelming question,   F   P   R   N

To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,   F   P   R   N

Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"--

. . .No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;   F   P   R   N

Am an attendant lord . . .

Deferential, glad to be of use,   F   P   R   N

Politic, cautious, and meticulous;   F   P   R   N

. . .Almost, at times, the Fool.   F   P   R   N

. . .I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.	F	P	R	N
I do not think that they will sing to me.	F	P	R	N
. . . We have lingered in the chambers of the sea				
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown	F	P	R	N
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.	F	P	R	N

PRE-TEST WRITTEN RESPONSES

For each one of the following phrases from the poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," write out what you think might be one possible interpretation of the phrase from the perspective which is in parentheses. Each interpretation should be no less than one sentence and no more than one paragraph. Try to write from the perspective of one who believes in a feminist, psychological, or religious perspective instead of necessarily using your own perspective. If you cannot imagine how to interpret the phrase from a particular perspective, just leave the space blank.

1. restless nights in one-night cheap hotels- (religious)

2. women come and go talking of Michelangelo- (feminist)-

3. to prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet- (psychological)-

4. time yet for a hundred indecisions- (psychological)-

5. a hundred visions and revisions- (religious)-

6. Do I dare disturb the universe? (feminist)-

7. I have measured out my life with coffee spoons. (feminist)-

8. The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase. (religious)-

9. I am pinned and wriggling on the wall. (psychological)-

10. Arms that are braceleted and white and bare. (feminist)-

11. Is it perfume from a dress that makes me so digress? (feminist)-

12. I should have been a pair of ragged claws scuttling across the floors of silent seas. (psychological)-

13. Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter. (religious)

14. I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker. (religious)-

15. I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be. (psychological)-

16. I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each. I do not think they will sing to me. (feminist)-

17. sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown. (feminist)-

18. till human voices wake us, and we drown. (psychological)-

19. To have squeezed the universe into a ball, to roll it toward some overwhelming question. (religious)-

20. There will be time to murder and create. (feminist)-

Samples of

Pretest Written Responses

1. **"restless nights in one-night cheap hotels"- (religious)**

   a. 0081- The character can't find peace in the wicked lifestyle he lives.

   b. 0099- A person feels ashamed to be there. The hotel could be a shack up place for non-married people, and because of feeling ashamed, they feel restless.

   c. 0530- Passing in the shadows through the valley of death.

   d. 1037- Religion, Christianity is supposed to be peaceful, but some people strive, and are unhappy, and satisfaction is only temporary.

   e. 1455- Could be talking about someone's conscience getting hold of them. They can't sleep because they know they should be doing something wrong. They know God is watching.

   f. 1642- As a religious perspective, all I can think of is Jesus' birth and that there was no room in the inn, so they went to a stable (one night, cheap). Hotels could be an inference to this place. However, their stay wasn't completely restless.

   g. 2600- The birth of Jesus.

2. **"women come and go talking of Michelangelo"- (feminist)**

    a.   0081- Why can't it be "men come and go speaking of Betsy Ross?"

    b.   0530- Women might have thought Michelangelo was a pervert since he was fascinated with the body, particularly unclothed or partially clothed.

    c.   0811- Women come and go, but men are remembered forever.

    d.   1037- Michelangelo could be a lady's ideal man. He was a universal man, with many skills. Definitely offered a lot of security.

    e.   1341- I suppose this would be some kind of put down for women. Women shouldn't be looked at as though we have nothing better to do than just chit chat.

    f.   1575- Women come around, but don't pay any attention to him. They all are talking of someone greater than him.

    g.   1642- I see this as women talking about men in general; for example, the "Don Juan" type, painted perfection—just a beautiful man.

    h.   2534- Depicting women as constant talkers. Regardless of the group of females they are always gossiping.

    i.   3065- The women were somewhat educated to be talking about Michelangelo the great sculptor.

3. "to prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet"- (psychological)

    a. 0081- He wants to put on a false self-image to associate with others.

    b. 0099- To get ready to meet new challenges daily.

    c. 0152- Describes how people before they go out or wherever they go, put the face on that they want people to see, usually not what the person really is all about.

    d. 0475- It's saying that you should put on a mask when talking with other people.

    e. 0530- Preparing your child to meet certain people and how to react to them or act with them as they grow up.

    f. 0811- It could mean that a person is not being themself. They don't want other people to know what they're really going thru.

    g. 1037- Talks about getting yourself emotionally ready to be "basically acceptable in other's eyes. Things like courtesy.

    h. 1341- When we get ready to meet others we feel a need to put on some facade. We feel a need to be loved and accepted and if need be, we'll be someone else.

    i. 1642- This, to me, is getting mentally prepared for the faces of life one is required to encounter each day.

    j. 2490- To not be real, a chameleon personality to everyone that you meet.

Appendix H

A Sample Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Please start by introducing yourself.

Jen: My name is Jen.

Interviewer: What is your major and year in school?

Jen: Um, I guess I'm a senior. My major is elementary education.

Interviewer: What was your background in English? What kind of experience did you have in both high school and college?

Jen: It was a positive experience, for the most part, depending on the teacher. Whether you like a subject or not depends a lot on whether you have a teacher who is excited about their subject, and I've had a few who were very good.

Interviewer: Do you like to read?

Jen: Yes.

Interviewer: What kinds of stories do you like to read?

Jen: Mostly mysteries. Stephen King is my favorite author.

Interviewer: What is there about his stories that you like?

Jen: I like the suspense, and the way that the author pulls you into the stories emotionally. I like to be scared.

Interviewer: Why would you want to be afraid?

Jen: Because I like to be stretched to my limits to find out what's there. I like living on the edge because I learn more about myself and my friends that way. You learn a lot about someone when you find out what their breaking point is, even if it is just through a fictional story.

Interviewer: Does reading poetry ever bring you to that edge, like a story does?

Jen: Not usually, but there have been a few times.

Interviewer: Would you mind sharing those examples?

Jen: Uh, I'm not sure I should. You have to understand that this happened in the past, okay?

Interviewer: Okay.

Jen: Well, I, uh, used to go to this coffee house with my friends. We used to sit around smoking pot, while different jazz musicians came to play on the weekends. One time, though, this guy recited his poetry while the musicians played. It was awesome. I've never heard anything like it. It was like his soul just left his body and floated around the room, and my soul rose to dance with his in the air. It was definitely a spiritual experience. It was like making love to a god. Do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: No, I can't say that I do. Do you think it was the poetry or the drugs that made you feel that way?

Jen: Both, can't you see? It was like the music and the poetry worked together to seduce me.

Interviewer: Do you think of other music as being poetry?

Jen: Oh, sometimes. It depends. Sometimes the words of songs are meaningless repetition put to a beat. A lot of times songs are just like diaries, where the singer is just using the song to whine about all their problems, or use words to get all their anger out at the world. It's not really poetry, it's just self-expressionism. Sometimes, though, you hear a song that really speaks to your spirit, and your whole body and soul just cries out, "wow!" That kind of song is <u>real</u> poetry.

Interviewer: What is your definition of poetry, then?

Jen: Anything, it doesn't have to be words. It might be a beautiful picture, or a child running barefoot through a meadow chasing butterflies. It might be two people making love, or a just a look of the eyes between close friends. Poetry doesn't have to fit any kind of form, it just has to communicate a deeper level of truth or beauty than you would find some place else. It has to open up your eyes to something new.

Interviewer: Have you ever tried writing poetry yourself?

Jen: Oh, yes. But I'm never satisfied. I try to create something really beautiful or profound, and I always come across as sounding so trite or shallow. Someday, though, I'd like to write a novel. I think that I could tell a pretty good story.

Interviewer: Do you think that stories and poems should be written with some kind of message that the writer is trying to get across about life?

Jen: I think that every writer has some message or theme that they are trying to get across, but I don't think that a writer should be preachy about it. The message should just come out in the flow of the story, and not be just tacked on at the end.

Interviewer: Do you think that our goal as readers should be to try to figure out what the writer was trying to say?

Jen: Of course, but that's not the only reason to read something. Sometimes I like reading a story just for the fun of it, without looking for any deep meaning. Like when I'm lying on the beach trying to get a suntan and stud watching. I want to be able to drift in and out of a story without feeling that I missed anything important.

Interviewer: When you do read something and you are looking for the message, do you consider the author's original intention or message as being the only true meaning of a story?

Jen: No way! I don't think even the author truly knows what they mean by something. Like when I write something down in my diary, and then I go back and read it again later. Sometimes it really blows me away, and I think, wow, did I write that? It means more the second time than it did the first. It's like the work has a life of its own and it becomes more than I meant it to.

Interviewer: How would you feel if you wrote something, and when someone else read it, they totally missed the meaning that you intended?

Jen: Ha, Ha! I see what you mean. I would probably be upset because I would feel that I had failed as a writer to communicate myself clearly, or that the other person was just sifting their brain through a straw and didn't have a clue.

Interviewer: So, you do believe that the author's view is the only right view?

Jen: Ha, Ha! Just when I'm the author. I think that I would take it personally. But when I'm reading someone else's work, I think that everyone has a right to their own interpretation of what the work means to them.

Interviewer: Do you think of yourself as being a tolerant person?

Jen: I try to be. The only people that I'm not tolerant of are those who are not tolerant of others.

Interviewer: In the pretest that you took, you were asked to identify different phrases in a poem that could be interpreted from different perspectives. What did you think of this pretest?

Jen: I thought it was fun, like a jigsaw puzzle or searching for hidden treasures. I don't know if I got any of them right, but it was fun trying.

Interviewer: One of the perspectives that you were supposed to look for was the feminist perspective. What does that mean to you?

Jen: Basically, it means standing up for the rights of women, but I think that some women carry this too far. They are so angry at men that they are not just pro-women, they're anti-men. I'm pro-people. I'm for everyone's rights, not just women's.

Interviewer: How would you react to a poem or story that was written from a feminist perspective?

Jen: I think that I would try to understand where they were coming from and why they felt the way that they did. That doesn't mean that I would agree with them, but I would try to understand them.

Interviewer: Do you feel that men have oppressed women in our society?

Jen: Yes, but I don't think it's all the men's fault. Most of the time it's the girl's mom who has taught her to be submissive to the men. She tells the girl that if she wants to get married to a good man, she better do whatever he wants. It's some stupid game that women play to keep from being an old maid, and the men merely take advantage of this.

Interviewer: Do you think that a poem written from a feminist perspective might help the male readers to be more sensitive to the needs of women?

Jen: Ha, Ha! Not the guys that I know. If they read a poem by a feminist, it would just make them madder at them than they already are. The guys I know are only sensitive to women's needs when they want something from them, if you know what I mean. Then, once they get it, they're not nice anymore. I don't think reading a poem would change that.

Interviewer: Don't you think that's a stereotype?

Jen: Ha, Ha! You got me! But I didn't say that all men were like that. I just said that the guys that I know are that way.

Interviewer: Okay. What about the psychological perspective? How would you define that?

Jen: I don't really know a whole lot about psychology. Isn't that just about this guy named Frood, or something? I don't know. It has something to do with blaming all of our problems on sex, doesn't it?

Interviewer: That's one kind of psychology, but not the only one.

Jen: Well, I don't believe in that view at all. I mean, lots of people have problems even before they have sex. So how can you say that sex caused them? I think our society places too much emphasis on sex, so people, like psychologists, start seeing sex where ever they look. It's stupid.

Interviewer: All right, and what about the religious perspective? What does that mean to you?

Jen: Anything that has to do with God, or our relationship to God. Spiritual things.

Interviewer: How would you react to a poem that presented a view of God which was different from your own?

Jen: I'm not sure. There are some things that I feel very strongly about, and I would probably feel threatened by anyone who was attacking my beliefs. But, there are a lot of

things that I'm just not sure of myself, and I would be interested to read other peoples' opinions about those things. I don't claim to know it all. Faith is a gutwrench, not a jack hammer.

Interviewer: I'm sorry. I've never heard that expression before. Would you mind explaining it to me?

Jen: It's something that my dad always used to say. It means that faith is supposed to be a personal thing, not something that you try to force on someone else. It's a gutwrench because it helps to tighten up your own spirituality. It's not meant to be a jackhammer, because jackhammers are used to break other things apart, or to force themselves into things outside of themselves. You shouldn't try to force your beliefs on other people.

Interviewer: It sounds like your dad is a very wise man

Jen: Was. He died a year ago.

Interviewer: I'm sorry.

Jen: That's okay.

Interviewer: Why don't we take a look at the pre-test for a few minutes. Look through the poem and pick out any highlighted phrase and try to interpret it according to any of the three interpretations.

Jen: "one night cheap hotels". I think this probably could be interpreted from a feminist perspective. Since the poet is a guy, his idea of a cheap hotel probably involves more than just a low price. It could imply that he had a prostitute, or a "cheap woman". A lot of

guys just think of women as being toys to bring men pleasure. They don't care about what it does to the woman's own self-esteem. They just want a cheap thrill without any commitment. They think that driving through life is just a matter of using their "gear-shift", and they don't care who they run over in the process.

Interviewer: Do I sense some personal anger here?

Jen: YES! YES! YES! That's all I have to say about it!

Interviewer: All right. Why don't you find another phrase to interpret, then.

Jen: Oh, yeah, okay. Let's see… "pinned on the wall". When I was young, my mom and I use to have a butterfly collection. We used to catch them in a net and then put them in a jar with some medicine in it to kill it before it damaged its wings. Then we mounted them on a piece of Styrofoam with pins. This guy who wrote this poem might feel that he is like one of those butterflies being put up for display before others to see, and he doesn't appreciate it. He's tired of being judged by self-righteous people who are trying to live his life for him, and judging him for every little mistake that he makes.

Interviewer: Which one of the three perspectives have you been using?

Jen: I'm not sure it fits any of these three. My own perspective, I guess. Is that all right?

Interviewer: Sure. Try another phrase.

Jen: I'll try "measured out life with coffee spoons". I think there are probably two different kinds of people in the world-- the bulldozers and the coffee spoons. The bulldozers like to take life in giant mouth fulls. Unfortunately, they often gulp up or hurt

other people in the process. Then there are the coffee spoons, who are much more cautious, taking life one small step at a time, being very sensitive to how their actions might affect others. Unfortunately, like in this poem, these people can be a little too sensitive to others to the point of wiping out their own individuality.

Interviewer: If these are the two kinds of people in the world, which category do you fit into?

Jen: <u>Neither!</u> I used to be a bulldozer, but I've outgrown that, and I refuse to be a coffee spoon. In fact, I refuse to fit into any category or stereotype. A lot of people feel comfortable and secure by fitting into a certain community or group, but I don't believe in belonging to anything except the human race. When I said that there were two types of people, I was speaking of the two extremes. There are also a lot of people like me who don't fit into any mold.

Interviewer: You use a lot of metaphors when you talk. Do you understand what a metaphor is?

Jen: Sure. It's when you describe something by comparing it to something else. Uh, like when a girl might call her boyfriend "sweet cheeks" because she thinks he has a cute butt. Ha, Ha!

Interviewer: (blush) Back to the pretest. When you were talking about bulldozers and coffee spoons, would you consider that a feminist perspective, psychological, or religious?

Jen: Why do I have to fit everything into one of those categories? Poetry is just like people. Sometimes they fit into a type, but a lot of times they don't. They just are.

Interviewer: I'm not saying that every phrase must fit into just one type. In fact, it's possible that they might fit into several categories at the same time, plus a lot more that haven't even been identified. A perspective in poetry is not meant to be a box that limits the poem. It merely helps us to understand one possible meaning better by identifying it. It doesn't eliminate the other meanings.

Jen: Okay. I, I guess I just misunderstood what you were trying to do. But, I still don't see how this phrase fits into any of these categories.

Interviewer: All right. Then take a look at the poem and find a phrase that you feel can fit into one of these categories.

Jen: Okay, give me a minute.

Interviewer: Okay.

Jen: (15 second pause) Here's one. "The eternal Footman snickers" I think that this is probably a religious phrase because it speaks of eternity. Let me think for a minute. (15 second pause) I don't know. This is really confusing. It seems like the eternal Footman probably is God, and the poet thinks that God is laughing at him, or playing some kind of joke on him. Maybe he even thinks that life is just one big joke, and God is just playing games with us. I don't understand why he would call God a Footman, though. Isn't a footman just a servant, someone who helps people in and out of their carriage or their car? Maybe the footman isn't God at all, but just an angel, or Satan laughing at us because he has tricked us into sin. I don't know. I'm just guessing.

Interviewer: Is it frustrating to you because you don't know for sure what it means?

Jen: Yes. I guess. I know that a poem doesn't just have one meaning, and that even the poet's meaning is not the only one, but I guess I still do feel frustrated by not knowing for sure what it means. I feel that if I'm just guessing, and that everyone else is also just guessing, then why bother? What am I learning if this is just a big guessing game?

Interviewer: In some subjects, like math or science, guessing might be a waste of time, because the emphasis is on learning facts. What we are trying to do here is to become familiar with different ways of viewing the world, so we can become more sensitive and understanding as people, so we can become more tolerant of people who may be different from ourselves. There are no clear cut answers, just different perspectives. Do you think that it is a waste of time trying to understand other people?

Jen: Of course not. I just never thought that was the purpose of English class, or studying poetry. Every English class I've ever had before was always just a matter of memorizing a bunch of stuff the teacher thought was important so we could pass a test. We never really had to think a whole lot. The teacher told us what to think.

Interviewer: I'm sorry that you have had this kind of experience in the past, but in this class I want you to learn how to think for yourself. I value your opinion.

Jen: Wow! That's cool. I've never had a teacher say that before. Cool!

Interviewer: Shall we get back to the pretest? What do you think of the phrase "There will be time to prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet?"

Jen: Ha, ha. If this poet was a woman, I'd say she was talking about putting on make up in the morning. But since the poet is a man, I guess he's talking about pretending to be something that he's not. Trying to impress people. I think he's very self-conscious and

fearful that other people won't like him, so he puts on a mask that he thinks will make everyone happy. Or maybe he changes masks depending on which group of people he's with. This guy seems very insecure.

Interviewer: Does it fit any of the perspectives?

Jen: Yeah, I would say that it's probably both a feminist and a psychological perspective. It's feminist, cuz like I said, women tend to spend a lot of time in front of the mirror in the morning trying to make themselves beautiful. Some of them must believe in miracles. Ha, Ha. Women feel that if they are going to make it in the world they have to please the men. It's also psychological because a lot of people feel insecure, both men and women, and are not happy with themselves. All of the commercials on TV make you feel that you're not quite good enough the way you are, so you need to buy their product to make yourself better or happier. It's like, "Life sucks, and you're the sucker, so buy from us". Ha, ha.

Interviewer: Is there any way that this could apply to the religious perspective, as well?

Jen: Oh, wow! I didn't think of that at first, cuz it had nothing to do with God, but I think you're right. A lot of religion is just a matter of following a bunch of rules set up by the church to make other people happy. It's going to church all dressed up, trying to impress people on how spiritual you are by the clothes that you wear and the smile on your face. It's a bunch of hypocrites getting together in their religious country club once a week so every one will think they're better than they really are.

Interviewer: Are we dealing with stereotypes again?

Jen: Ha! Caught me again. I get off on these little tangents sometimes. I'm sorry. You're right. I know that not all Christians are like that. It just seems that those are the ones that stick out in my mind. I guess I'm just tired of dealing with all of the phonies.

Interviewer: Like I said before, studying poetry should help us to be more sensitive to the feelings and needs of others, even the phonies. We need to ask ourselves why they are the way that they are, and to learn from them, even if it's only by their mistakes.

Jen: That sounds good, but I don't think that a phony would be the kind of person who would write poetry. Poetry seems more real than that.

Interviewer: You don't think that when someone writes a poem that they might be just trying to impress someone with their writing skill, or "b. s. ing" someone?

Jen: Yeah, I guess you're right. But I'm not sure that I could learn anything by reading that kind of poetry.

Interviewer: All right. What do you think of the phrase, "Do I dare disturb the universe?"

Jen: There isn't anything that most of us can do to disturb the physical universe, unless the poet is talking about blowing up the world with a nuclear bomb. By the way, when was this poem written?

Interviewer: In 1915.

Jen: Wow! Well, maybe this is about blowing up the world, cuz it's written right after world war I. Maybe he was concerned about the end of the world. But it seems like he's talking about a more personal universe. You know, like the people and things that surround his own life that he has some influence over. Maybe he's built up some kind of reputation, a phony one, and he is trying to decide if he should mess everything up by just being his real self.

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Interviewer: All right.

Jen: Stop! I know what you're going to ask next. What perspective, right?

Interviewer: (shook head yes)

Jen: I thought so. Well, I know it's not one of the three perspectives that we've been talking about, but I'd say that the first part about the war might be an historical perspective, cuz it deals with what might be the historical cause of his writing this poem. The second part, though, I think I was probably talking about a psychological perspective cuz this guy is very afraid again of what other people might think. This guy really seems like a wimp to me. He's afraid of Casper's shadow.

Interviewer: Excuse me?

Jen: You've never heard of Casper the friendly ghost?

Interviewer: Sure, but I've never heard some one use the term Casper's shadow.

Jen: Oh. Well, you know how some people are afraid of things even though there really is no real reason to be afraid? They're not only afraid of the ghost which isn't really there, but they're afraid of the shadow of the ghost that isn't really there. They're paranoid.

Interviewer: Okay. I learn something new every day. Well, I think that we've spent enough time talking about poetry for the time being. I will need to interview you again later, though, after you have gone through the computer program, if that's all right with you.

Jen: Sure. I'd be glad to. I thought this would be a lot harder than it was.

Interviewer: Thank you. Good bye for now.

Computer Program Evaluation Questionnaire

and Results

Circle the response that most closely matches your evaluation of this computer program.

1. What is your over-all impression of the effectiveness of this computer program?

    a. very effective   51%

    b. effective   44%

    c. parts effective, parts not   3%

    d. not very effective   2%

2. What is your reaction to the visual, aesthetic quality of the program?

    a. very poor   2%

    b. so-so   5%

    c. average   13%

    d. better than average   49%

    e. e. superior   31%

3. Were the introduction and instructions clear and understandable?

    a. very clear   72%

    b. clear   26%

    c. partly clear, partly confusing   0%

    d. very confusing   2%

4. Did the program work the way that it was suppose to work ?

    a. not at all   0%

    b. not very often   2%

    c. sometimes   0%

    d. most of the time   18%

    e. always   80%

5. Did you feel that you needed additional instructions or help from a teacher in order

    to know how to do the program beyond what was given in the introduction?

    a. not at all   80%

    b. not very often   13%

    c. sometimes   5%

    d. most of the time   2%

    e. always   0%

6. Were the literary interpretations stated so that they were easy to understand?

    a. always   59%

    b. most of the time   38%

    c. sometimes   0%

    d. not very often   3%

    e. not at all   0%

7. Did the literary interpretations help you to understand the poem better?

    a. always   33%

b.	most of the time	49%
c.	sometimes	15%
d.	not very often	3%
e.	not at all	0%

8. Did you agree with the literary interpretations in general?

a.	not at all	0%
b.	not very often	22%
c.	sometimes	31%
d.	most of the time	64%
e.	always	3%

9. Did you agree with the feminist literary interpretations?

a.	always	8%
b.	most of the time	18%
c.	sometimes	36%
d.	not very often	15%
e.	not at all	21%

10. Did you agree with the psychological interpretations?

a.	always	21%
b.	most of the time	59%
c.	sometimes	20%
d.	not very often	0%

e.   not at all   0%

11. Did you agree with the religious interpretations?

    a.   not at all   0%

    b.   not very often   2%

    c.   sometimes   41%

    d.   most of the time   44%

    e.   always   13%

12. Did you agree with the other students' responses?

    a.   never   0%

    b.   not very often   5%

    c.   occasionally   51%

    d.   usually   40%

    e.   always   4%

13. Which one of the interpretations,   generally speaking, did you feel was closest

    to your own perspective?

    a.   other students   8%

    b.   religious   39%

    c.   feminist   8%

    d.   psychological   45%

    e.   none   0%

14. What did you respond to most of the time when you typed in your response?

a.	the poem itself	28%
b.	literary theories	62%
c.	other students	10%
d.	audio-visuals	0%

15. Do you feel that this program helped you to understand literary theories better?

a.	not at all	0%
b.	not very much	3%
c.	a little bit	21%
d.	quite a bit	38%
e.	a lot	38%

16. Do you feel that this program will help you to be more understanding of others who have different views from your own?

a.	very much	46%
b.	some	46%
c.	not very much	0%
d.	not at all	8%

17. What was your emotional response to most of the literary interpretations?

a.	anger	5%
b.	disgust	2%
c.	boredom	3%

d. enjoyment   82%

e. excitement   8%

18. If you had the opportunity to do similar programs for other works of literature,

would you be interested in trying them?

a. never   0%

b. maybe once or twice   15%

c. sometimes   31%

d. often   26%

e. very   28%

19. Do you feel that this program will make it easier for you to discuss the poem ?

a. yes   92%

b. no   8%

20. Do you feel that this program will make it easier for you to do well on a quiz on

the poem?

a. yes   92%

b. no   8%

Please use the space below to type in any suggestions on how you think that this

program could be improved.

A Sample

Post-Program Interview

Interviewer: Hi, Jen. Thank you for coming back again. This time I'm going to ask you some of the same questions as before, but I'm also going to ask you about the computer program itself. Let's start by having you answer some of the previous questions.

Jen: Can I take a quick peek at the answers I gave the first time?

Interviewer: Ha, Ha. You don't need to do that. There are no right or wrong answers, and it doesn't matter if your answers are consistent with what you said before. Just be yourself.

Jen: Okay. I'll try.

Interviewer: When you read something, like poetry or a novel, do you think that your main goal should be to try to figure out what the author was trying to say, his or her original meaning behind the words?

Jen: I don't know if that's possible. Even if the writer has told someone what they were trying to say, that doesn't mean that that's really the meaning. Sometimes a writer uses their story, you know, sort of like a mask that they're hiding behind, and they don't really want you to know the true meaning. The story sort of lets them express themselves behind a wall of fiction, where the reader can't tell what's fiction and what's real. But I

think it would be interesting if we could get inside the writer's brain for awhile, just to sort of find out what inspired the writing of the story.

Interviewer: One of the purposes of the computer program was to help you to get inside other people's brains, or to see things through their eyes. Do you think that the computer program succeeded in doing that?

Jen: Absolutely. In fact, I was really surprised. I would be looking at the poem and thinking, there is no way that this hot word can be interpreted from a certain perspective, and then I look at the interpretation, and I think "wow". Yes! That makes sense. I see that now. It was like Alice in Wonderland looking through the magical looking glass and falling down into a magical world where everything is different and upside down from the world that we know. I'll never be able to look at a birch tree the same way again.

Interviewer: Are you saying that the different perspectives are just fantasies that different people have, but they're not really true in the real world?

Jen: No, not at all. But I'm sure that it seems that way to a lot of people. Like my roommate. She went through the computer program and came back to the room and said, " I've never waded through so much crap in my life." She just couldn't see how people could come up with such bizarre ideas from a poem about birch trees. Some people are like that. They can't see past the pimple on the end of their own nose.

Interviewer: What about you? Why do you think you're able to "see past the pimple on your nose"?

Jen: I don't know. My mom always used to say I had an over-eating imagination.

Interviewer: Ha! Say what? You mean an overactive imagination?

Jen: No. My mom always has trouble with her weight. She'll go on a diet for a while, but then she goes on a binge, and just eats everything. I mean she just stuffs her face all day long, like she's an addict or something. It doesn't matter if it's candy or carrots, ice cream or refried beans, if it's in the house, she eats it. She knows she has a real problem, but she sort of makes a joke about it, and laughs it off. I know that she's always thinking about it, though, 'cuz it keeps coming up in the way she talks. Like about my "over-eating imagination". She thinks my imagination is sort of out of control like her eating. I guess I was always making up these wild stories when I was young. I still do, except now I just write them down.

Interviewer: I'd like to read them sometime, if you wouldn't mind.

Jen: Okay. I'd like that.

Interviewer: You said in the other interview that your favorite author was Stephen King. Does your "over-eating imagination" have anything to do with that?

Jen: Yeah. I love the kind of story that even though it sounds totally unreal, like a fantasy or science fiction, it plays with your brain and your heart, so you feel that it really is real. It lifts you into a new dimension beyond reason, where it doesn't matter if it makes sense—reason is just a mask with a stoic smile that must be removed to see the real face crawling with maggots and butterflies.

Interviewer: Whoa! Maggots and butterflies?

Jen: Yeah, you know. Maggots hang around dead things, and butterflies start out something like a maggot, but become beautiful butterflies. They are transformed from death unto life-- sort of like a new-birth experience. At least that's how my youth pastor used to explain it at church.

Interviewer: Okay. But how does that fit into what you were saying about reason being a mask and everything?

Jen: That's easy. It's like reason can only see the cold, hard facts, or what can be seen from a scientific observation. It doesn't recognize faith, or fantasy, or feelings as being relevant. It completely ignores anything that can't be reproduced in a scientific laboratory. There's more to this world than that. I don't think God would have given us our imaginations if he wanted us to just see with our eyes. I mean love is the most important thing in the world, but you can't study it under a microscope. You have to remove the mask of reason to understand the worlds that can't be measured, to believe in the power of transformation or rebirth—how the maggots of life can become butterflies.

Interviewer: Very interesting. I hope you do become a writer. You have a very vivid way of expressing yourself.

Jen: Thank you.

Interviewer: Why don't we use some of that imagination and have you look at the pre-test poem again. I'd like you to tell me how you think certain lines can be interpreted from different perspectives. Why don't you start with "one night cheap hotels"?

Jen: I really don't like this one phrase. It probably means something completely different to a man and a woman. For a man, it probably means getting an ultimate pleasure with

very little cost. For a woman, it may mean costing everything—her self-esteem, her relationship with her family and friends, her spiritual peace of mind—everything. This is why feminists are so angry with men, because the men think it's all just a big game, and the women are devastated. Some times the woman may have a bad experience with a guy, and they might think, oh well, maybe it will be better the next time. But, after it keeps happening with every guy they meet, they just get sick of it, and they start fighting back, and the guy they are with doesn't understand that the woman's anger is not just against them, but a lot of guys. The guy just thinks the woman is being too sensitive or overreacting, but all he sees is the smoke from the volcano.

Interviewer: What about "pinned on the wall"?

Jen: A lot of times we hang things on the wall, like pictures or calendars, that we want to look nice, but they don't have to do anything. A lot of times women are treated like this, like "things" that can be appreciated for their beauty, but they are not taken seriously in the real world. Feminists don't like this image of women, where men put them in boxed-in frames like pictures, out of the way on the walls of life, instead of being allowed to be in the middle of the action. The women don't want to be wallflowers waiting for the men to pick them.

Interviewer: All right. Try "measured out life with coffee spoons."

Jen: It sounds very limited when you talk about measuring anything with coffee spoons. I think the feminists would attack this because they view their own options as being very limited as women, as if the men have only given them the household responsibilities to be creative in, and want them to stay out of their way in the real world. It's pretty hard to build a dream when all you have as tools are coffee spoons.

Interviewer: Okay. Now try "The Eternal Footman snickers".

Jen: The first time I read this I thought it probably was referring to God, but I think it makes a lot more sense if it's talking about Satan. The bible says that Christ is the "head" of the church, so maybe Satan is the "foot" or the footman. Satan would love to stomp us into the ground, or keep us under foot, so we won't be out doing good things for God. He probably is snickering because he has succeeded in keeping the Christian so discouraged and defeated, that they aren't able to do anything positive. In other words, he thinks he has won. From a feminist perspective, the woman might feel that God the Father is trying to subdue all women, and that he is the footman snickering because he has successfully held them down. He is angry at the women for tempting Adam in the garden of Eden, and he is seeking revenge against them by allowing the men to rule over them.

Interviewer: Okay. What about "There will be time to prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet"?

Jen: I think this has to do with judging people by appearances. Most of the time, women are judged just by their appearance, how beautiful or sexy they are, instead of what they're like inside. Even the men, though, are caught up in trying to impress people. Life is just one big show with everyone pretending to be something they're not. Psychologically, people are just too insecure. They shouldn't care so much about what other people think. Even the way people dress up to go to church is just a big charade. God doesn't care one bit what we look like, so why should we? It doesn't matter if your hair looks like you comb it with a chain saw, or your face looks like a rotten pineapple. Everyone's beautiful in their own way, and we should always look for that beauty, instead of being so critical.

Interviewer: Okay. What about "Do I dare disturb the universe"?

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Jen: I don't know. Maybe he believes that God has some divine plan for him, and that if he doesn't do what he's supposed to, he might disturb God's whole plan for the universe, like dominoes falling over and knocking each other down. Or maybe he's just thinking of his own life and how one decision can ruin the rest of his life. I don't know what you would call this. It's sort of a religious perspective and sort of psychological. It deals with his view of God, but it also deals with his own self-image and fears. It's sort of half and half.

Interviewer: All right. I think that's enough for the pre-test. Now let's talk about the computer program itself. First, what was your over-all impression of the program? You said before that it helped you see things from different perspectives, but what else did you think about the program?

Jen: I thought it was lots of fun. It was like playing a game with words. Like a treasure hunt. I liked being able to choose whatever hot word that I wanted and whatever perspective that I wanted, and skip around instead of going straight through. Most of the time, though, I didn't skip around. I wanted to look at every word and every perspective and every picture and every video. I was disappointed when the hour was up and I couldn't do anymore. I'd like to come back again some time and do the rest. It was really neat.

Interviewer: What about the introduction to the program? Do you think that it was easy enough to understand?

Jen: I thought it was okay. I'm glad it wasn't any longer, though. I'm glad you didn't just spend the whole program trying to teach us a bunch of terms and junk about poetry. It was neat being able to just spend time exploring the poem itself and learning as I went.

The introduction gave just enough information to get started, and the rest was up to us. I liked that.

Interviewer: Were the literary perspectives stated so they were easy to understand?

Jen: I don't think they were too difficult to understand. I just didn't agree with them all of the time.

Interviewer: Was there any one interpretation or perspective that you found the most difficult to accept?

Jen: I think the feminist perspective was the most annoying. Don't get me wrong. I believe that many of the feminist interpretations were right on. I think that most men treat women like dung-pies, and that women shouldn't put up with it anymore. But I don't think men are our enemies, like some of the feminists believe. I think women and men can work together to resolve our differences.

Interviewer: What did you think about the religious perspective?

Jen: I agreed with most of it, but I was really surprised when it dealt with other religions besides Christianity. I thought that since you wrote the program, at least that part would have been okay. I think you were just trying to help us see different perspectives, but it made me wonder several times exactly where you were coming from.

Interviewer: Did you think I was a heretic or something?

Jen: I had my doubts there for a while. I'm sorry if I misjudged you. I'm just not use to any of the professors at this school presenting any view except a conservative Christian

one, unless they are trying to show how evil something is. You're the only professor that I've ever had that presented liberal views without judging them first as right or wrong.

Interviewer: I'm sorry if that made you feel uncomfortable, but sometimes we need to be knocked off balance a little in order to grow or learn. I guess this was just my way of stretching you a little beyond what you're used to, to force you to think through your own beliefs a little more carefully to make sure that you know what you believe and why you believe it. If you only hear one view all of the time, it can be dangerously boring.

Jen: I think it's a good idea, it just surprised me.

Interviewer: What did you think about the psychological perspectives?

Jen: I didn't have any problem with those. They were a little more obvious. Everyone has a mind and emotions, so it's a little bit easier to relate to them.

Interviewer: What about the other student responses? What did you think of those?

Jen: I agreed with most of them, but some of them were really bizarre. It made me wonder, you mean someone at L.U. actually believes this garbage. Especially some of the guys' answers to the feminist perspective. How could someone be a college educated person and be such an ignorant bigot? Unbelievable. But most of them were pretty interesting.

Interviewer: Did it seem like there were too many hot words?

Jen: No, not really. I mean I wasn't able to finish them all, 'cuz we were only given an hour, but I would like to go through them all some time. They were all interesting.

Interviewer: Was it confusing by having three different perspectives? Would it have been better if it just gave you one?

Jen: No way. I thought it was great having the three 'cuz you could compare the different ones and see how the same thing can be interpreted differently. If you only had one you wouldn't be able to do that. In fact, I think it would be great if you had even more than three to give the students some more choices.

Interviewer: What other choices would you like to see?

Jen: I don't know. What are some of the other theories to choose from?

Interviewer: Historical, new-criticism, post-structuralism...

Jen: Whoa! You lost me. The historical sounds good, but those other two are too spacy.

Interviewer: What do you mean by spacy?

Jen: Way out in space, far from the real world, out of touch with the common person. Something that only the nerd would understand, or would want to understand. I think some of these people must be aliens 'cuz they sure don't live in my world.

Interviewer: Why does the historical sound interesting to you?

Jen: 'Cuz I think it would help us to understand maybe some of the stuff that was happening when the poem was written that might have caused the poet to write it. Like maybe something happened that inspired him or something.

Interviewer: What about the different media, such as the audio, video, and pictures? Did they help you at all?

Jen: I really liked the pictures. It was cool how they tied into what the literary perspective was saying, at least most of the time. Some of time I didn't see the connection. I only looked at one of the videos, and I didn't think it was too effective. It wasn't long enough to really say anything. I didn't hear any of the audios, so I don't know about those. I thought it was a good idea, though, to have all that stuff, especially more pictures.

Interviewer: Why don't you take a look at one of those pictures and tell me what it means to you. Here's one (pointing at the screen), try this one.

Jen: This picture deals with the word "cracks", and the perspective says it's dealing with someone going crazy or cracking up. The picture really fits this idea 'cuz it shows a person, I don't know if this is right, but I think it's a woman, and they're cut up into pieces and glued back together in jagged pieces, like a collage. And they have this strange face coming out of their stomach. Maybe this is their "real self" coming out, I don't know. And they have a raised fist, like they're angry about something. It looks like they might be losing control. If it's a woman, she might be reacting to way that men have been treating her. I think it's a cool picture.

Interviewer: Does the picture add any meaning to the word, or does it merely reinforce what was already said in the literary perspective?

Jen: Mostly it just reinforces what was already said, but I think the face coming out of the stomach was something new. It gave me the idea that a person who is "cracking up" might be just like a chicken or a bird trying to crack out of its shell, and this person's real self was just trying to get out from its confining surroundings, and everyone else just interprets that as going crazy, 'cuz they don't know how to respond to it.

Interviewer: All right, choose another picture, and tell me what you think it means.

Jen: (She takes about a minute looking for another picture) Here's one. This one deals with the phrase, "never right themselves" from the psychological perspective. The picture is just some tree branches, which really threw me off at first, 'cuz I couldn't see what it had to do with a person, but then I got the idea that it must be because the branches are all twisted and deformed looking, like they're all tangled up, going every which direction. This is sort of like the person in the poem who has had so much crud happen in their life that they feel deformed and messed up, so they can't ever get themselves straightened out. You don't see the whole tree either. You just see the twisted branches. When people see someone who has a messed up life, they usually judge them on the messed up circumstances, instead of taking the time to really understand the person as a whole.

Interviewer: All right. Try to find a video clip.

Jen: (Takes about two minutes finding a video) Here's one. This one's about the phrase "clicking upon themselves" from the feminist perspective. The picture is really hard to see. It's too dark. I think a woman is talking to a man. Her voice is real clear, though. (She listens to the words again). She says, "Why does a man always assume that when a woman is happy she is romantically involved?" I think this is basically saying the same as the perspective—that men think that women need them and can't be happy without them,

but women can find happiness apart from men. Some of the students were critical of this idea 'cuz they thought that it supported the gay movement, but I don't see it that way. A lot of girls go overboard about needing a guy, so if the guy breaks up with them they just fall apart, and some even commit suicide, like their life isn't worth living without this one guy. I think something is really wrong with this. A girl shouldn't need a guy so much that he is her only reason for living. She needs to love herself and respect her own value more than that. It doesn't have to have anything to do with being a lesbian. It just means learning to value one's own self worth.

Interviewer: All right. Now pick any phrase that has something written from all three perspectives, and tell me what you think about the perspectives and the student responses.

Jen: (She takes several minutes looking for a phrase that she wants to deal with) "Across the lines" is a good one. The feminists think that this means for a woman to go against the man-made rules that govern our society. A lot of students seem to disagree with this perspective, and I sort of agree with them, 'cuz I think it is a little extreme. Since most of the laws in our country, including the constitution, were made by men, the feminists would have to disobey all these laws or rebel against them to be consistent. Just because a law is made by men doesn't mean that it's a bad law, and not all men try to be dictators over women. Feminists don't like to be treated like bimbo-stereotypes, so they shouldn't treat all men like Hitler-stereotypes. From the psychological perspective, I like this one better. The psychological view looks at people as a whole rather than just men or women, so it's not so extreme or one-sided. Everyone feels boxed-in sometimes by rules or limitations set up by others, and everyone would like to rebel against those rules sometimes, but not everyone has the courage to be a rebel. Some of the students felt that being a rebel was good, and others felt it was bad. It just depends on what the rules are and what the person's motives are. If a person wants to rebel against good rules because they want to be bad, then their rebellion is bad. But if they are good people rebelling against bad laws,

then crossing the lines might be good. It's very complex. It just depends. From the religious perspective, it's the same way. A lot of people are turned off by religion just because of the "thou shalt nots". They don't want to be told what they can or cannot do. When God sets the rules in the Bible, though, it's always wrong to rebel against them. When it's just the church that sets the rules, then it might be right sometimes to rebel. The leaders of the church might just be power hungry, and their rules might be just for their own good. The church has done some pretty terrible things in the name of God throughout history, so I think you have to be very careful about who or what you follow.

Interviewer: What did you think of the students' responses on the religious perspective?

Jen: I thought they were pretty good, actually. Like this one makes a distinction between Christianity and other religions. It says that most religions are based on rules, but Christianity is based on love. I think this is really true if you're just talking about the core belief of Christianity itself, without all the added stuff that is added in today's "churchianity". Christianity is not legalistic, but most churches are. People get the two confused. But I also disagree with this whole idea that Christianity is all love and no rules. I've never been married, but if I meet a guy, and he says, "If you love me, you'll let me do whatever I want", I'll drop him faster than a two-ton brick. Love without responsibility isn't love for the other person, it's just self-love. Christianity is based on love, but that doesn't mean you can do whatever you want to. If you really love God, you will want to do whatever he wants you to, even if it means giving up some stuff that you enjoy.

Interviewer: Very interesting comments Jen. You've done a good job. I think we've gone through enough. Thanks a lot for your help, and I'll see you in class tomorrow.

APPENDIX K

The Computer Program Interface
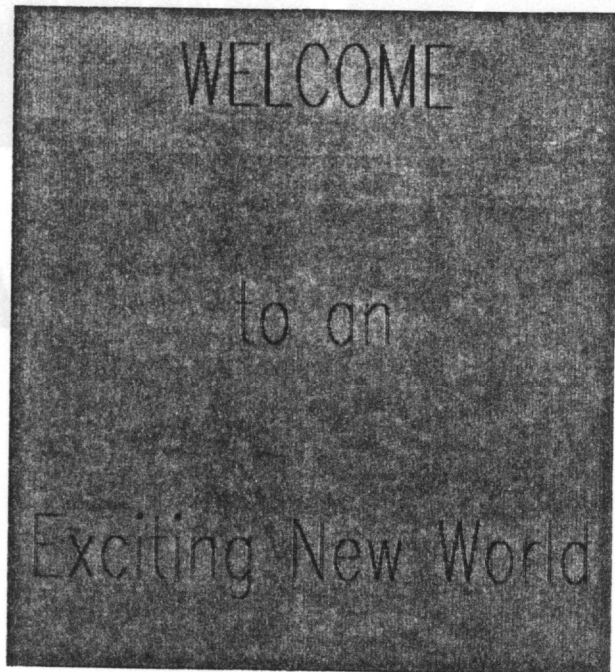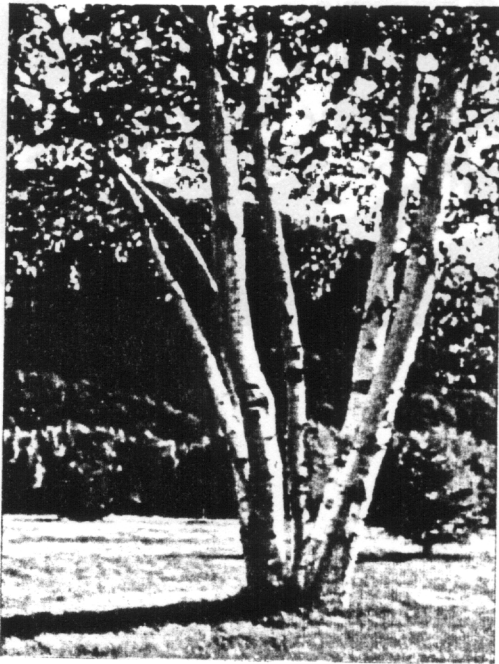
Exploring Literary Perspectives of Poetry through an Interactive, Multimedia Learning Environment

by   Tim Paulsen
VA Tech,   1996

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Introduction

Poetry is different from prose, in that, it is filled with colorful language that can have a variety of meanings or interpretations. This computer program is designed to help you learn how to perceive these many layers of meaning by being exposed to a few of the main interpretations that are often given when discussing poetry, and allowing you the opportunity to either respond to these or to give your own interpretation. You will also have the chance to react to the responses of other students who have gone through the program before you. Hopefully, by the time that you are done, you will have a greater appreciation for the complex meanings of poetry, and a greater awareness and sensitivity toward the many perspectives about poetry and life that may be different from your own.

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Instructions

As you go through this program, you will be analyzing the poem "Birches" by Robert Frost. As you view the poem, you will notice that several of the words and phrases have been highlighted in a different color, such as in the following example:

"When I see birches bend to left and right."

If you want to look at a possible interpretation of that particular word or phrase, just click on it with the mouse-arrow. Then choose which interpretation that you want to see by clicking on the appropriate button, such as the following:

Feminist	Psychological	Religious

Not all of the buttons will be activated at all times, just the interpretations that are available for that particular phrase. When you have chosen an activated button, it will show you the interpretation, as well as any responses from other students who have gone through the program before you.

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Literary Perspectives

You will be learning about four literary perspectives in this program, which are described below.

Feminist Perspective- This view interprets the poem through a woman's eyes, standing up for women's rights, and against any oppression of those rights.

Psychological Perspective- This view emphasizes the mental or emotional struggles that one goes through in the growing up process.

Religious Perspective- This view interprets objects and actions as symbols of spiritual truths, dimensions, and relationships.

Reader-Response- This view encourages each reader to interpret the poem from their own perspective, for their own view is valued equally with others.

Options

After you have read the interpretation and the student response, you have several options:

1. You can click on another button to view a different perspective for the same chosen phrase.

2. You can choose one of the media buttons, such as "video", if they are activated for that phrase, to see an audio/visual interpretation.

3. You can type in your own response to the interpretations or student responses, or give your own interpretation to the poetic phrase itself.

4. You can choose a completely different word or phrase any where in the poem. You do not have to go in order or look at them all. You should try, however, to type in a response to at least ten highlighted phrases and/or their interpretations.

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Identification

First, identify yourself by clicking
the LOGIN button below. Then, enter
the last four digits of your student ID
number in the box that appears

Login

**Select a Poem By Clicking on the
Appropriate Circle**

◯ "Birches" by Robert Frost

End Program   Proceed

When I see "birches" bend to "left and right"
"Across the lines" of "straighter darker trees",
I like to think "some boy's" been swinging them.
But swinging "doesn't bend them down to stay"
As "ice storms" do. Often "you must have seen them".
"Loaded with ice" a "sunny winter morning"
"After a rain". They "click upon themselves"
As the "breeze" rises. and turn "many-colored"
As the stir "cracks" and "crazes" the "enamel".
Soon the "sun's" warmth makes them shed "crystal
shells"
"Shattering" and "avalanching" on the "snow crust"--
Such heaps of "broken glass" to "sweep away"
You'd think the "inner dome of heaven" had "fallen".
They are "dragged" to the "withered bracken" by the
load.
And they "seem not to break;" though once they are
bowed
"So low for long", they "never right themselves":

Literary Perspective: Feminist

"birches"- (feminist)- These trees seem to
represent the "male" authority figures in his
life who seem dark and foreboding to his
young. innocent mind. They want to make
him into a straight tree (a stereotypical.

Other Student Responses:

--I believe that they want him to stand
up for what he believes in; not bending
in any way.
--I don't think that men are sexist any
more than women.

Click inside window to enter your response

Click Here to Save Your Response

Feminist	Psychological	Religious
Video	Picture	Sound

Change Poem Segment

| << | >> | Seg: 1 of 3 | New Poem |

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Vita

Timothy David Paulsen

I received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Biola University in La Mirada, California, where I majored in English, with a minor in Biblical Studies, and edited a college poetry journal. For the next seven years, I was able to use my degree in various ways as a teacher of seventh through twelfth grade English, and as the yearbook advisor at American Heritage Christian Schools in Hayward, California.

After receiving this very valuable teaching experience, I decided to continue my education at Humboldt State University in Arcata, California. As part of my degree studies, I traveled to Plymouth, Massachusetts, where I did extensive research in the poetry of William Bradford, the governor of the pilgrims. I later analyzed this poetry as the integral part of my Master's thesis, and earned my Master of Arts degree in English.

I continued my graduate studies in English at the University of Oregon in Eugene, where I gained valuable teaching experience as a teaching assistant in Freshman Composition courses for two years. I also took graduate courses in Southern American Literature at the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi.

I received a teaching position as an Assistant Professor at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, where I have been teaching for the last eleven years. My primary teaching responsibilities have been in Freshman writing courses and American Literature

surveys. I also have taught on a regular basis an upper level Colonial American Literature seminar class, and an honors class on Early American Literature.

My latest studies and research interests lie in the uses of educational technology in the teaching of English. I have developed an interactive, multimedia learning environment prototype for my doctoral studies at Virginia Tech, and I plan on continuing to develop this program so that it can be used in my classes, as well as many other disciplines and commercial markets in the future.