Checking the Blind Spot:  
The Inevitability of Theory in the  
Ontario Secondary School English Classroom

By

Mark Dutton

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the  
University of Toronto

©Copyright by Mark Dutton 2000
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L’auteur conserve la propriété du droit d’auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.
Abstract

This thesis concentrates on the application of research I have undertaken in literary theory to a set of problems I encountered in my professional practice as a secondary school English teacher. I argue that, although the last three decades has been a period of much ferment in both the universities and the high schools, the changes that have occurred in these two educational environments have been fundamentally different ones, and that this distinction has largely been overlooked. In most university English classrooms, the traditional New Critical approach to teaching literature has been problematized as a result of challenges from a range of alternative theories. In most high school classrooms, however, the traditional New Critical approach has been replaced by a less traditional Reader Response approach, but most Reader Response classrooms are no more problematized than the New Critical classrooms which preceded them. The failure to distinguish between these two different histories has led, in the high schools, to a situation in which Reader Response Practice has been thought to have solved the major problems inherent in New Critical Practice. I argue, however, that Reader Response practice cannot genuinely solve these problems because it does not address the issue that lies at the centre of New
Criticism, which I call the issue of what counts. I argue that Reader Response Practice cannot address this issue because the limits on what counts are determined by theory, and because Reader Response Practice is no more problematized than New Critical Practice, teachers are still positioned so that theory remains in the blind spot. I show how both the garden path problem which characterizes New Critical Practice and the interpretation problem which characterizes Reader Response Practice are symptoms of an unproblematized classroom. I argue that, in order to solve these problems, classroom practice in the high schools needs to be problematized much like it has been in the universities, so that teachers may check the blind spot and the limits on what counts may be made more explicit and in fact renegotiated. In the last chapter of the thesis, I describe a problematized practice with which I am currently experimenting in my own high school classroom, one which offers a solution to both the garden path problem and the interpretation problem.
Acknowledgements

Thanks to Jet Fuel and Lettieri in Toronto, Café de Paris and Bar Americain in Avignon, Moka House, Cascadia and The Parsonage in Victoria; to Giant, Gary Fisher and Cannondale Bicycles; to my sweetheart, my family and my friends; to my students and colleagues; to Dwight Boyd and Rob Morgan for invaluable advice; to Anna Soter and Brent Kilbourn for asking such thoughtful questions; and to Deanne Bogdan for her insight, judgment and care.
### Table of Contents

Abstract  
Acknowledgements  

**Chapter One: The Problem of Problematization**  
1.1 The Argument  
1.2 The University: Problematizing the Traditional Practice  
1.3 The Secondary School: Replacing the Traditional Practice  
1.4 There and Back Again: My Journey as a Classroom Teacher  
1.5 Into the Heart of Darkness: From New Criticism to Reader Response  
1.6 Moving Theory Out of the Teacher's Blind Spot  
1.7 A Guide to the Thesis  

**Chapter Two: New Criticism and the English Classroom**  
2.1 The Approach  
2.2 The Development of New Critical Practice in the Universities  
2.3 The Development of New Critical Practice in Ontario Secondary Schools  
2.4 Theory and Practice: The Garden Path Problem  
2.5 The New Critical Conception of the Text  
2.6 The New Critical Conception of the Reader  
2.7 The New Critical Conception of the Author  

**Chapter Three: Reader Response Criticism and the English Classroom**  
3.1 The Approach  
3.2 The Development of Reader Response Criticism in the Universities  
3.3 The Development of Reader Response Practice in the High Schools  
3.4 Theory and Practice: The Interpretation Problem  
3.5 The Reader Response Conception of the Text  
3.6 The Reader Response Conception of the Reader  
3.7 The Reader Response Conception of the Author  

**Chapter Four: A Problematized English Classroom**  
4.1 The Approach  
4.2 Problematizing the English Classroom: Beyond Reader Response Practice  
4.3 Back into the Heart of Darkness  
4.4 A Problematized Approach to Heart of Darkness  
4.5 Redefining Theory  
4.6 Conclusion: Problematizing the Problematized Classroom  

**Works Cited**
Chapter 1:  
The Problem of Problematization

Like the Moliere character who discovered he had been speaking prose all his life, we are always talking theory whether we know it or not.

— Gerald Graff

Practice is never natural or neutral; there is always a theory in place.

— Robert Scholes

There is no practice without theory, however much that theory is suppressed, unformulated or perceived as "obvious."

— Catherine Belsey

Hostility to theory usually means an opposition to other people's theories and an oblivion of one's own.

— Terry Eagleton

The lesson that has been learned from the theoretical debate of the past twenty years, and learned not only by radicals but also by some of those who wish to defend more conventional or traditionally humanistic positions and approaches, is that no literary-critical activity is not underpinned by theory.

— Peter Widdowson

Recent developments in critical theory have for the most part ignored pedagogical issues, and teachers in the schools have found little in current theory to revitalize their instructional approaches. Most remain largely unaware of movements such as Structuralism, Deconstruction, or recent developments in Reader Response theory.

— Arthur Applebee

The high schools, where most people receive the whole of their literary training, are largely protected from the tempests of theory.

— John Willinsky

Blind spot (n): 1a. the point in the retina not sensitive to light where the optic nerve passes through the inner coat of the eyeball; 1b. a portion of a field not seeable. 2. an area in which one fails to exercise understanding, judgment or discrimination.

— Webster’s Third New International Dictionary

On a winter’s day, while a blizzard raged through the streets of Toronto, Lilah Kemp inadvertently set Kurtz free from page 92 of Heart of Darkness.

— Timothy Findley, Headhunter
1.1 The Argument

The past thirty years has been a period of much ferment in English departments across North America. Summations of the current situation abound. A good one is offered by Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*: "That English and American literary studies have undergone a series of transformations in the last several decades is obvious; what to make of them in one's own teaching and research is less clear" (Greenblatt and Gunn 1992 1). Greenblatt and Gunn's encapsulation might be applied to both university and high school English classrooms, for both have undergone tremendous changes in the past few decades. In this thesis, however, I argue that the transformations that have happened in most secondary school English classrooms are fundamentally different than the ones that have occurred in the universities. I observe that, in the university setting, the most significant outcome of this ferment has been the problematization of a traditional approach to teaching English literature that shaped university classrooms for the greater part of this century. This traditional approach to teaching English has a legacy extending from Coleridge to Arnold to the key early Modern critics I.A. Richards, T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis, and it reached its ultimate codification in the work of the American New Critics from the 1930s to 1950s. By the *problematization* of this approach to teaching literature, I mean showing that such an approach is, to use Gerald Graff's words, "not as self-evident and uncontroversial as its users think" (Graff 1992 79). Or, I mean showing that such an approach does not, in Catherine Belsey's terms, acknowledge the "plurality of the text," but rather that it assumes what she calls the "pseudo-dominance" of a single reading that is "constructed as the 'obvious' position of its intelligibility" (Belsey 1980 129). In other
words, by observing that classroom practice in the universities has been problematized in the last thirty years, I mean that this traditional approach to teaching literature has been shown to be an approach, that it has been shown to be only one of several possible approaches to teaching literature.

Moreover, I observe that the development of a problematized classroom practice in the universities has been a result of significant challenges to the theory that underlies this traditional practice of teaching English literature. Such challenges have come from a range of alternative theories, including Poststructuralism, Deconstruction, Feminism, Reader Response criticism, Cultural Studies criticism and New Historicism, among others.¹ Challenges to the underlying theory from these alternative positions in the past thirty years have resulted in university classrooms which, although exhibiting differing degrees of emphasis of these various alternative theories, largely have in common the fact that their practices are problematized: their practices acknowledge that no position is self-evident and uncontroversial, that no single reading of a text can be constructed as the obvious position of its intelligibility, that any approach to teaching literature is only one of several possible approaches.

In the thesis, I argue that secondary school English classrooms in North America, and in Ontario in particular, have witnessed their own period of ferment in the past thirty years, but that the fermentation process has been a significantly different one than the one that has occurred in the universities. Although many secondary school teachers have felt that their classrooms have experienced the same shift, or perhaps a parallel shift, to the one that has occurred in the universities, I argue that in fact this is not the case. While in the universities the traditional practice has been

¹ The process of problematization in the universities is well documented; see especially Belsey, Scholes, Graff, Eagleton and Richter. I refer to these sources in more detail in section 1.2.
problematized as a result of challenges to the theory that underlies that practice, in the secondary schools, the traditional classroom practice has instead simply been replaced by another, less traditional practice. In most Ontario high school English classrooms, a traditional New Critical Practice has been replaced by a less traditional Reader Response Practice, but these classrooms, by and large, have not been problematized in the way that university classrooms have. In the high schools, the new practice does not acknowledge, any more than does the old practice, that no position is self-evident and uncontroversial, that no single reading of a text can be constructed as the obvious position of its intelligibility, that any approach to literature is only one of several possible approaches.

Of course, these observations describe general trends, and of course there are exceptions to these trends, in both the university and the secondary school settings. Clearly some university classrooms are more problematized than others, and clearly some high school classrooms have more fully replaced New Critical Practice with Reader Response Practice than others. And naturally there have been other significant influences on the direction of pedagogical practice in both settings, too. Nevertheless, the dominant shift in the universities has been from a traditional practice to a problematized practice, and the dominant shift in the high schools has been from a New Critical Practice to a Reader Response Practice.² What has not been observed by most commentators, however, is that these two shifts are fundamentally different in their natures and their results. This may largely have to do with the fact that few

² Regarding the dominant shift in the universities, see especially Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn's introduction to their collection Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies (1-11), and "Cultural Studies in the Academy" in Vincent Leitch's American Literary Criticism From the 1930s to the 1980s (246-254). I examine the history of the university classroom in more detail in section 1.2. Regarding the dominant shift in the high schools, see especially Applebee and Appleman; I trace the history of the secondary school classroom in more detail in sections 1.3 and 1.4.
writers, in their assessments of the evolution of the English classroom over the past thirty years, have addressed both the university and secondary school settings. And this is particularly the case here in Ontario: in our province, relatively little care has been taken to distinguish between the separate evolutionary histories of university and high school teaching practices. Yet within the context of North American English departments, Ontario classrooms have played an interesting part in both histories, and the specific circumstances in our own province during this period have made the particular transitions we have experienced a unique and colourful chapter of these histories.\(^3\)

In the thesis I observe that, as most secondary school English classrooms in Ontario have changed their pedagogical practices, the emerging Reader Response Practice has often been thought to have solved a number of problems observed to be inherent in New Critical practice, in much the same way as the emerging problematized practice in university classrooms has genuinely addressed many problems observed to be inherent in the traditional practice. Particularly in the past two decades, many secondary school teachers have argued that New Critical Practice is deeply flawed, and there is now almost a litany of pedagogical problems associated with New Criticism. Of these, the following four charges against New Critical Practice are the most substantial, the most commonly observed and the most germane to this study:

1. New Critical Practice is largely based on a transmission model of learning, in which the teacher's role is to transmit to students an accumulated body of knowledge; the students' role is to absorb this transmitted knowledge, and hence learning becomes limited to a process of swallowing (and regurgitating

\(^3\)In Ontario, there have of course been other strong currents in the development of secondary school pedagogy; I examine these currents in section 1.4.
upon demand) a static body of knowledge;

2. Because the knowledge transmitted by the teacher is the only valid knowledge, the learning process does not value students' experiences and has little meaningful connection to students' lives;

3. New Critical Practice assumes a specific canon of texts, a canon determined by established critics which is difficult to add to or subtract from; this canon is highly biased toward texts written by certain kinds of writers from certain regions and time periods, writers who are members of a particular group or groups by virtue of their race, gender, class, and/or culture;

4. New Critical Practice is based on unstated assumptions about the racial, sexual, socioeconomic, and/or cultural homogeneity of the classroom.4

In my view, at the centre of each of these commonly cited problems of New Critical Practice lies a single question: What counts? What counts, or what is included, in the body of knowledge transmitted by teachers and absorbed by students? Which experiences (or whose experiences) count in determining meaning? Which texts are included in the canon? Which authors count? Who counts as the reader in the classroom? Which readers, or which kinds of readers, are assumed to be included in the classroom conversation? And the inverse of this question is equally important: What doesn’t count? Which knowledge, experiences, texts, authors, readers are excluded? Moreover, how are the lines drawn between what does and does not count? And by whom? Who or what sets the limits on classroom practice, the limits on what is

4 I examine these charges against New Critical Practice in more detail in Chapter Two. For examples of such critiques of New Criticism in the universities, see especially Eagleton, Richter, Graff, Belsey, and Scholes. In the high schools, for an account from a Reader Response perspective, see Beach and Marshall; I discuss their work in Chapter Three. For an account from a Post-Reader-Response perspective, see Bogdan and Straw; I discuss their work in Chapter Four.
(and is not) included in the classroom conversation?\textsuperscript{5}

The failure to address the issue of what counts is, in my view, the fundamental problem of New Critical Practice, the kernel at the centre of each of the most commonly cited criticisms of New Criticism. And in the New Critical classroom, this central problem is obscured by the fact that the limits on what counts are determined by theory. In the thesis, I argue that teachers in the New Critical classroom are positioned in such a way that they tend to use the pedagogy without being able to see the theory that inevitably delineates it. In this sense, the theory remains in the teacher's blind spot: it resides, as Webster's dictionary states, in a portion of the visual field that is not seeable. And it is precisely because the theory lies in the blind spot that New Critical Practice fails to address the problem of what counts.

By problematizing New Critical Practice in the high schools the way it has been problematized in the universities, theory may move out of the blind spot and the issue of what counts may be better addressed. In the universities, the emergence of a problematized classroom practice through challenges to the theory that underlies the traditional New Critical Practice is what has allowed teachers to check the blind spot and to make the limits on what counts more explicit. The challenges to New Criticism from alternative theories are what have allowed theory to move into the seeable portion of the visual field, which has permitted the development of a practice that acknowledges that no position is self-evident and uncontroversial, that no single reading of a text can be constructed as the obvious position of its intelligibility, that any approach to teaching literature is only one of several possible approaches. These

\textsuperscript{5}In a new article published after this thesis was written, Deborah Appleman and Mary Beth Hines ask after this same question, although in a slightly different context. They maintain that different types and sources of knowledge used by the teachers in their study indicate very different understandings not only of "what elements and practices should constitute 'literary studies,'" but also "more fundamentally, what counted as knowledge in literary inquiry" (Appleman and Hines 2000 163). The ways in which I address the issue of what counts are detailed in Chapter Four.
challenges have also forced teachers in the universities to check the blind spot in the other, more figurative, definition of the term: such challenges have revealed an area of classroom practice in which these teachers often failed to exercise understanding and judgment.

In the high schools, however, because the classroom has largely remained unproblematic, Reader Response Practice has not allowed teachers to check the blind spot, either literally or figuratively, any more effectively than New Critical Practice. The shift to Reader Response Practice in Ontario secondary school English classrooms has not allowed theory to move into the seeable portion of the visual field, nor has it revealed an area of our teaching in which we have often failed to exercise understanding and judgment. Because Reader Response Practice is no more problematized than the New Critical Practice which preceded it, it suffers from the same fundamental problem: it fails to make explicit how we determine what counts in the classroom. Hence, despite its dominance in high school English classrooms in Ontario in recent years, and despite its pedagogical merits, Reader Response Practice has not successfully solved the problems most commonly observed to be inherent in New Critical Practice. Because it does not address the issue of what counts, Reader Response Practice is not the solution it has so often been thought to be.

I argue that in order more genuinely to solve the problems of New Criticism, teachers in the high schools need to develop a problematized practice much like the practice that has evolved in the universities, so that theory may more successfully move out of the blind spot and the limits on what counts may be made more explicit.6

---

6Because, of course, there are important differences between the university and secondary school teaching environments, the particular problematized practice that best addresses the problems of New Critical and Reader Response practices will be somewhat different in the high schools than in the universities; I articulate these differences in Chapter Four.
Ontario secondary school teachers need to stop seeing Reader Response Practice as the only alternative to the New Critical Practice; rather, they need to see it as one of several possible approaches to teaching English literature in a problematized classroom. This is not to say, however, that a problematized practice will allow high school teachers to see everything with perfect clarity, or even that such a practice will enable teachers to check the blind spot completely. More precisely, I develop the argument that, in the hindsight of challenges to traditional practice from alternatives such as Poststructuralism and Cultural Studies theory, theory itself has become redefined. The theory that determines the limits on what counts in classroom practice has come to encompass more than just literary theory: it has come to include the social-political conditions of the teaching-learning-schooling context.7 I argue that, in a problematized practice, teachers can check the blind spot of the kinds of literary theory which determined the limits on what counts in New Critical and Reader Response Practices, but that theory, more broadly defined to include the social-political dimensions of the classroom context, is always present, is always somewhere in the visual field. Like any other practice, a problematized practice has its limitations. While it will not solve every problem that might come up in an English classroom, I argue that a problematized practice better resolves the problems of New Criticism than Reader Response practice.8

In developing a problematized practice in the high schools, I build on the work of Deanne Bogdan and Stanley Straw, particularly in their collection of essays entitled Constructive Reading: Teaching Beyond Communication. In their introduction to this text, Bogdan and Straw articulate a model of reading as primarily a constructive

7 I discuss the ways in which theory has become redefined in more detail in section 4.5.
8 I address the limitations of a problematized practice in section 4.6.
activity, in which meaning is not seen as "something present in the text" (although the
text may be one source of knowledge) but instead is "built up by the reader during the
act of reading." Moreover, Bogdan and Straw maintain that the reader draws on "a
number of knowledge sources in order to create this meaning." Among these
knowledge sources are "the text, the reader's knowledge of the features of language,
the reader's background experiences and worldview, and the reader's social context."
Bogdan and Straw view reading as a "meaning-constructing process" rather than a
"meaning-getting process," and they emphasize that this meaning-constructing process
occurs in a social context: the ways in which readers construct meaning are learned
through social interaction, according to an "actualization contract" in which readers
agree within a community how they are going to read texts (Bogdan and Straw 1993
1-3).

In my view, a model of constructive reading based on the work of Bogdan and
Straw is precisely what secondary school English teachers need in order to develop a
problematized practice in their classrooms. By conceiving of reading as primarily a
constructive activity, teachers in the high schools would be better positioned than in
either New Critical or Reader Response Practice to learn the lesson that teachers in
the universities have been learning over the past thirty years, the lesson illustrated so
clearly by the work of writers such as Graff, Belsey, Richter, Scholes and Eagleton: that
there is no practice without theory. By using a model of constructive reading,
secondary school teachers may be better able to see that Reader Response Practice,
like New Critical Practice, is based on theory, and that the best way to solve the
problems of New Criticism is to problematize the high school classroom so that theory
may move out of the blind spot. A problematized classroom practice based on a model
of constructive reading can better resolve the problems of both New Critical and Reader Response practices because it acknowledges the inevitability of theory.

1.2 The University: Problematizing the Traditional Practice

Particularly since Jacques Derrida delivered a paper entitled "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" at a conference at Johns Hopkins University in 1966, English departments in the universities have witnessed a flurry of scholarly discussion, publication and debate on the subject of theory. This ferment is widely acknowledged. One account of it is offered by Peter Widdowson: "An increasing number of people teaching and studying in this field are aware that their subject is in the midst of some kind of crisis" (Widdowson 1982 1). As a result of this crisis, the traditional approach to teaching literature that has shaped university English classrooms for the better part of this century has been shown to be an approach, to be only one of several possible approaches. This is in part due to the breakdown of a state of relative consensus that existed within university English departments until the late 1960s. Several accounts of university teaching in North America indicate that English departments were ripe for ferment at this time precisely because for several decades there had been a considerable degree of consensus within these departments about which texts should be read and how they should be taught. Although of course there were clearly differences of opinion within and between departments, writers such as David Richter, Catherine Belsey, Peter Widdowson and Deborah Appleman paint a convincing picture of the relative agreement regarding pedagogy that existed in university English departments before the late 1960s, and of the unproblematized practice of most of those classrooms. In Falling Into Theory: Conflicting Views on
Reading Literature, Richter notes that, when he was a university student in the early 1960s, although "the world of literary scholarship appeared to be a noisy and quarrelsome place...from the perspective of the present day, however, the world of literary scholarship in the early sixties was a gentle and simple one." Richter notes that, "for all their internecine quarrels and controversies, [his] teachers were in essential accord about nearly everything that was basic to their profession." Richter points out that, for these professors, literary works were "supreme and universal expressions of the human spirit," and students were to read these works in order to "broaden and deepen their own humanity." The particular works to be studied had been sifted by time so that "only the greatest and most universal had survived," and these works were to be "read closely and scrutinized carefully" so that their ambiguity, their "layers of meaning," could be explored. Moreover, these layers of meaning were thought to be "public," neither privately intended by the author nor privately produced by the operations of a specific reader (Richter 1994 2-4).

Similarly, in Critical Practice, Belsey offers a sketch of the development of what she calls the "common sense view of literature" that pervaded university and secondary school classrooms up until the late 1960s; she shows how this common sense view presupposed "humanism, empiricism and idealism." Belsey traces a shift in the classroom from "expressive realism" to "New Criticism," and shows how first one, then the other, came to be seen as the common sense view of literature (Belsey 1980 4-7). Peter Widdowson, in his introduction to the third edition of A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory, picks up on Belsey's observations:

Until relatively recently, in the English-speaking world at least, ordinary readers of literature and even professional literary critics had no reason
to trouble themselves about developments in literary theory...Then at the end of the 1960s, things began to change. During the past twenty years or so, students of literature have been troubled by a seemingly endless series of challenges to the consensus of common sense. (Widdowson 1993:1)

Moreover, Appleman's account in "Looking Through Critical Lenses: Teaching Literary Theory to Secondary Students" is similar in many ways to both Richter's and Belsey's. Appleman traces how the teaching of literature in the universities up until the late 1960s was influenced by a progression of ideas from Victorian critics like Matthew Arnold to New Critics like Cleanth Brooks, resulting in a relatively high degree of consensus within English departments and an unproblematized classroom practice (Appleman 1993:156-157).

In Chapter Two, I offer a detailed examination of the traditional approach to teaching literature that is embodied in the relative consensus noted by Richter, Belsey, Widdowson and Appleman. My point here is that, because of the relative accordance about how literature should be read and taught that existed within the bounds of this traditional approach until the late 1960s, the underlying assumptions about reading and teaching literature shared by instructors in North American university English departments at that time, by and large, were not seen as underlying assumptions. The basic principles that were shared were not articulated as basic principles, as propositions to be defended against alternative propositions, precisely because they were so highly agreed upon. Hence the classroom practice was largely unproblematized. As Michael Polanyi points out, when people fundamentally agree

9The aforementioned article by Appleman and Hines (2000) uses data from case studies of literature classrooms to argue that contemporary literary theories can enrich literature instruction in high school and university classrooms.
about things, those things tend to remain largely unspoken. In the case of university English departments until the late 1960s, these largely shared underlying principles about the reading and teaching of literature formed what Polanyi calls the "tacit dimension" of scholarly understanding. To use Polanyi's terms, these principles operated like mathematical axioms: they were seen as "above (or beneath) debate" (Polanyi 1958 14-16). In another formulation, these shared principles shaped a classroom practice that exhibited what Thomas Kuhn calls a "paradigm" of knowledge: a framework of generally accepted assumptions and perspectives that enables researchers and teachers to solve problems and answer questions whose relationship to accepted ideas is well understood and well accepted within their field (Kuhn 1970 10). In this sense, the period of relative consensus in university English departments before the late 1960s is analogous to what Kuhn calls a period of "normal science": a time where a given paradigm is in place and where most research is carried out within an accepted model (Kuhn 1970 11).10

However, for Kuhn, a paradigm is not a permanent structure of assumptions and perspectives. Although paradigms are useful and effective structures within which quality research is carried out, within which knowledge is acquired and learning occurs, there are also periods in which paradigms break down, when assumptions and methodologies are no longer accepted and come under debate. Kuhn calls such periods "scientific revolutions" (Kuhn 1970 12). The ferment experienced in university English departments in North America in the last thirty years is analogous to one of Kuhn’s scientific revolutions.11 It is fair to say that the degree of consensus that once characterized university English departments has broken down, that the traditional

10 Morgan (1990) draws this analogy clearly and eloquently.
11 In their introduction to Beyond Communication, Straw and Bogdan (1990) also use the term paradigm shift to describe this transition.
approach to teaching literature has come under attack, and the assumptions that underpin it have been challenged.

With the breakdown of the relative degree of consensus, English departments have fallen into what David Richter calls a "state of theory." Richter defines theory as "the sort of talk we talk when we have lost our consensus, when nothing 'goes without saying,' so that we have to define every term and justify every statement in the arguments we offer to defend our ideas" (Richter 1994 3). Richter's use of the term corresponds well with the definition Gerald Graff offers in Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education: "'Theory,' by my definition anyway, is what erupts when what was once silently agreed to in a community becomes disputed, forcing its members to formulate and defend assumptions that they previously did not even have to be aware of" (Graff 1992 52-53). The term theory, as used by writers such as Richter and Graff, captures quite well the state in which English departments have found themselves during this period of academic ferment. And by falling into theory, the university English classroom has become problematized.

It is worth noting, however, that there has been a considerable backlash against the emphasis on theory that has characterized the debate within the academy during this period. The application of theory as defined by writers such as Richter and Graff has itself come into question. For instance, Gary Thomas's recent article "What's the Use of Theory?" criticizes the almost ubiquitous use of the term theory within the academy (Thomas 1997 82). Yet, in my view, writers such as Thomas, in calling attention to the term theory itself and to its ubiquity, fail to appreciate that theory is a way of reflecting on our assumptions and practices. Moreover, to those who would discount the emphasis on theory that has characterized the recent debate within
English departments, both Gerald Graff and Terry Eagleton offer persuasive rejoinders. Graff notes that

few who react violently against "theory" would object to the proposition that we inevitably have general ideas about such practices as writing and reading or that when disagreement erupts over these practices, it is often necessary and useful to debate our principles. The critics have every right to dislike the kinds of "theory" that are popular in today's academy, but to attack theory as such is equivalent to attacking thinking. (Graff 1992 54)

And to those who oppose the recent emphasis on the term "theory" itself, Eagleton, in his text Literary Theory: An Introduction, writes: "Hostility to theory usually means an opposition to other people's theories and an oblivion of one's own" (Eagleton 1983 viii).

Several writers have observed that with the breakdown of the relative consensus within university English departments has come an imperative to re-assess and re-define our teaching practice, to move theory into the foreground of academic debate, to problematize our classrooms. For instance, Belsey has successfully argued the case for the development of a classroom practice that takes into account the fact that there is no longer agreement in what constitutes the teaching of literature: "The task of a new critical practice is first to identify the effects of the limitation which confines 'correct' reading to an acceptance of the position from which the text is most 'obviously' intelligible." According to Belsey, such a critical practice acknowledges the "plurality" of the text and refuses the "pseudo-dominance constructed as the 'obvious' position of its intelligibility" (Belsey 1980 129). In the wake of the work of writers such as Belsey, university classrooms have largely moved from a traditional practice that was based on
a relative consensus about which texts should be read and how they should be taught, a practice which regularly construed an "obvious position" of a text's intelligibility, to a problematized practice in which the text's plurality is acknowledged and in which theory is foregrounded. This is also clear in Widdowson's work:

The lesson that has been learned from the theoretical debate of the past twenty years, and learned not only by radicals but also by some of those who wish to defend more conventional or traditionally humanistic positions and approaches, is that no literary-critical activity is not underpinned by theory...that it is more effective, if not more honest, to have a praxis which is explicitly theorized than to operate with naturalized and unexamined assumptions. (Widdowson 1993 7)

Over the past thirty years, university English departments have had to acknowledge that, in Robert Scholes' words, "practice is never natural or neutral; there is always a theory in place" (Scholes 1985 x). Or, as David Richter puts it, we have had to acknowledge that "there are no innocent stances, no plain vanilla problems"; Richter notes that even the way we frame the questions we ask of literary texts "already presumes an elaborate set of assumptions, whether we have articulated them or not" (Richter 1994 ix). The foregrounding of theory that is the hallmark of a problematized classroom practice is nicely encapsulated by Belsey:

there is no practice without theory, however much that theory is suppressed, unformulated or perceived as "obvious." What we do when we read, however "natural" it seems, presupposes a whole theoretical discourse, even if unspoken, about language and about meaning. (Belsey 1980 4)
Moreover, in the introduction to Richter's text *Falling Into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*, Gerald Graff offers a very useful analogy:

Like the Moliere character who discovered he had been speaking prose all his life, we are always talking theory whether we know it or not... A literature instructor may not recognize that even in making a seemingly elementary observation about a work's plot or the identification of its author, he or she has made a theoretical decision, a decision about what is important and worth talking about. (Graff, cited in Richter 1994 vi)

In the same essay, Graff notes that, until recently, "such theoretical decisions seemed so obvious and self-evident that they were not recognized either as theoretical or as decisions," and he points out that, as the consensus within English departments about "what is obvious and self-evident in literature" has weakened, we have begun to recognize that "assumptions that we formerly took for granted are in fact theories, in contention with other theories" (Graff, cited in Richter 1994 vi). And Terry Eagleton notes that, despite the fact that some critics protest that literary theory "gets in between the reader and the work," in fact "without some kind of theory, however unreflective and implicit, we would not know what a 'literary work' was in the first place, or how we were to read it" (Eagleton 1983 viii). Hence, the development of a problematized classroom practice in university English classrooms in the past thirty years has shown that pedagogy is necessarily informed by theory, whether or not we articulate that theory to ourselves or our students. In developing a model of a problematized practice for the high school classroom based in part on the work of writers such as Graff, I extend the notion of problematization slightly. Graff's prescription, for instance, is to "teach the conflicts": to open the traditional classroom up to competing literary theories, to
encourage students to apply these theories to their reading of literary texts, and hence to make them more open, more sophisticated readers. While I do not disagree with Graff's approach, in designing a problematized practice for the high schools, I see it as necessary but not sufficient. Problematization, in the high school English classroom, ought to be directed toward more than just introducing students to more theories. It ought to help make them better people—better cultural citizens. The problematized practice I develop in this thesis has educational aims which have a stronger ethical component than Graff's approach. I discuss the educational aims of a problematized high school practice in more detail in section 4.6.

1.3 The Secondary School: Replacing the Traditional Practice

While these changes have been occurring within English departments in North American universities, Ontario secondary schools have also experienced a major shift in their pedagogical practices. This shift, however, has been fundamentally different from the shift toward a problematized classroom practice that has occurred in the universities. Secondary school classrooms in Ontario have absorbed several pedagogical influences over the past thirty years, each leaving its imprint on the shape of our classroom practice. Within the context of these changes, however, clearly the dominant shift has been from a traditional approach largely shaped by New Critical pedagogy (with a focus on the text itself) to a less traditional approach largely shaped by Reader Response pedagogy (with a focus on the reader's experience of the text). This change in pedagogical practice has been well documented, and it is quite clear that Ontario classrooms constitute only one example of a trend that has swept across North America. The classic study of this shift is the National Council of Teachers of
English's *Research Report Number 25* in the *Literature in the Secondary School* series, authored by Arthur Applebee and published in 1993. Applebee notes the ubiquity of New Critical Practice throughout North American high school classrooms from the 1930s to the 1970s, and clearly describes the shift toward Reader Response Practice that has occurred in secondary school English classrooms within the past few years. He writes that teachers have turned to Reader Response Practice for "an alternative to New Critical approaches." In the survey portion of the NCTE Report, he states that "the critical approaches that the teachers cited as influencing their teaching of a representative class were New Criticism (50 percent of the teachers in the random sample of public schools) and Reader Response (67 percent)." Applebee also observes that some classrooms have only partially replaced New Critical Practice with Reader Response Practice: "some 38.5 percent of the teachers gave high ratings to the influence of Reader Response and New Critical approaches on their teaching with a specific class, and another 41.1 percent reported at least moderate influence of both approaches." And, most significantly, the resounding dominance of the influence of these two pedagogies over any other is clear: Applebee observes that only "4.8 percent stressed neither approach" (Applebee 1993 117-122).

Further evidence that the most significant pedagogical shift in recent years has been from New Criticism to Reader Response is offered by Deborah Appleman in her aforementioned article. Appleman observes: "Broadly stated, [secondary school] teachers either present literary texts as cultural artifacts and literary masterpieces whose authoritative meaning is to be mastered by neophyte students, or they employ a Reader Response approach relying heavily on students' personal experience" (Appleman 1993 159). Moreover, Applebee points out that secondary school English
classrooms have been relatively isolated from the theoretical developments that have challenged the traditional approach to teaching literature in the university community in the past thirty years:

The challenges to New Criticism, however, have taken place largely in the realm of literary theory. Only a few scholars have begun to give serious attention to the implications of these newer approaches for classroom pedagogy, and most of that attention has been focused at the college level. It would be fair to say that despite the ferment in literary theory [in the universities], the majority of college undergraduates still receive an introduction to literature [in their secondary school education] that has been little influenced by recent theory. (Applebee 1993 116-117)

Applebee's observation emphasizes that the significant shift that has occurred in the secondary school English classroom is not the same as the one that has happened in the universities. Rather than experiencing a process of problematization, secondary school English classrooms have undergone a shift in which one pedagogical practice has been replaced by another.

Because Ontario secondary school classrooms have largely not been problematized, the Reader Response Practice of most secondary school English classrooms does not resolve the problems that have been observed to be inherent in the old New Critical Practice. In particular, the issue of what counts cannot be addressed by an unproblematized Reader Response Practice. Because the new practice continues to position teachers in such a way that they tend to use the pedagogy without being able to see the theory which inevitably supports it, the theory remains in the teacher's blind spot. My experiences as a classroom teacher have led
me to conclude that most English teachers, regardless of the degree to which they have replaced New Critical Practice with Reader Response Practice in their classrooms, understand pedagogy non-theoretically: we tend to see pedagogy as what we just do in teaching English. We do not tend to see classroom practice as a set of choices, each of which is based on theory. These choices might include which texts to study, what activities in which to have students engage while reading the texts, which types of assignments to have students undertake during and after reading the texts, which types of discussions, writing, groupwork or presentations should occur in the classroom, and so on. However, in light of the work of writers such as Graff, Richter, Belsey, Eagleton and Scholes with respect to the university classroom, it is clear that the actions that characterize the teaching of English, even if they are not conceived as such, do in fact represent pedagogical choices, and that each of these choices presupposes assumptions in theory. Every choice made in our classroom practice presupposes theoretical conceptions of, for instance, the text, the reader and the writer, and each of the various theories that underlie these possible choices in pedagogical practice exists as only one among several competing theories.

Moreover, in most secondary school English classrooms, these theoretical presuppositions tend to be implicit rather than explicit. Rarely do teachers articulate to themselves or to their students the theoretical conceptions that underlie the choices they make in their pedagogical practices. And because of this lack of articulation of underlying theory, pedagogy has tended to be practised as if the theory which inevitably supports it were not present—as if the theory were in the blind spot. Like the point in the retina where the optic nerve passes through the eyeball, the theory has largely remained unseen. And as the optic nerve is the necessary connection for the
brain to be able to understand the sensory data in the visual field, an acknowledgment of theory is necessary for an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses, the successes and failures, the problems and solutions, of any pedagogical practice. In fact, as we have seen from our examination of the university classroom, the presence of theory underlying any pedagogical practice is not only necessary: it is inevitable.

Hence in the high schools, Reader Response Practice still positions teachers so that the theory remains in the teacher's blind spot precisely because the traditional New Critical pedagogy has remained largely unproblematic, and in order to address the problems of New Criticism, it is necessary to develop a problematized classroom practice in Ontario secondary schools. In Chapter Four, I offer a detailed description of such a practice as it might function in a secondary school English classroom in Ontario. I show how, in a problematized classroom, the theories upon which our pedagogical choices rest may be made more explicit to ourselves and to our students, how the differences between possible readings of a given text (and between the different theories upon which these readings are based) may be more openly acknowledged, how the limits on what is included in the classroom discussion, on what counts, may be more easily recognized, and how changes to those limits may be more openly negotiated. Moreover, I illustrate how a problematized classroom practice offers more genuine solutions to the problems of New Criticism: how learning in a problematized classroom may include more than absorbing knowledge transmitted by the teacher, how that learning may be more genuinely connected with students' experiences, and how problems created by an inflexible canon or by unfounded assumptions about the homogeneity of the classroom may be better addressed.

In order to prepare the groundwork for this argument, I focus my attention in the
rest of this chapter on the secondary school community in Ontario, and I offer a brief historical account of the dominant shift that has recently occurred from New Critical to Reader Response practice. I think the most meaningful way to do this will be to tell my own story as a classroom teacher who has experienced this shift personally. Through the 1990s, as I have been teaching English in Ontario, my own classroom practice has undergone the transition from New Criticism to Reader Response. Moreover, in the past two years during which I have been writing this thesis, my classroom has been evolving toward a problematized practice, one which I hope addresses the problems of New Criticism more successfully than did my Reader Response Practice. In addition to offering a first-hand account of the pedagogical changes we have witnessed in Ontario, telling my own story will also, I hope, help to show my own situatedness, in part by providing what Jane Miller calls the autobiography of the question (Miller 1995 23). In the telling, I hope to illustrate how I became interested in the set of questions that constitute the inquiry of this thesis, and how I arrived at my present answers to them.

1.4 There and Back Again: My Journey as a Classroom Teacher

In searching for my own starting point for this inquiry into the relationship between theory and practice, I have to admit that the first time anybody described to me what teaching literature was about was when I was a student at the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario in the early 1990s, in Don Gutteridge’s class for pre-service English teachers. Gutteridge’s course, and his text Brave Season (1983), codified virtually everything that I had absorbed about studying English as a student in high school and in university for the previous ten years. In his course, Gutteridge led us, step by step, through what one did as an English teacher. And I
never questioned his approach, precisely because it corresponded so well with all I had known in my own history about the study of literature as a secondary school student and as an undergraduate student. In fact, I never conceived that there could be any other approach. I offer a brief description of this methodology below.

According to what I was taught in Don Gutteridge's class and through *Brave Season*, the English teacher's role is essentially fourfold:

1. The teacher selects texts for the students to study.

2. The teacher completes his or her own expert-level reading of the text. In doing this, the teacher relies on his or her own previous literature education; it is important to realize that the teacher is conceived as a member of a community of scholars who have been inducted into the particular knowledge of the field of literature, and that as a scholar, the teacher reads the text carefully, according to his or her training, in addition to reading the relevant criticism (also according to his or her training).

3. After having read the text in this fashion, the teacher carefully guides the students toward an approximation of that same reading of the text. This may be done in essentially two ways, depending on the educational institution. In the university setting, the professor typically lectures his or her way through a scholarly reading of the text, pointing out the key features emphasized by his or her carefully researched reading. And in the secondary school setting, the teacher typically develops an elaborate sequence of questions that carefully guides the students through a reading and discussion of the text so that they come to approximate the
teacher's scholarly reading. Although the teacher typically does not lecture to the students, the resultant reading of the text through which the students are guided is similar to the one they would have experienced if he or she would have lectured to them.

4. The teacher mediates the classroom discussion emerging from these questions.

That, in its briefest form, is the pedagogy I was taught as a student at the Faculty of Education in the early 1990s; at the time, I would not have characterized it as any particular type of classroom practice. Rather, it was simply what one did as a teacher of English literature in an Ontario secondary school.

A year later, after completing my Master’s degree, I began teaching English in a district high school in a small community in southwestern Ontario according to the practice I had been taught. And as a new teacher, I naturally had many questions to ask of my colleagues, including questions about the origins of our classroom practice. But I found something curious: when I asked my colleagues where our four-step pedagogy had originated, none of them knew where it had come from or who had developed it. In an attempt to find an answer to this question, I started to read more about pedagogy on my own, and I began to correspond with some of my professors in the Faculty of Education. Over time, I came to know a little more about how the practice I was using in my classroom had evolved.

Over the next few years, I learned that the approach to teaching literature in Ontario which I was taught and with which I started my teaching career was largely the result of the spread of the theory of New Criticism across North America (a process well documented by writers such as Applebee and Appleman). And I was shocked to find
that a single textbook based on this theory (*Understanding Poetry*, by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, published in three editions, 1938, 1950 and 1960) had largely shaped pedagogical practice for forty years in the vast majority of high schools across the United States—and that I had never even heard of it before, save for a single reference in Peter Weir's film *Dead Poets' Society* (1989), a reference to what I thought was a fictitious textbook. In addition to finding out about the spread of New Criticism, I began to chart other influences on the development of the pedagogy I had learned at the Faculty of Education. The most important of these influences included the following:

1. Northrop Frye's prodigious collection of literary criticism, particularly his conception of literature as a total system and criticism as a unified theory;
2. F.R. Leavis' emphasis on rigorous critical analysis, on literature as the instrument of cultural preservation, and on teaching literature as the noblest profession;
3. Matthew Arnold's idea of the power of literature to illustrate and preserve the best that culture has to offer;
4. Louise Rosenblatt's concept of literature as exploration;
5. James Britton's theory of reading;
6. I.A. Richards' theory of language, in which Richards divides all language into two categories, poetic and scientific;
7. B.C. Diltz's pedagogical method, in which the teacher of English designs a series of questions and then engages students in what Diltz calls a "Socratic encounter" (Diltz 1962:23).

The first four of these other influences in the development of the pedagogy I was
taught are the subject of John Willinsky's historical study *The Triumph of Literature/The Fate of Literacy* (1991). Willinsky's text is a worthwhile re-examination of the contributions of Arnold, Leavis, Rosenblatt and Frye to secondary school English pedagogy; in it, Willinsky maintains that these four figures are "responsible for what a great number of students learn about literature" (Willinsky 1991:1). He illustrates how each of these educators influenced the course of English pedagogy: how Arnold established the moral import of literature education by emphasizing its soul-forming powers; how Leavis made a determined and largely successful effort to turn the professing of English literature into the school's and university's highest calling; how Rosenblatt secured literature's place in the curriculum as an essential tool for democracy and the realization of the individual; and how Frye's landmark work, particularly *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) and *The Educated Imagination* (1963), was able to wrestle the whole of literature and criticism into a four-part system (Willinsky 1991:7-8). I have relatively little to add to Willinsky's comprehensive study of these four influences here. Notably, Willinsky is conscious of the importance of theory in the secondary school classroom. He criticizes the naive assumption that "students simply swim through literature, experiencing the works directly and unencumbered by criticism," and he recognizes that "the very idea of literature as a theoretical construct informs every English class in one form or another" (Willinsky 1991:11). His study, which pertains to high school English classrooms across North America, is a deliberate inquiry into the forces that have shaped the teaching of English which lie beyond the dominant influence of the New Critics (and in particular beyond the influence of Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Poetry*).

Yet the point that Willinsky does not make in his study is how the basic steps
that most English teachers have used in their practice for the past fifty years follow one of two dominant patterns, patterns determined by either New Criticism or Reader Response criticism. Of the four figures Willinsky traces in his study, the work of three of them has led to teaching practices which follow the four steps of New Critical Practice which I described earlier in this section. This is directly the case with Arnold and Leavis, whose work was in many ways extended by New Critics such as Brooks and Warren. It is also, although indirectly, the case with Frye: although Frye’s archetypal criticism differs substantially from New Criticism on several counts, the pedagogy which emerges from it is similar in most respects, particularly in that the teaching practice follows the same four steps as in New Critical Practice.\textsuperscript{12} Only Rosenblatt’s work results in a radically different pedagogy: Rosenblatt is one of the most important figures in the development of Reader Response Practice, which I describe in detail in Chapter Three.

The fifth and sixth of these other influences also require little comment here. The importance of Britton’s work is well documented; a retrospective examination of Britton’s contributions to literature teaching is to be found in Martin Lightfoot and Nancy Martin’s The Word for Teaching is Learning: Language and Learning Today: Essays for James Britton (1988). Lightfoot and Martin’s collection provides ample evidence that, even twenty years later, Britton’s ideas have had a lasting influence on English pedagogy in North America. Richards’ theory of language I discuss in considerable detail in Chapter Two. Richards, along with Leavis and T.S. Eliot, laid much of the groundwork for the New Criticism that would sweep across North America from the 1930s to the 1950s. However, it is the last of these influences, the development of a

\textsuperscript{12}This is clear in the series of textbooks based on Frye’s theory edited by Hope Lee and Alvin Lee and entitled Literature: Uses of the Imagination (1972), which are aptly described in Willinsky’s account.
particular pedagogical practice here in Ontario by B.C. Diltz in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, that, I learned, was the most significant of these seven factors in shaping the New Critical pedagogy I was taught at the Faculty of Education. And curiously, Diltz's influence is the least documented and least known of the seven factors I uncovered: despite the fact that the classroom practice of this single teacher of English was virtually replicated for decades in the vast majority of high schools in Ontario, when I first started teaching English in Ontario, I had never even heard of him.13

According to the research I undertook in those first years I was teaching English, the reason that one teacher's practice could have had such a considerable influence on the development of English pedagogy in Ontario, and that, despite this influence, that single teacher could remain so unknown, seems to lie in a particular combination of historical circumstances. First, from his position at the Ontario College of Education in Toronto, Diltz or his close associates trained all the English specialists for Ontario collegiates (and hence all English teachers who would become department heads in Ontario) from the mid-1930s to the 1960s (Gutteridge 1994 10). Moreover, through his successors, the influence of Diltz's particular approach was extended through the 1970s and 1980s at the Ontario College of Education and to the other Faculties of Education in Ontario, precisely because most of the English instructors at these institutions had been, of course, trained by Diltz or his associates at the Ontario College of Education. Hence Diltz's ideas exerted a significant influence on classroom practice in Ontario from the 1930s to the 1980s, to the point that Gutteridge notes that "the influence of his teaching techniques and his philosophy of literature was as widespread as it was profound" (Gutteridge 1994 11).

13Helen Stewart (1985) clearly illustrates Diltz's importance to English education in Ontario in her doctoral dissertation on Frye's theory of the imagination.
It is certainly no coincidence that this period coincides exactly with the heyday of New Criticism across North America (Eagleton 1983 46). Although Diltz's pedagogical practice owes some debt to nineteenth-century critics such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Matthew Arnold, many more of his ideas are directly related to the theories developed by early twentieth-century critics I.A. Richards, T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis, and by the New Critics who were his contemporaries. Indeed, Diltz's practice in many ways was a kind of homegrown version of the pedagogy prescribed by American New Critics such as Brooks and Warren. However, it is curious that these influences are seldom openly acknowledged in Diltz's work, despite the fact that the key features of his method of textual analysis, such as close reading, ambiguity, organic unity, and the harmonized balancing of disparate parts within a text, can clearly be traced to the New Critics. Through Diltz's particular influence, Ontario classrooms became part of a wider trend of New Critical pedagogy that dominated the study and teaching of English literature in North American secondary schools from the 1930s to the 1960s. In Ontario, the dominant practice was very close to Brooks and Warren's prescription.

However, the pedagogy that Diltz developed does contain some features that differentiate it from mainstream American New Criticism of the same period. Diltz's key pedagogical texts are Poetic Pilgrimage: An Essay in Education (1942), Pierian Spring: Reflections on the Education and the Teaching of English (1946) and Patterns of Surmise (1962). I examine these texts and discuss their relationship to New Critical pedagogy in more detail in Chapter Two. At this point, I would only emphasize that the key features of Diltz's classroom practice are, in fact, the same four steps I was taught when I was a student at the Faculty of Education. Recall that these were:

14 I discuss Diltz's pedagogy in more detail in section 2.3.
1. the teacher’s selection of the text;

2. the teacher’s careful preparation of a scholarly reading of the text;

3. the teacher’s design of an elaborate sequence of questions that lead students toward an approximation of that reading;

4. the teacher’s mediation of the classroom discussion that emerges from these questions.

As a beginning English teacher, discovering the origins of my classroom practice in Brooks and Warren’s text and in Diltz’s work (and to a lesser extent in the other influences listed above) was very exciting for me. The next stage in my own research was to chart the evolution of that practice from Brooks and Warren and from Diltz to the form in which it was presented to me as a student at the Faculty of Education. Below are some of the highlights of that evolutionary history:

In 1957, the same year as the publication of Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*, Diltz himself became Dean of the Ontario College of Education, and hence he was no longer directly training the English specialists who would become department heads in Ontario secondary schools. During the 1960s and 1970s, several modifications to Diltz’s methodology may be noted, most significantly by John Stevens (at the Ontario College of Education in Toronto) and John Smallbridge (at Althouse College of Education in London) (Gutteridge 1994 12). In Chapter Two, I examine these modifications in more detail. At this point I would emphasize only that these modifications are relatively minor ones; in all cases, the four basic steps of Diltz’s pedagogical practice remain intact. And yet, I discovered, with the passing of his central ideas through these modifications by Stevens and Smallbridge, and later by Gutteridge, much of Diltz’s legacy in Ontario became tacit and remained unacknowledged. Hence it became possible for teachers
like myself to be trained in a pedagogical practice that owed its origins to Brooks and Warren and Diltz and yet never to have heard these names before.

Beyond Stevens and Smallbridge, further modifications to Diltz's pedagogy are apparent in the key text through which I was taught when I was a student at the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario: Don Gutteridge's *Brave Season*. Again, I examine these modifications in more detail in Chapter Two, and again I would emphasize that none of these changes alter the four essential features of Diltz's New Critical pedagogy. Most of *Brave Season* is devoted to a detailed explanation of the designing of the teacher's questions. Gutteridge's particular approach is to divide the text into chunks, and to have students write their initial impressions in response to various prompts; then students answer more detailed, more specifically textual questions on particular sections of the text; finally, students answer more general, more summative questions that draw upon the text as a whole, questions directed to what Gutteridge calls moral or thematic concerns (Gutteridge 1983 24-40). Many of Gutteridge's own modifications are clear and genuine improvements to Diltz, but I must emphasize that the essentials of Gutteridge's approach are the same as Diltz's. Gutteridge's approach is still solidly within the New Critical tradition as filtered through Diltz: the key features of the pedagogy remain teacher selection of texts, teacher-researched scholarly reading, carefully designed questions to lead students toward that reading, and teacher-led discussion to develop that reading.

Of course, as a beginning English teacher in the early 1990s, I did not come to these conclusions all at once. The ideas in the paragraphs above represent the slowly accumulated knowledge of five years, on and off, of reading about pedagogy in the province of Ontario. And of course, during all this time, I was busy learning the craft of
teaching English literature in my own classroom, at first using the very pedagogical practice whose origins I was researching. In the next section of this chapter, I offer an account of some of the particulars of my classroom experience using that practice. To do this, I will examine the way I taught a particular text from the point when I started teaching English in southwestern Ontario until the point when I started writing this thesis. This will allow me more clearly to illustrate the assumptions about the teaching of literature that were behind that practice: the theory behind the pedagogy. I am fortunate in being able to use the example of Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness* (1988), because I taught *Heart of Darkness* every year from when I started teaching to when I started writing this thesis. For this reason, Conrad's novella is the best indicator I can think of for charting changes in my classroom practice, and for examining the corresponding differences in the theories that lay behind that changing practice.

1.5 Into the Heart of Darkness: From New Criticism to Reader Response

I can clearly remember my first reading of *Heart of Darkness* as a university student. I read it on summer vacation in Banff National Park, and I can still picture the view of the mountains I had outside my window whenever I looked up from the page. Part-way through my first year of teaching, I found a class set of mustard yellow copies of *Heart of Darkness* at the bottom of a stack of textbooks that literally were covered with ten years of dust. I asked my department head if I could teach the story in my grade twelve course, substituting it for another text that had been taught for years. To his everlasting credit, he said yes.

That day when I first read aloud "The Nellie, a cruising yawl, swung to her
anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest" (Conrad 1988 7) to a mystified but eager grade twelve class in a district high school in southwestern Ontario seems very long ago. And the first time I taught *Heart of Darkness*, I used the approach that came "naturally" to me (because it was the only one I knew), and that I have described above: a solid New Critical pedagogy derived from Gutteridge, which had its origins in Brooks and Warren and in Diltz. Accordingly, I broke the story down into manageable chunks (or scenes), and spent many laborious hours constructing very carefully worded questions on each scene. These questions were chock full of meticulously crafted cues and angles (terms drawn from Gutteridge's *Brave Season*) to allow the students to extract my "expert reading" of the text: the interpretation I had carefully researched by going through the story with a fine-toothed comb and by reading the most significant criticism on *Heart of Darkness* that I could find in the D.B. Weldon library at the University of Western Ontario. I used the questions I had devised to set a daily agenda for class discussion and for homework assignments. Moreover, because my careful reading of the text was so influenced by my own teachers, and because most of the criticism I read at the library was written by the same critics as my teachers had read (American New Critics), the interpretation generated by my careful questions was, of course, very much in keeping with the reading that would have been developed by my own teachers in their day. Furthermore, the very notion of arriving at the interpretation of the text by careful analysis of the text itself, and of transmitting this reading to my students, is itself a product of these teachers and of New Criticism.

In using this pedagogical approach, I perceived at the time that we were generating wonderful discussions, class after class; students were enthusiastic, eager to contribute answers, and there was a real feeling of accomplishing something, of
getting somewhere, in our analysis. Day after day, light bulbs would turn on in my students' heads, and by the end of the Conrad unit we would achieve a very satisfying sense of resolution, a sense of having really got it after a long and difficult examination of a such a challenging text. Looking back from several years later, I think that, essentially, I was simply leading students very slowly and carefully toward my own reading of the text—toward a single, albeit carefully researched, interpretation. I thought then that I was encouraging genuine discussion of my students' interpretations of the text because I was not lecturing to them. Because the classroom was filled with students' voices instead of my own, I thought that I had freed the students from the narrow confines of a typical lecturer's (or professor's or critic's) more or less brilliant reading of the text. Now, looking back, what I think I was in fact doing was carefully guiding (and really dominating) the discussion, by keeping it within very narrow parameters through the mechanism of my elaborately crafted questions. I think now that my carefully crafted questions were almost as effective at determining their reading of the text as a lecture would have been.15

Eventually, after teaching Heart of Darkness for four semesters, I started to become somewhat dissatisfied and unsettled with the pedagogy I was using. I perceived that I was leading my students down what I started to call the garden path; term after term, I was having essentially the same discussions over and over again, just with different groups of students. Something began to nag at me; something did not feel right. I started to think that I could not possibly be generating authentic discussion of students' interpretations of the text if I was having the same conversations over and over again, semester after semester. It seemed that I was not really accomplishing

15 In Chapter Four, I offer a critique of this New Critical approach to teaching Heart of Darkness from the perspective of a problematized practice.
anything very different than if I had been lecturing to them. I sensed that I could not continue to go forward in the same direction, and that my teaching practice was somehow insufficient and problematic. But I did not know anything different. I thought that the way I was teaching was, quite simply, teaching English. I did not know, at that point, that I was teaching according to a particular, New Critical Practice derived from Brooks and Warren and Diltz and Gutteridge; I did not characterize what I was doing as an approach, as one of several possible approaches. Because of this, I felt stuck, and I could not see any way to resolve what I began to call the garden path problem.

In hindsight, I think I was coming up against some of the most often cited shortcomings of New Critical Practice: the limitations of a pedagogical practice premised on a transmission model of learning, a practice that did not connect meaningfully to students' lives, one biased toward a particular canon of texts and a particular conception of the make-up of the class. And I was unknowingly struggling with the effects of a pedagogy where the limits on what counts in the classroom were set by the underlying theory, without the existence of such limits (or theory) being acknowledged. Yet because I did not see my teaching practice as "New Critical Practice," as one of many possible approaches to teaching literature, and because I had not yet read any of the critiques of New Critical Practice that I cited in section 1.1, I did not identify these shortcomings or connect them to any other teacher's experiences. I simply knew something was wrong, and I put a label on it, calling it the garden path problem.

In fact, it took until I met someone who did something very different in the classroom for me to imagine that there could be any way out of my dilemma, and that event caused me to change my approach to teaching Heart of Darkness, and my
approach to teaching English literature. It happened in the form of a workshop I attended as a part of the English Honour Specialist course that I took after teaching Heart of Darkness for four semesters run by a teacher from South Secondary School in London, Ian Underhill. For the better part of one July morning, Ian led a group of us through a lesson he had taught to his OAC (Ontario Academic Credit) class earlier that spring. He described it as a "prototypical Reader Response short story lesson." He read us a wonderful story by James Reaney, and to my surprise he, as the classroom teacher, had not designed any careful questions! Instead, he had us (as his students) write open responses to the text. Then we made up questions (and statements) that we felt we wanted to pursue, and these, rather than the teacher's questions, became the agenda for our discussion. That single lesson was a revelation for me. The discussion in that class was so charged, the speakers were so willing to delve into the details of the text, and, most importantly, the scope permitted such a range of creative interpretations. The conversation was so interesting to listen to, and so easy to enter into. The only limitations on the discussion appeared to be the text itself and the composition of the readers in the classroom.

Underhill's Reader Response lesson offered not only an alternative conception of teaching English, but, more importantly for me, it offered the very possibility that there could be an alternative. And this possibility freed me from my state of stuckness in teaching Heart of Darkness. Moreover, it made me wonder what must underlie these two different conceptions of teaching English. It seemed to me that my old approach and Ian Underhill's approach to teaching Heart of Darkness involved very different assumptions about texts, readers and writers, and about what mattered in the teaching of literature. Recognizing the possibility of a range of different approaches to teaching
English led me, in time, to the realization that any approach to teaching literature must presuppose some critical theory of literature. I realized that any set of pedagogical choices must presuppose some conceptions in theory, whether or not these conceptions are made explicit to the teacher or to the students. Later I realized that these theoretical conceptions determine the limits on what counts in the classroom.16

Hence, I learned, underlying both the New Critical and Reader Response approaches to teaching texts like *Heart of Darkness* must be different sets of unstated assumptions in theory. I realized that no approach to teaching literature can exist without some theoretical conceptions of such basic elements as the text, the reader and the writer. None of my teachers, however, had ever stated that. In all of my history as a student and as a beginning teacher, I had never heard anyone say, "Here is one approach to teaching literature; it is based on such and such a theory of literature, which is only one of a broad range of theories. I have chosen this theory, and this approach to teaching literature, and here is why." Until I returned to graduate school, I was not aware of the existence of these assumptions, or even of the possibility that there could be such assumptions. Instead, I saw pedagogy as non-theoretical, as simply what one did as an English teacher. No critical theory was ever discussed in my courses at the Faculty of Education, and certainly no theory was ever discussed within the English department of my first school. Hence, Underhill's approach in the classroom was like a seed crystal for me in two ways: it showed me the possibility of a different approach to teaching English, and it showed me the possibility of a relationship between literary theory and pedagogical practice.

From that July morning, what Underhill had labelled a Reader Response

---

16 This learning process occurred largely as a result of the courses I completed in the doctoral program at OISE/UT, particularly in Deanne Bogdan's Philosophy 1484 course.
approach came to influence my teaching of English literature, and my teaching of *Heart of Darkness*, more and more. After my experiences with Underhill's workshop, I moved to Toronto and began preparing to teach in a different school for September. Once again, I was to teach *Heart of Darkness*, this time to OAC students in an academic high school downtown. However, this time around, when I had my students read the text, although I still broke the story down into constituent scenes, I no longer created carefully contrived questions for them to answer on these scenes. Instead, students wrote open responses to the text, sometimes to individual scenes, sometimes to larger chunks of the story. I wrote responses, too—albeit as an older and more experienced reader, who had read the text a number of times and who, as the teacher, had a different position within the classroom. Together, as readers, we used our responses, rather than questions that I had prepared ahead of time, to form the agenda for class discussion and for the subsequent writing we would complete on the text. From its beginnings in Ian Underhill's workshop class that summer, my pedagogical practice was continually modified over the next three years.

However, during that time, I started to experience a similar sequence of reactions to my classes as I had experienced in my New Critical classroom a few years before. I felt a great sense of success at first, but over time I began to notice a problem. Just as I had in my New Critical classroom, I started to feel stuck. In my Reader Response classroom, my stuckness looked like this. My students, in response to a text we were reading in class, would always come up with all sorts of ideas, commentary, and interpretations about what was going on in the text: what it was about, what it meant, what was important about it, which elements ought to be emphasized. And after a good deal of stimulating discussion, class after class, they
began to ask me the same question: "Of all of these ideas we have come up with, which interpretation is right? Which interpretation is the best one?" I was stuck again. I honestly did not know how to answer their question. And I sensed that I had to answer it; not to answer it would mean that we would have to accept any reading of a given text, and that clearly was not an alternative that either I or my students were willing to live with. I labelled this problem the interpretation problem, and it came to represent, to me, an underlying flaw in the apparently seamless pedagogy of Reader Response Practice: when faced with many interpretations of a given text in class, how do we determine which readings are better than others? However, it was not until I started to write this thesis that I began to see that the two problems, the garden path problem of New Critical Practice and the interpretation problem of Reader Response Practice, were, in fact, both symptoms of an unproblematized classroom.

1.6 Moving Theory Out of the Teacher's Blind Spot

In writing this thesis, and in reading writers such as Graff, Richter, Belsey, Scholes and Eagleton, I have come to view both the garden path problem and the interpretation problem as a result of the way teachers are positioned in both New Critical and Reader Response classrooms. In both practices, theory remains in the teacher's blind spot because the classroom practice has not been problematized. Despite its merits, Reader Response Practice does not offer a genuine solution to the problems of New Criticism because it does not acknowledge the inevitability of theory any more than New Critical Practice. Moreover, because the theory remains in the teacher's blind spot, the root causes of the garden path problem and the interpretation problem cannot be seen either. Because each practice presupposes particular
conceptions in theory, the particular problems of each pedagogy are in fact created by specific characteristics exhibited by each underlying theory. This point of view has developed as a result of my own experiences as a classroom teacher who has undergone the transition from New Critical to Reader Response classroom practice. My experiences in the classroom and the reading I have completed in preparation for writing this thesis have led me to the view that the best way for Ontario English teachers to resolve the problems of New Criticism, and the best way to alleviate the symptoms of the garden path problem and the interpretation problem, would be to take advantage of the lesson the teachers in the universities have been learning for the past thirty years. If we can develop a problematized practice in our high school classrooms, theory will be able to move more successfully out of the blind spot, and these problems may be more genuinely resolved. Although the presence of theory is inevitable in our classrooms, and although theory has become redefined to include more of the social-political dimensions of the learning context than it did in New Critical or Reader Response Practices, theory will always occupy some place in the visual field.

1.7 A Guide to the Thesis

In Chapters Two and Three of the thesis, I examine the two pedagogical practices that have most influenced secondary school English classrooms in Ontario: New Critical pedagogy and Reader Response pedagogy, respectively. In each case, I aim to show how the classroom practice positions teachers in such a way that theory remains in the teacher's blind spot, and I aim to show how the blindness to theory causes fundamental problems in the practice precisely because the pedagogy has not been problematized. In the case of New Critical pedagogy, I show how the garden path
problem is a result of unacknowledged theory that underlies the classroom practice, and in the case of Reader Response pedagogy, I show how the same symptom resurfaces as the interpretation problem, again from the unacknowledged theory that underlies the practice. Then, in Chapter Four, I indicate how high school English teachers might develop a problematized classroom practice that is characterized by an acknowledgment of the inevitability of theory. In Chapter Four, I make use of the model of constructive reading developed by Bogdan and Straw to describe a problematized classroom practice that better addresses the shortcomings of both New Critical and Reader Response practices.
Chapter 2:  
New Criticism and the English Classroom

The first law of criticism is that it shall be objective, shall cite the nature of the object, and recognize the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own sake.

--John Crowe Ransom, The New Criticism

This book has been conceived on the assumption that if poetry is worth teaching at all it is worth teaching as poetry.

--Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Poetry

Understanding Poetry did more than any other single book to make the techniques of the New Criticism available in the classrooms of American colleges and universities and to present the techniques of analysis as something to be learned and imitated.

--René Wellek

There is no more need to be a card-carrying Leavisite today that there is to be a card-carrying Copernican.

--Terry Eagleton

Often critics practising New Criticism were unaware that they were doing so: the ideas and methods of the school had become so deeply embedded and broadly generalized among critics as to form the very essence of "criticism"

--Vincent Leitch

So deeply ingrained in English studies are New Critical attitudes, values and emphases that we do not even perceive them as the legacy of a particular movement. On the contrary: we feel them to be the natural and definitive conditions for criticism in general.

--William Cain

The close readings [of New Criticism] were not nearly close enough.

--Paul de Man
2.1 The Approach

In this chapter, I examine the pedagogical practice that, from the 1930s to the 1970s and even 1980s, dominated secondary school classrooms in Ontario. I label that pedagogy New Critical Practice because most of the key components of the theory that underlies the practice, and to a degree, the practice itself, are derived from the work of the major American New Critics from the 1930s to the 1950s. I show how the garden path problem I faced in my own New Critical classroom has its origins in New Critical theory, because it is New Critical theory that determines the limits on what counts in the New Critical classroom. Moreover, I illustrate that the reason I felt so stuck in my New Critical classroom, and the reason I couldn't get unstuck, was that the theory which determined the limits on what counts remained in the blind spot. I argue that, by problematizing the New Critical classroom, teachers may be repositioned so that the theory no longer resides wholly in the blind spot; hence the limits on what counts may be made more explicit and the garden path problem may be resolved. Moreover, I argue that, by problematizing the New Critical classroom, the four most commonly cited charges against New Criticism may be better addressed. Throughout, I stress that a more genuine solution to the problems of New Criticism requires a teaching practice that acknowledges the inevitability of theory.

In order to develop this argument, I first describe the essential features of New Critical pedagogy as it has typically been practised in Ontario secondary school classrooms; then I examine the key components of the theory that underlies that practice. In my discussion of the pedagogy, I show how New Critical Practice in Ontario high schools is closely related to the traditional approach to teaching English in the universities that I identified in Chapter One. In my discussion of the theory, I include an
analysis of the New Critical conceptions of the text, the reader and the author, and I illustrate how these conceptions underlie the practice, and indeed how particular problems with these conceptions in theory lead to the garden path problem and to the problems commonly observed in New Critical Practice.

At the outset, I should offer the following caveat. The New Critical pedagogy that dominated secondary school classrooms in Ontario in this period was, of course, neither monolithic, uniform nor wholly consistent. But this does not mean that, as a set of practices, its key characteristics cannot be identified or that its basic development cannot be traced. New Critical pedagogy in Ontario is closely related to the traditional approach to teaching English that I identified in my discussion of the North American university English classrooms in Chapter One. As I stated in that chapter, this set of approaches has a legacy extending from Coleridge to Arnold to the key early Modern critics I.A. Richards, T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis; I emphasize in the present chapter that it reached its ultimate codification in the work of the American New Critics in the 1930s to the 1950s. Moreover, much of the New Critical pedagogy that emerged from this legacy was prescribed in the text that, more than any other, dominated university and secondary school English classrooms during the middle decades of this century: Understanding Poetry (1938), co-authored by New Critics Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren.

In Ontario the basic elements of this traditional approach were subject to a range of influences (as I noted in Chapter One), particularly the work of educator B.C. Diltz, to produce the New Critical Practice that typified Ontario secondary school English classrooms during this period—the practice I learned as a student at the Faculty of Education in the early 1990s. As I noted in Chapter One, the key characteristics of this practice are:
1. the teacher’s selection of the text;
2. the teacher’s careful preparation of a scholarly reading of the text;
3. the teacher’s design of an elaborate sequence of questions that lead students toward an approximation of that reading;
4. the teacher’s mediation of the classroom discussion that emerges from these questions, which further ensures that students are led toward an approximation of that reading.

Moreover, these key characteristics of New Critical Practice are easily contrasted with the key characteristics of the pedagogy that, as noted by writers such as Applebee and Appleman, has emerged in North American secondary school classrooms in the past few years (and the one I learned in Ian Underhill’s workshop): Reader Response Practice. Reader Response Practice does not share these four key characteristics, and in fact is defined by quite different features altogether. I pursue these differences in more detail in Chapter Three.

2.2 The Development of New Critical Practice in the Universities

To provide a context for my examination of New Critical pedagogy in Ontario secondary school classrooms, it will be useful briefly to trace the development of that pedagogy. And because that development is closely linked to the development of the traditional approach to reading and teaching literature in North American university English classrooms described in Chapter One, it will be appropriate first to consider the evolution in North American universities, and then to trace the more specific lineage in Ontario secondary schools, to show how the New Critical pedagogy that developed in Ontario high schools was part of a movement that swept across universities and
secondary schools in North America during the middle decades of this century. As a beginning teacher, my tracing of the development of New Critical Practice was a revealing and exciting process for me, full of twists and turns and "Aha!" responses as I uncovered more of the roots of the teaching practice I was using in my classroom. It was also a process of coming to terms with an almost total ignorance of the history of English teaching with which I had begun my career. What follows in the rest of this section and in section 2.3 is based on the reading in pedagogy and theory I did as a new teacher in the early 1990s.

The lineage of the traditional approach to teaching literature that shaped North American university English classrooms until the late 1960s has been remarked upon by several writers noted in Chapter One, including Richter, Belsey, Graff, Scholes and Eagleton. An accurate, succinct and often cited account of this lineage is offered in Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Eagleton locates the founding of "English studies" in eighteenth-century England, and notes that in this period what was conceived as "literature" included not just creative or imaginative writing but "the whole body of valued writing in society: philosophy, history, essays and letters as well as poems" (Eagleton 1983 17). Only in the early nineteenth century, with the Romantic critics, did creative or imaginative writing come to be valued over other kinds of writing. According to Eagleton, from Romantic writers such as Coleridge we inherit our more contemporary ideas of the symbol, aesthetic experience, aesthetic harmony and the unique nature of the artifact (Eagleton 1983 21). Eagleton notes how, later in the same century, the preeminent Victorian critic Matthew Arnold identified literature as the force that ought provide the social cement, affective values and basic mythologies that knit together a society. Arnold believed that, with the decline of religion, this burden should come to rest
more and more on literature. For Arnold, only literature could illustrate and preserve the best that culture had to offer, and only literature could confer "greatness and a noble spirit" (Eagleton 1983 24). Hence, since Arnold's era, our conception of literature has been imbued with a distinct moral sense.

Historical analysts such as Eagleton emphasize the influence of several early Modern critics in England, particularly F.R. Leavis, I.A. Richards, and T.S. Eliot, in the development of our contemporary conceptions of teaching literature. Moreover, these writers were in many ways the forerunners of the New Critics who emerged in America a decade later. Leavis, in particular, popularized the study of English at the universities. Eagleton notes that "in the early 1920s it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all," but that owing to the influence of Leavis' teaching and to his journal, Scrutiny, "by the early 1930s it had become a question of why it was worth wasting your time on anything else" (Eagleton 1983 31). According to Eagleton, Leavis' legacy has exerted a tremendous influence on our conception of literary studies:

There is no more need to be a card-carrying Leavisite today that there is to be a card-carrying Copernican...That current has entered the bloodstream of English studies in England as Copernicus reshaped our astronomical beliefs [and] has become a form of spontaneous critical wisdom as deep-seated as our conviction that the earth moves round the sun.

(Eagleton 1983 31)

Rigorous critical analysis, combined with the moral imperative to keep the torch of culture burning, were hallmarks of Leavis' work. As one commentator has shrewdly put it, for Leavis and his followers, "the decline of the West was felt to be avertible by close reading" (Wright 1988 48).
If Leavis was the popularizer of literature studies in the 1920s and 1930s, it is worth noting that he was a student of I.A. Richards, and that the origins of many of his most influential ideas, and the origins of many of the ideas central to the theory of New Criticism developed in America a decade later, lie in Richards' theory of language. Richards' key texts are *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929). In *Principles of Literary Criticism*, Richards distinguishes between two usages of language: referential and emotive. For the former, Richards maintains that we often use language for the sake of referring to objects in the world. This is, he says, the "referential" or "scientific" use of language (Richards 1924 180). By contrast, Richards maintains, we also use language for the effects in emotion and attitude produced by its reference; this is the "emotive" or "poetic" use of language (Richards 1924 180). Many of the key components of New Criticism are based on Richards' division of language and on the conception that literature belongs to the category of poetic language.

T.S. Eliot, like Richards, maintains that literature is distinguished by a nonscientific use of language. Moreover, Eliot defines as a key feature of literary language the "objective correlative": a one-to-one correspondence between images or objects and the feelings for which these images or objects are supposed to be the formula (Eliot 1950 71). In addition to Richards' conception of poetic language, the origins of several of the key ideas of American New Criticism are to be found in six essays published by T.S. Eliot from 1919 to 1923 (from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" to "The Function of Criticism," republished in *Collected Essays*, 1950). In fact, the central claim of New Criticism, that criticism ought to focus on the text itself, may in large part be argued to emerge from the work of Eliot and Richards. Consider Eliot's claim that "a poem should be treated primarily as poetry and not another thing" (Eliot
1950 73) and Richards' argument that any critical analysis of a poem ought to take place only with reference to "intrinsic criteria," rather than "extrinsic criteria" such as biography or history (Richards 1924 117). Moreover, Leavis, in *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), notes that a poem's "self-sufficiency is limited" when critical focus is shifted to "anything outside the poem" (Leavis 1932 24).

The emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the text, poetic language and close reading drawn from Leavis, Richards and Eliot in England were to become hallmarks of American New Criticism of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. The term *New Criticism* itself was coined by John Crowe Ransom in his 1941 text entitled *The New Criticism*, although by that date the views and methods of what came to be labelled *New Criticism* were already well established. The major American New Critics included American Southerners Ransom, Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren (Tate, Brooks and Warren were all, in different years, students of Ransom), as well as W.K. Wimsatt, R.P. Blackmur, René Wellek, Kenneth Burke and Yvor Winters (Wellek 1986 145). Journals of New Criticism included Eliot's *The Criterion* (1922-1939) and Leavis' *Scrutiny* (1932-1953) in England, and in America *The Southern Review* (1935-1942) edited by Brooks and Warren, *The Kenyon Review* edited by Ransom (1938-1959) and *The Sewannee Review*, edited by Tate from 1944-45 and run by others well into the 1980s (Leitch 1988 24).

Examining the works of these writers helps to identify the main principles of the theory of *New Criticism* which, in turn, set the limits on what counts in New Critical Practice. Although the New Critics were far from unified on all issues and although *New Criticism* cannot be considered a wholly consistent school, the fundamentals of the theory that had such an impact on English studies in North America may, in hindsight, be
fairly clearly identified and articulated. For instance, Cleanth Brooks, arguably the most consistent, most prolific and most lasting proponent of the theory, wrote a retrospective 1200-word condensation of New Critical theory for the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* published in 1974. In his entry, Brooks identifies five distinguishing characteristics of the school:

1. New Criticism distinguishes literary criticism from the study of textual sources, social backgrounds, the history of ideas, politics, and social effects; attention is focused on the literary object itself rather than on such "extrinsic" concerns;

2. New Criticism concentrates on the structure of the text and not the intentions of the author or the reactions of the reader;

3. New Criticism focuses on the particular words of the text in relation to the work as a whole; for New Critics, each word contributes to a unique context and derives its precise meaning from its place in that context; in this sense, New Criticism is an organic theory of literature;

4. New Criticism practises close reading of individual works, attending scrupulously to the words of the text to specify the contextual unity and total meaning of the work itself;

5. New Criticism distinguishes literature from both religion and morality. 

(Brooks 1974 567-568)

Although this list of characteristics is far from exhaustive, it is an accurate and useful account from which to begin an analysis of the theory of New Criticism. It was also, for me as a new teacher, a distillation of so much that I had internalized about the English classroom.
Arguably, the New Critics are as much grouped together by the ideas to which they were opposed as by the ideas for which they stood. In *A History of Modern Criticism*, René Wellek identifies four main trends prevalent in early twentieth-century American criticism to which the New Critics were opposed. These include:

1. the evocative mode of the aesthetic impressionist criticism of James G. Huneker;
2. the moralistic New Humanism of Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More;
3. the antimodernist, cultural criticism of H.L. Mencken and Van Wych Brooks;
4. the sociological Marxist criticism of Granville Hicks. (Wellek 1986 145-146)

Moreover, Wellek notes that the New Critics were united in their protest against the prevalent academic criticism of their day, specifically the emphases on philology, biography, textual bibliography, historical scholarship and literary history, which at that time dominated university instruction and publication (Wellek 1986 146). In addition, Vincent Leitch notes that the New Critics were opposed to the view of the literary canon typically expressed by the academic criticism of their era: in the opinion of the New Critics, too little space was allotted to modern literature and the metaphysical poets (Leitch 1988 27). The New Critics deplored the underrepresentation of modern poetry in university English studies. Allen Tate, for instance, scathingly claimed that “the scholar who tells us that he understands Dryden but makes nothing of Hopkins or Yeats is telling us that he does not understand Dryden” (Tate 1968 153).  

Hence, as a movement, it is fair to say that New Criticism, in large part, began in

---

17 In the category *modern literature*, most New Critics included English language literature published after 1890, and in the category *metaphysical poets* they included Donne (especially) as well as G. Herbert, Crashaw, H. Vaughan, Marvell and Traherne (Drabble 1995 645, 656).
opposition to critical trends in English studies in America in the early 1930s. However, New Criticism became such a conspicuous success story that by the 1950s the New Critics clearly had come to represent the status quo; their practice had come to dominate the teaching of English literature throughout North American university classrooms. The pedagogy of New Criticism, as articulated in the key New Critical textbook of the era, *Understanding Poetry* (1938), co-authored by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, set the reigning method of reading and teaching literature in North American universities and secondary schools for decades. Regarding the impact of New Criticism, Vincent Leitch offers the following observation:

[By the 1950s] New Criticism served for growing numbers of academic critics and scholars as “normal criticism” or simply as “criticism”...Often critics practising New Criticism were unaware that they were doing so: the ideas and methods of the school had become so deeply embedded and broadly generalized among critics as to form the very essence of “criticism.”

(Leitch 1988 26)

Even as late as the 1980s, critics such as William Cain observed:

No one speaks on behalf of the New Criticism as such today...But the truth is that the New Criticism survives and is prospering, and it seems to be powerless only because its power is so pervasive that we are ordinarily not even aware of it. So deeply ingrained in English studies are New Critical attitudes, values and emphases that we do not even perceive them as the legacy of a particular movement. On the contrary: we feel them to be the natural and definitive conditions for criticism in general. (Cain 1984 105)

Hence, by the 1950s New Criticism had become influential and even ubiquitous in the
English departments of North American universities.

2.3 The Development of New Critical Practice in Ontario Secondary Schools

As a new teacher, my reading about the development of New Criticism in the universities gave me the beginnings of a context for seeing what I had been practising in my own classroom. As I noted in Chapter One, I learned that, in Ontario, American New Criticism was filtered through a range of influences, most significantly through the work of B.C. Diltz at the Ontario College of Education. The characteristics of Diltz's pedagogical practice in Ontario are, to a significant degree, in accordance with the pedagogy presented in Understanding Poetry, in that it is distinguished by the same four steps. Diltz elaborates on these features in his three key pedagogical texts, Poetic Pilgrimage: An Essay in Education (1942), Pierian Spring: Reflections on the Education and the Teaching of English (1946) and Patterns of Surmise (1962). In my synopsis in the present section, I refer primarily to the more succinct account offered in Patterns of Surmise; I consider Poetic Pilgrimage and Pierian Spring in more detail in sections 2.5 to 2.7, below. According to Diltz, the teacher's first job is to "select texts from the canon" to suit his/her perception of the students' reading abilities, interests, and needs. The texts are to be "classics" in terms of what Diltz calls their "universal moral and aesthetic values" and they are to be "free-standing." These texts are deemed to harbour "eternal truths" and can yield up to "consensus-meaning" within individual interpretations, and provide vicarious experience for the reader (Diltz 1962 18-21). Through such texts, students are to experience the power of the best literature and its values: by these Diltz means "spiritual, universal truths," "organic unity" and "aesthetic wholes." Diltz maintains that any worthy text "itself raises natural questions," questions whose answers lead the
reader through a process of "recreation" of its effects (Diltz 1962 21-23).

After selecting texts and using his/her training to complete a scholarly reading of the text, the teacher "prepares in-depth questions" on the text, and these questions are used to form the agenda for the classroom lesson. Diltz has the teacher prepare questions in the following way. First there are questions on the whole text, to be engaged after students have completed their initial reading; then there are questions on sequenced sections; finally, there are questions that "re-visit" the text as a whole (Diltz 1962 25-26). Moreover, Diltz has the teacher use the questions in the classroom in a particular way; the teacher is to engage the students in what he terms a "Socratic encounter," in which the students use their responses to the teacher's questions to create a specific kind of classroom discussion (Diltz 1962 23-25). The students offer their answers to the teacher's sequenced questions, and the teacher incorporates scholarly or contextual material as needed to deepen students' reading experiences. In addition, the teacher "deploys analogies to the students' experiences" to enhance and enliven the discussion (Diltz 1962 23-25). In this way the teacher mediates between the text and the readers. This mediation is crucial: in Diltz's classroom practice, the teacher not only selects the texts and sets the agenda for discussion through the sequence of questions, but he or she also mediates between the text and the readers themselves.

Discovering in Diltz's work the origins of so many of the particular practices I was using in my own classroom was an astonishing and profound experience for me. Moreover, I noted several modifications to Diltz's practice in Ontario that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s, most significantly by John Stevens (at the Ontario College of Education in Toronto) and John Smallbridge (at Althouse College of Education in London). I would emphasize that these modifications are relatively minor; in all cases,
the four basic principles of Diltz's New Critical pedagogy remain intact. These modifications are clearly and accurately described in Don Gutteridge's 1994 text *Stubborn Pilgrimage: Resistance and Transformation in Ontario English Teaching 1960-1993*. However, because Gutteridge's own pedagogical prescription shares many of the essentials of Diltz's practice, I refer here only to his description of the history of pedagogy in Ontario; discussion of the content of that pedagogy is reserved for sections 2.5 to 2.7, below. Specifically, the most important modifications to Diltz's pedagogy in Ontario during the 1960s and 1970s include the following:

1. the question format begins to extend beyond the teacher-led classroom encounter to include student responses before and after that encounter;
2. texts are grouped by genre and theme, allowing more comparisons to be drawn between texts;
3. a more developmental approach is used to sequence texts through the grades;
4. tests and exams are more carefully matched to one another by the use of more summative questions;
5. a greater variety of approaches to answering the teacher-generated questions is used; classroom practice extends beyond a teacher-led, whole class discussion, to include small group and individual study, seminar presentations and essays. (Gutteridge 1994 52-60)

None of these modifications, however much they may be argued to have improved the functioning of English classrooms in Ontario, changed the basic tenets of Diltz's practice. The pedagogy remained still solidly within the purview of Diltz's version of New Criticism, with the teacher selection of texts, the carefully prepared scholarly reading, the use of
carefully crafted questions that led students toward that reading, and the teacher-led classroom discussion.

Beyond Stevens and Smallbridge, further modifications to Diltz's pedagogy are apparent in Gutteridge's 1983 text *Brave Season*, which encapsulates the particular method I was taught as a student at the Faculty of Education. However, once again, although many of Gutteridge's own modifications are clear and genuine improvements to Diltz's practice, none of these modifications change the essential features of Diltz's pedagogy. The most important of these modifications are:

1. breaking the questions down into three levels, the first two of which apply to smaller sections of the text as opposed to the whole text; this extends Diltz's approach (which was initially designed for poetry and short fiction) to apply more usefully to novels and longer plays;
2. having students answer the questions in a greater variety of modes, including individual response writing and small group discussion, rather than always using whole-class discussion;
3. grouping texts together more continuously to allow for greater development of ideas and for more comparative work between texts;
4. permitting students to read beyond "core" texts as a whole class, including having students read texts in small groups or individually;
5. offering modifications to questions as students progress through the grades;
6. creating better links between classroom work and examinations;
7. permitting a wider range in the degree of teacher mediation during discussions. (Gutteridge 1983 127-138)
Gutteridge's approach is still solidly within the New Critical tradition as filtered through Diltz: the key features of the pedagogy remain teacher selection of texts, teacher-researched scholarly reading, carefully designed questions to lead students toward that reading, and teacher-mediated discussion to develop that reading.

2.4 Theory and Practice: The Garden Path Problem

In reading about the development of New Critical Practice in my first two years of teaching, I learned a good deal about where the pedagogy I had been using in my own classroom had come from. I did not, however, find a solution to the garden path problem. Only when I began to read New Critical theory did I begin to find a way out of my state of stuckness in my New Critical classroom. I learned that the garden path problem that was causing me so much trouble in fact had its origins in New Critical theory, because it is the theory which determines the limits on what counts in the classroom. Yet in New Critical Practice, the theory remains in the teacher's blind spot; hence it was some time before I was able to find a way out of my dilemma with the garden path problem. The sections below describe what I found in reading New Critical theory that helped me to see a way to resolve the garden path problem.

Having traced, in sections 2.2 and 2.3, the development of New Critical Practice in Ontario secondary school English classrooms, from its origins in England to its codification in America to its application in Ontario through Diltz and his inheritors, I turn now to the theory that lies behind the practice. In sections 2.5 to 2.7, I examine the key components of New Critical theory in order to locate the causes of the garden path problem. I have grouped these components into three sections as follows: the New Critical conception of the text (section 2.5), the reader (section 2.6) and the author
In each of these sections, I first illustrate how that component is conceived in the theory of New Criticism, including arguments from the key American New Critics, from the key text of American New Critical pedagogy, *Understanding Poetry* by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, and from the key texts of New Critical pedagogy in Ontario, *Poetic Pilgrimage*, *Pierian Spring* and *Patterns of Surmise* by B.C. Diltz. Then I show how that conception in New Critical theory positions the teacher in New Critical Practice so that the underlying theory remains in the teacher's blind spot because the pedagogical practice has not been problematized. I argue that it is in the theory, however obscured by an unproblematized practice, that the causes of the garden path problem are to be found because the limits on what counts in the classroom are determined by theory. Moreover, I show that the commonly cited charges against New Criticism are also caused by limitations in the theory that underlies the practice.

### 2.5 The New Critical Conception of the Text

The central claim of New Criticism is its insistence that criticism ought to focus on the text itself. Ransom, in *The New Criticism*, clearly articulates this position: "The first law of criticism is that it shall be objective, shall cite the nature of the object, and recognize the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own sake" (Ransom 1941:23). Ransom's conception of the text as "the work itself" is shared by all the major American New Critics. Moreover, that conception is largely derived from the work of the early modern critics in England discussed above: F.R. Leavis, I.A. Richards and T.S. Eliot. Each of these writers established that the core of critical practice was an emphasis on the work itself, Leavis stressing the text's "self-sufficiency" (Leavis 1932:43), Richards arguing that any critical analysis of a poem ought to take place only with reference to
"intrinsic criteria" (Richards 1924 26), and Eliot maintaining "a poem should be treated primarily as poetry and not another thing" (Eliot 1950 14).

The origin of the New Critical conception of the text as the work itself bears closer examination if we are to locate the roots of the garden path problem. The way in which that conception is articulated in the work of the American New Critics is based largely on the work of Richards and Eliot. In fact, several of the key terms employed by the American New Critics in their critical practice are derived from the work of these two writers in England. For instance, from Richards' text *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) come the now familiar New Critical terms "tension" and "irony," as well as the distinction between "emotive" and "referential" language. Moreover, the notion of an intricate "balance" or "equilibrium" of opposites that was to become a hallmark of the American New Critical conception of the text is also derived from Richards: "This balanced poise, stable through its power of inclusion, not through the force of its exclusions, is...a general characteristic of all the most valuable experiences of the arts" (Richards 1924 248). Richards' influence in the articulation of the New Critical conception of the text in America was acknowledged by New Critics such as Allen Tate, who claimed that "nobody who read I.A. Richards' *Practical Criticism* when it appeared in 1929 could read any poem as he [sic] had read it before" (Tate 1968 xi).

Another influence in the articulation of the New Critical conception of the text is T.S. Eliot's theory of the "objective correlative" in literary language (Eliot 1950 124). As I articulated in section 2.2, above, for Eliot the effects of poetry stem from a relation between the words of the text and events, states of mind, or experiences that offer the reader a particular correlation to those words (Eliot 1950 124). Eliot suggests that there is a unique experience to which the units of language in a poem correspond, and that
experience, that objective correlative, is what makes the intellectual and emotional value of the poem intelligible to the reader. Eliot’s theory of the objective correlative, combined with Richards’ theory of language and Richards’ emphasis on tension, irony and equilibrium, profoundly shaped the articulation of the New Critical conception of the text that emerged in America in the 1930s and 1940s.

From the work of New Critics such as Ransom, Tate, Brooks, Warren, Wimsatt and Blackmur, the following conception of the text emerges, which is clearly influenced by the earlier work of Leavis, Richards and Eliot: the text is conceptualized as the work itself, which is a structure of meanings manifested in tensions, ironies and paradoxes, whose organic unity is achieved through the ambiguity inherent in poetic language; in reading such a text, an equilibrium of the opposed forces within the structure of meanings is achieved. This conception of the text determines the defining procedure for the practice of New Criticism, what is labelled by New Critics the procedure of close reading. For the New Critics, close reading is what the critic does: it is the distinctive procedure by which the equilibrium of the opposed forces within the structure of meanings in the work is achieved. The term close reading was first coined by Richards in Practical Criticism. Richards maintains that, through “close reading,” the text converts “a welter of responses” into a “systematized complex response” (Richards 1929 54). Moreover, close reading is the primary activity of critical practice for all of the American New Critics. From its beginnings in the work of Richards, the procedure of close reading is articulated by each of the New Critics, and reaches its most elaborate form in the work of Cleanth Brooks, particularly in the painstakingly detailed The Well-Wrought Urn (1968). In The Well-Wrought Urn, Brooks demonstrates how, through the distinctive procedure of close reading, the text becomes a “pattern of resolved stresses” illustrating “organic unity” and
containing “total meaning” (Brooks 1968 63-64).

A closer examination of the procedure of close reading in the practice of New Criticism will provide considerable insight into the New Critical conception of the text and into the origin of the garden path problem. In *Practical Criticism*, Richards claims that “all respectable poetry invites close reading” (Richards 1929 203), and the practice of criticism, for Richards and for all of the subsequent American New Critics, tends to focus almost exclusively on the close reading of individual texts. Moreover, close reading, as a method of criticism, is premised on Richards’ theory of language. In that theory, close reading is a critical procedure that applies to poetic, rather than scientific, language. The reason for this, it must be stressed, is that poetic language is characterized, for Richards, by *ambiguity*. Ambiguity, according to Richards, is the root condition of poetic language, and the key to its richness. In fact, Richards’ student William Empson published an important New Critical text entitled *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1947). In it, Empson illustrates how poetic texts, through ambiguity, stimulate the reader to see a harmonious reconciliation of their inherent multiple meanings. Empson defines Richards’ sense of ambiguity as “any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language” (Empson 1947 1), and uses this definition to provide a set of seven meticulous, word-by-word analyses of poetic texts. These analyses were to become the paradigm examples of the kind of close reading prescribed by Richards. In *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Empson provides seven illustrations of increasingly complex ways in which poems may be shown to contain ambiguity, and in so doing he introduces many specific techniques that later were to become hallmarks of New Criticism. In particular, he illustrates how a text’s ambiguity may disclose “hidden conflicts” or “tensions” near its outset, and how, through close reading, these conflicts or
tensions may be shown to converge in a "harmonious balance" to reveal the "meaning" of the poem (Empson 1947 12-14).

The technique of close reading first described by Richards and demonstrated in such detail by Empson is practised by each of the major American New Critics. In North America, the practice of criticism from the 1930s to the 1950s was largely characterized by conducting close readings of individual texts, which involved searching for what the New Critics called "master tropes" (Brooks 1974 569). For Cleanth Brooks, the master tropes which guided close reading were paradox and irony; for Allen Tate it was tension; for Robert Penn Warren and R.P. Blackmur it was symbol; for Murray Krieger it was metaphor (Brooks 1974 569). However, regardless of the term, in their practices of close reading, New Critics defined the master tropes very broadly, so that all of them came to mean the tendency of a word to suggest "more than one meaning" (Brooks 1974 569). Hence the close readings demonstrated by the American New Critics remained modelled on Empson's work, and retained their dependency Richards' theory of language.

Arguably the most highly developed articulation of the practice of close reading is found in Brooks' text The Well-Wrought Urn (1947). In it, Brooks presents exemplary instances of the New Critical practice of close reading, and he offers a central account of New Critical doctrines. In many ways, Brooks' approach appears as a synthesis of key ideas from Richards, Empson, Eliot and Ransom. In The Well-Wrought Urn, Brooks aims to demonstrate that the tension, paradox, irony and ambiguity of much modern and metaphysical poetry—of just the sort exemplified by Eliot and explicated by Empson—is fundamental to the nature of literature. He tries to show that in every age, in diverse styles, a quality of dramatic tension or paradox is essential to poetic meaning, so much so as to warrant the claim that poetry and paradox are all but identical (Brooks 1968
43-44). For Brooks, the term *paradox* calls attention to the contingent density of poetic language and metaphor, while evoking the practice of close reading that traces out the various elements that may be discerned in poetic paradoxes. And the term *irony* is, he claims, "the most general term that we have for the kind of qualification which the various elements in a context receive from the context" (Brooks 1968 209). As a dramatic tension, as a balancing and reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities, a poem is, for Brooks, fundamentally ironic in structure. More particularly, Brooks asserts that the language of the poem itself effects the reconciliation of opposites and that the result of this reconciliation is the meaning of the poem (Brooks 1968 183). Brooks extends Richards' theory by claiming that this effect is embodied in poetic language itself (Brooks 1968 186).

In *The Well-Wrought Urn*, Brooks also claims that no easy distinction between "form" and "content" can be maintained without distorting the overall meaning of the poem: the form of the poem itself "uniquely embodies its meaning" (Brooks 1968 84). Brooks concludes his demonstration of the procedure of close reading in *The Well-Wrought Urn* by describing what he calls the "heresy of paraphrase," arguing that any attempt to reduce poetic meaning to a prose statement of the poem's theme or a description of a poem's plot is a "betrayal of the poem as a poem" (Brooks 1968 170). In the final chapter, itself entitled "The Heresy of Paraphrase," Brooks examines ten representative works from *Macbeth* to the present. He states that "the common goodness which [these] poems share will have to be stated, not in terms of 'content' or 'subject matter' in the usual sense in which we use these terms, but rather in terms of structure" (Brooks 1968 177). For Brooks, "paraphrase is not the real core of meaning which constitutes the essence of the poem" (Brooks 1968 180). Instead, meaning is
found in structure: "The attempt to deal with a structure such as this may account for the frequent occurrences in the preceding chapters of such terms as 'ambiguity,' 'paradox,' 'complex of attitudes,' and—most frequent of all, and perhaps most annoying to the readers—'irony'" (Brooks 1968:179). For Brooks, a close reading of a given text reaches completion when structural unity, balance, or harmony has been demonstrated; hence, although the detail offered in The Well-Wrought Urn surpasses the efforts of other American New Critics, and even Empson’s Seven Types of Ambiguity, the principles developed by Richards are still maintained.

A useful summary of the distinctive procedure of New Critical close reading, based largely on the detailed articulation of that procedure found in Brooks’ The Well-Wrought Urn, is offered by William Leitch:

1. select a short text, often a metaphysical or modern poem;
2. rule out "genetic" critical approaches;\(^{18}\)
3. avoid "receptionist" inquiry;\(^{19}\)
4. assume the text to be an autonomous, ahistorical, spatial object;
5. presuppose the text to both intricate and complex, and both efficient and unified;
6. carry out multiple retrospective readings;
7. conceive each text as a drama of conflicting forces;
8. focus continually on the text and its manifold semantic and rhetorical interrelations;
9. insist on the fundamentally metaphorical and therefore miraculous powers of literary language;

\(^{18}\) As identified by Brooks (1968).

\(^{19}\) Of the sort identified by Wimsatt and Beardsley, which I discuss in detail in section 2.6.
10. eschew paraphrase and summary or make clear that such statements are not equivalent to poetic meaning;

11. seek an overall balanced or unified comprehensive structure of harmonized textual elements;

12. subordinate incongruities and conflicts;

13. see paradox, ambiguity, and irony as subduing divergences and insuring unifying structure;

14. treat (intrinsic) meaning as just one element of structure;

15. note in passing cognitive, experiential dimensions of the text;

16. try to be the ideal reader and create the one, true reading, which subsumes multiple readings. (Leitch 1988 35)

Leitch's summation is an accurate, succinct description of the practice of close reading described by Brooks in The Well-Wrought Urn. From it, several observations may be made regarding close reading. First, the initial characteristic identified by Leitch bears comment: the practice of New Critical close reading was developed for the analysis of poetry and was primarily applied to relatively short, often modern or metaphysical, poems. A frequent criticism of the New Critical school has been that its practice, in both criticism and pedagogy, is not as applicable to longer texts such as novels and plays. And this is quite clear from my description of the procedure of close reading: it is difficult, if not impossible, to sustain a study of the organic unity achieved by an equilibrium of opposed forces of the structure of meanings through several hundred pages of text.

Leitch's next three characteristics point to the New Critical emphasis on the work itself as the appropriate focus for critical practice: emphases on the author ("genetic" approaches) or on the reader ("receptionist" approaches) are disallowed in favour of an
emphasis on the text itself as an “autonomous, ahistorical, spatial object.” And characteristics five to fifteen offer a summation of the procedure of close reading itself, including a reiteration of the importance of Richards’ theory of language noted in characteristic number 9, with its emphasis on the “fundamentally metaphorical and therefore miraculous powers of literary language.” But it is the last of Leitch’s characteristics that I find to be the most revealing about the procedure and the assumptions of the New Critical Practice of close reading: the attempt by the critic to be “the ideal reader” who creates “the one, true reading.” This point is the one I discuss in detail in section 2.6, below.

The procedure of close reading, and the conception of the text as the work itself upon which that procedure is based, are characteristics of New Critical theory which lead to the garden path problem in classroom practice. In order to see how this occurs, it will be useful to examine how these key components of New Critical theory are directly applied to pedagogy in the key text of New Critical Practice, Understanding Poetry (1938), co-authored by Brooks and Robert Penn Warren. The influence of Understanding Poetry in shaping the teaching of English in North American university and secondary classrooms has been remarked upon by several critics, including those sympathetic with, and those opposed to, the school. René Wellek, for instance, notes that Understanding Poetry “did more than any other single book to make the techniques of the New Criticism available in the classrooms of American colleges and universities and to present the techniques of analysis as something to be learned and imitated” (Wellek 1983 122). To a significant degree, Understanding Poetry systematized many New Critical principles by synthesizing the key ideas of Richards, Eliot, Empson, Leavis, and the American New Critics; moreover, in many ways the text institutionalized New
Criticism. Leitch notes that between the publication of the first edition of *Understanding Poetry* in 1938 and the release of the second edition in 1950, the New Critics had become established in positions of authority at the most prestigious schools in America: Brooks, Wellek, and Wimsatt were professors at Yale; Blackmur was at Princeton; Eliot had just received the Nobel prize; Warren was the nation's poet laureate; Krieger and Ransom were at Kenyon, where Ransom was head of the influential Kenyon School of English supported by the Rockefeller Foundation; Richards was at Harvard; Tate was at Minnesota and Winters was at Stanford (Leitch 1988 39). *Understanding Poetry*, as the text taught in English classrooms across America, was, in many ways, the vehicle that transported the New Critics to the top of the academy. And it was the work that, more than any other, propagated the New Critical conception of the text as the work itself and the New Critical procedure of close reading as the practice of criticism, as what the critic was supposed to do, what the teacher was supposed to teach, what the student was supposed to learn, in the English classroom.

In each of the three editions of *Understanding Poetry*, published in 1938, 1950 and 1960 respectively, a canon of poems is presented to the reader, and several of these poems are explicated for the student according to the technique of New Critical close reading. The foreword to the first and second editions of the text, entitled "Letter to the Teacher," makes clear that throughout *Understanding Poetry*, the text is conceptualized as the work itself:

This book has been conceived on the assumption that if poetry is worth teaching at all it is worth teaching as poetry. The temptation to make a substitute for the poem as the object of study is usually overpowering. The substitutes are various, but the most common ones are:
1. Paraphrase of logical and narrative content.

2. Study of biographical and historical materials.

3. Inspirational and didactic interpretation.

(Brooks and Warren 1938 iv)

Notice that the various "substitutes" for the poem itself identified by Brooks and Warren correspond closely with the trends in early twentieth-century American criticism to which the New Critics were initially opposed, which included philology, biography, textual bibliography, historical scholarship, literary history, impressionistic, moralistic, cultural and sociological criticism (Wellek 1986 145-146).\textsuperscript{20} By the time of the publication of Understanding Poetry, the New Critics were in a position to present a pedagogical model based on a conception of the text that stood in firm opposition to these earlier trends. The authors emphasize in their "Letter to the Teacher" that "a satisfactory method of teaching poetry" should ensure that "emphasis be kept on the poem as a poem," that any "treatment should be concrete and inductive" and that a poem should always be treated as "an organic system of relationships" (Brooks and Warren 1938 ix), all of which are a product of the New Critical conception of the text. Moreover, in the introduction to all three editions of Understanding Poetry, Brooks and Warren make a clear distinction between "scientific" and "poetic" language, firmly including poetry in the second category (Brooks and Warren 1938 viii). What is revealing, however, is that despite the fact that this division of language is crucial to the New Critical conception of the text, to the procedure of close reading that is the primary activity of New Critical Practice, and to New Critical pedagogy, it is not explicitly argued as a position, to be defended against other possible positions. In this sense, the pedagogical practice is not

\textsuperscript{20} I cited these trends in section 2.2.
put forward as self-evident and uncontroversial. Nor is its source cited: despite the debt that the theoretical foundation of Understanding Poetry clearly owes to Richards, his theory of language is not openly acknowledged! Hence, even at the outset of the institutionalization of New Critical pedagogy, the theory, and its primary source, are already being pushed toward the teacher's blind spot, and even the early sketches of the pedagogical practice are unproblematized.

This avoidance of theory, this lack of acknowledgment of one's position as a position to be defended against other possible positions, is carried further by Diltz in the development of New Critical pedagogy in Ontario secondary school classrooms. The conception of the text that informs Diltz's classroom practice is very closely related to, if not identical with, the American New Critical conception of the text as the work itself. Moreover, the American New Critical emphasis on close reading as the primary activity of critical practice, as the procedure that the teacher ought to teach and the procedure that the students ought to learn, is very much in evidence in Diltz's work. Diltz even uses much the same canon of texts as are selected by Brooks and Warren in Understanding Poetry. Diltz prescribes that the teacher select texts which are "classics" and which are "free-standing," and that these texts be selected "from the canon" (Diltz 1962 18). Both the principles and the canon correspond well to the prescription offered in Understanding Poetry. Moreover, Diltz prescribes that the teacher undertake the careful preparation of a "scholarly reading" of the text before he or she teaches it in the classroom (Diltz 1962 21). And it becomes clear that what is meant by a scholarly reading is really an informed close reading of the type developed by American New Critics like Brooks: one that traces the patterns of ambiguity within the structure of meanings in the text, which discloses tensions within that structure, and which reveals an equilibrium of forces describing the
text's organic unity. Diltz even employs the terms "ambiguity," "tension" and "organic unity" (Diltz 1962 19-20). Moreover, for Diltz part of the teacher's job in preparing a scholarly reading of the text before designing questions on it for his or her students is to consult "critical readings" on the text (Diltz 1962 21). These critical readings are, of course, those that have been published by the established New Critics at the universities; such a step in preparing the teacher's questions ensures that the teacher's close reading discloses patterns of ambiguity which are similar to those of the established critics.

Hence it is clear that the New Critical pedagogy that dominated Ontario secondary school English classrooms for decades is informed by the conception of the text developed by the American New Critics, which has its origins in the work of Leavis, Richards and Eliot. Moreover, the dominant procedure of New Critical Practice developed by the American New Critics, close reading, and its application in the classroom as articulated in Understanding Poetry, are also reflected in the pedagogy of the Ontario English classroom through this period. Most importantly, the pedagogy developed in Ontario through Diltz and his inheritors is based on a conception of the text that is not articulated as a position, a position in theory, which exists in contention with other potential positions from other theories. As I have traced the development of this conception of the text, by the time we get to Ontario in the period that stretches from the 1930s to the 1960s, any theoretical justification of this conception has been left behind. Moreover, because the practice is unproblematized, the teacher in Ontario using Diltz’s pedagogy is positioned in such a way that the theoretical conception of the text remains in the blind spot.

It is precisely this lack of articulation of the New Critical conception of the text as a position in theory which leads to the garden path problem in the New Critical classroom.
In the rest of the section that follows, I argue that the conception of the text in New Critical theory determines the limits on what counts in the classroom practice developed in Ontario by Diltz and his inheritors. And this central issue of what counts is what leads to the garden path problem, as well as to the most common charges against New Criticism. I argue that New Critical theory limits what counts in the classroom for three specific reasons. Moreover, because New Critical Practice positions teachers so that theory remains in the blind spot, these three reasons are not apparent to the teacher using the pedagogy. The three reasons why the conception of the text in New Critical theory limits what counts in classroom practice and hence causes the garden path problem are as follows:

1. Richards' division between referential and emotive language, one of the founding principles of the New Critical conception of the text upon which Diltz's pedagogy is based, is questionable;
2. Eliot’s concept of the objective correlative, another cornerstone of the New Critical conception of the text built upon by Diltz and his followers in developing New Critical pedagogy in Ontario, is problematic;
3. The notion of ambiguity which is so central to the New Critical conception of text and to the procedure of close reading is untenable.

In the paragraphs below, I consider each of these three arguments in turn.

As I stated in section 2.2, above, one of the fundamentals of the New Critical conception of the text is Richards' division of language into two categories in Principles of Literary Criticism: referential language and emotive language. Literature, according to Richards, belongs to the second category because the use of language in literature is poetic rather than scientific: in literature, we use language for the effects in emotion and
attitude produced by its reference, rather than for the reference itself (Richards 1924 180). This division in language is used by all the American New Critics. Cleanth Brooks, in particular, articulates and even extends Richards' notion of poetic language. Brooks maintains that the language of a poem itself, because of its effects in emotion and attitude, causes the reconciliation of opposites in the text that produces the meaning of the poem. It may be argued, however, that Richards' division of language into two categories, the division used by Brooks and all of the major American New Critics, as well as Diltz and his followers in Ontario, is itself questionable, or even untenable. As a theory of language, it requires a defense against other possible theories, a defense offered by none of Richards, the American New Critics or Diltz.

Several writers have pointed this out in the case of the New Critics. R.S. Crane, for instance, in an influential piece entitled "The Critical Monism of Cleanth Brooks," argues that New Critics such as Brooks weaken the theory of New Criticism by making irony or paradox a principle of the structure that is unique to poetic language, a principle derived from Richards. Crane counters this position by claiming that the balancing and reconciliation of opposites that the New Critics hold is inherent only in poetic language is in fact a characteristic of all connected discourse (Crane 1953 24). He argues that, by Brooks' own criteria, an excellent example of a modern ironic poem would be Einstein's formula E=mc², which would assert, in Brooks' terms, the paradoxical identity of matter and energy (Crane 1953 104). Crane's argument is a persuasive one, and the theory of New Criticism, from Richards to Diltz, does not contain a persuasive rejoinder, precisely because, from its inception to its application by Diltz in Ontario, the conception of the text is not problematized. And more recently than Crane, several Poststructuralist critics have argued that a distinction between literary and scientific language such as the one
drawn by Richards and used by New Critics in America and Diltz in Ontario is untenable.21

What is significant about arguments such as Crane’s (or De Man’s) for the New Critical pedagogy developed in Ontario by Diltz and his followers is that the theoretical division of language upon which the New Critical conception of the text is based is not conceived, in the pedagogy, as a position—a position which may be, and in fact has been, called into question by theorists arguing other positions. Diltz’s New Critical pedagogy, grounded in New Critical theory, fails to recognize that one component of that theory is a conception of the text based on the idea of a fundamental division in language. When Diltz claims that texts are “aesthetic wholes” with “organic unity,” that they contain “universal moral and aesthetic values” and “eternal truths,” and that they raise “natural questions” (Diltz 1962 21-23), these claims are clearly grounded in a theory that conceives the text as characterized by what Richards and Brooks and all the major New Critics call poetic language. Because the New Critical pedagogy which developed in Ontario does not acknowledged that theory as a theory, as one theory in contention with other theories, the conception of the text is not questioned, or even seen as questionable; the implicit premise upon which the position is based is enclosed by circularity.

On this point, we can see that the pedagogical model that was used for so many years in secondary school English classrooms in Ontario, and still, to a degree, is used, needs to take advantage of the lesson learned in the universities. At this stage in my analysis, it becomes clear that observations made by writers such as Graff, Scholes, Richter, Belsey and Eagleton pertain as much to the secondary school classroom as

21 Of several contemporary examples, possibly the most carefully argued and best known is offered by Paul De Man in “Form and Intent in the American New Criticism,” included in Blindness and Insight (1983).
they do to the university classroom. Because the secondary school pedagogy derived from the New Critical conception of the text is not problematized, the teacher is positioned in such a way that the theory remains in the blind spot. In an unproblematized New Critical classroom, the limits on what counts are determined, in part, by the uncritical acceptance of a conception of the text in New Critical theory based on Richards' fundamental division in language. This contributes to the garden path problem in New Critical Practice, in that classroom discussion occurs within these limits, within specific parameters determined by theory, without being conceived as occurring within parameters of any kind at all. Classroom conversation and student writing are determined by the fact that the language of the text is assumed to be used for effects in emotion and attitude, and is assumed to effect a reconciliation of opposites that produces its meaning. These assumptions of New Critical theory limit what counts in classroom practice, yet neither the teacher nor the students are made conscious of these limitations. Discussion and interpretation are narrowed, and the teacher starts to have the same conversation over and over again, semester after semester, regardless of the make-up of each class. Moreover, the particular limits set by Richards' theory of the distinction between referential and emotive language lead directly to two of the commonly cited criticisms of New Critical Practice. First, in the transmission model of learning, what is transmitted by the teacher in New Critical pedagogy is, specifically, a description of effects in emotion and attitude produced by the text's references, effects which bring about the reconciliation of opposites in the text that produces its meaning; what is transmitted to students is determined by Richards' theory that poetic language works in a certain way. And second, because poetic language, the language of the literature studied in an English class, is assumed to work in a way that is different from non-poetic
language, students' experiences are not included in what counts because they are not part of that language. Hence the limits on what counts in the classroom are determined by theory, even though that theory remains in the blind spot.

The second argument for how theory, although hidden, limits what is included in classroom practice and leads to the garden path problem is that T.S. Eliot's notion of the objective correlative, another cornerstone of the New Critical conception of the text, is itself problematic. Like Richards' theory of the division of language, Eliot's idea of the objective correlative is fundamental to the conception of the text in the writings of all the major New Critics, and like Richards' division of language, the objective correlative is a part of the theory that remains in the teacher's blind spot. Recall that, according to Eliot, the effects of poetry stem from a relation between the words of the text and events, states of mind, or experiences that offer an "objective correlative" to those words (Eliot 1950 124). For Eliot, the particular language of a text corresponds to a unique experience: the experience that is the objective correlative to the text is what makes the poem intelligible, both emotionally and intellectually (Eliot 1950 122-124). However, the concept of the objective correlative has been shown to be problematic by many writers since the heyday of New Criticism: Structuralists, Reader Response critics and Poststructuralists have all put forward convincing arguments against Eliot's theory.22 The major problem pointed out by Eliot's critics is that the precision of language demanded by Eliot of the poem in many cases cannot clearly be shown to determine a correlative meaning, objective or otherwise, upon which critics can agree (Wellek 1983 130-131). And with a profusion of potential correlative meanings drawn by differing critics, Eliot's theory breaks down: there cannot exist the notion of a unique experience universally agreed upon which makes the

22 René Wellek offers a balanced treatment of these arguments in A History of Modern Criticism (Wellek 1983 130-131).
poem intelligible within a specific context.

New Critical pedagogy in Ontario as described by Diltz is based in part on Eliot’s theory of the objective correlative. In fact, Eliot is one of the few critics whom Diltz openly admires in his own writing. Diltz’s notion that any text worthy of study “itself raises natural questions” and that the reader, by answering those questions, is led through a process of “recreation” of the text’s effects, is drawn directly from Eliot’s theory of the objective correlative (Diltz 1962 18-21). Once again, the pedagogy is grounded in theory: Diltz’s approach in the classroom is premised upon theoretical principles, including the notion that the language of the text corresponds to an objective correlative in experience that makes the text intelligible. However, the pedagogy, in prescribing how the reader recreates the effects of the text by encountering its natural questions, does not acknowledge that this procedure is based on a theory—a theory that exists in contention with other theories. The process of having the language of the text correspond to an objective correlative is not questioned, or even open to question. Again, because the pedagogy is based on a theory which remains unseen, classroom discussion occurs within certain limits determined by a theory whose presence is not acknowledged. In this particular case, the language of the text is assumed to correspond to particular experiences which make the text intelligible, and classroom discussion occurs within parameters set by this assumption, without being conceived as occurring within parameters of any kind at all. And again, this leads directly to the garden path problem and to two of the common criticisms of New Critical Practice (the transmission theory and the devaluation of students’ experiences). Because the classroom practice is based on a theory that the language of the text corresponds to certain experiences, what is transmitted to students are the particular objective correlatives to which the text is said to
correspond; these associations, rather than any generated by the students' own experiences, determine the limits on what counts in classroom practice. Again, this leads the teacher in the New Critical classroom to the experience of repeating the same conversation semester after semester, without being conscious of the parameters of classroom practice because the theory remains in the blind spot.

The third (and possibly most important) argument for how the theory, although residing in the blind spot, limits what counts in New Critical Practice concerns the concept of ambiguity that is so central to the New Critical conception of text and, in particular, to the New Critical procedure of close reading upon which much of New Critical pedagogy in Ontario is based. Ambiguity is the central idea upon which the New Critical procedure of close reading hinges, yet it may be shown to be a highly problematic notion. And, more than any other component in the New Critical conception of the text, the concept of ambiguity in theory delineates the parameters of classroom discussion. Essentially, the problem with the concept of ambiguity is that while even the New Critics themselves acknowledged that there were different possible sets of alternative reactions to the same piece of language, and hence different possible readings of the same text, New Critical pedagogy does not, and in some ways cannot, allow for this range of readings. Hence although New Critical pedagogy purports to be based on the concept of ambiguity, it is in fact based on ambiguity as defined in only a very narrow sense. And the resulting limitations, because they are unacknowledged, lead directly to the garden path problem. In the following paragraphs, I argue these claims.

Richards' initial distinction between poetic and scientific language, upon which so much New Critical theory is based, is drawn primarily because of his identification of the presence of ambiguity in poetic language and the absence of ambiguity in scientific
language. For Richards, ambiguity is the root condition of poetic language and is the reason that poetic language, rather than scientific language, invites close reading. Moreover, in Empson’s important work *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Richards’ theory is elaborated to show how ambiguity, defined as “any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language” (Empson 1947 1), stimulates the reader to see a “harmonious reconciliation of the poem’s inherent multiple meanings” through a word-by-word analysis identified as “close reading” (Empson 1947 4). Empson illustrates how, through close reading, the text’s ambiguity may disclose “hidden conflicts” or “tensions” near the outset of a poem, and how these conflicts or tensions may be shown to converge in a “harmonious balance” to reveal the “meaning” of the poem (Empson 1947 8-9). Empson’s explanation offers a further development of Richards’ initial articulation of how, through close reading, the text converts “a welter of responses” into a “systematized complex response” (Richards 1929 54).

The concept of ambiguity is central to all the major New Critics’ styles of close reading; we have already seen how each New Critic defines his particular master trope broadly enough that in practice each trope indicates the tendency of a word to suggest more than one meaning. However, as New Criticism gained momentum through the 1930s and 1940s, a curious and problematic phenomenon occurred. An explosion of scholarship reverberated through an ever-increasing number of academic journals, characterized largely by a profusion of close readings of a selective canon of texts (Wellek 1986 146). Yet the increasingly popular and increasingly vigorous practice of close reading led, in time, to frequent conflicts over rival interpretations of classic texts. Often these conflicts appeared irresolvable, and produced divergent readings of well-established texts, readings that seemed to be mutually exclusive. In the language of
Richards and Empson, it might be said that different critics in the 1930s and 1940s began to develop different sets of alternative reactions to the same piece of language, or different welts of responses. In the language of T.S. Eliot, it could be said that different critics began to assign different objective correlatives. And these different sets of alternative reactions to the language of the text led critics, through divergent close readings, to different harmonious balances, different systematized complex responses, different meanings for the same text, without having any way of adjudicating between them. And for a theory based on the notion that meaning is produced exclusively through the structure of the work itself by virtue of the ambiguity of its poetic language, not to have a way of determining meaning when that ambiguity is disputed presents a serious problem. Even the major theorists themselves acknowledged this problem. For instance, Allen Tate, in a discussion of Robert Frost's "The Witch of Coos", admitted that "like every first-rate work of art—poem, picture, sculpture, film—it [the literary text] invites endlessly varied interpretations, and all of them may be 'right'" (Tate 1975:99).

Turning from theory to pedagogy, it is quite easy to imagine how the problem identified by critics such as Tate might easily extend to something unmanageable in the classroom. If the New Critics themselves, with their similar backgrounds, training and basic conception of the text, began to diverge in their interpretations of particular texts soon after the practice of close reading was developed, then secondary school students, with much less training, less similar backgrounds and a less fixed conception of the text, would likely diverge even more widely in their sets of alternative reactions to the same piece of language, and hence in their notions of the meaning of the text. But New Critical pedagogy as developed in Ontario classrooms by Diltz and his inheritors leaves this central problem in New Critical theory unacknowledged by imposing strict constraints on
the permissible range of alternative reactions to the language of the text—without acknowledging constraints of any kind. This occurs because the discussion of a text's ambiguity occurs within the limits of the teacher's carefully structured questions. These questions are designed to lead students to see the same set of alternative reactions to a given text, to disclose the same set of hidden conflicts or tensions, and to converge in the same harmonious balance. *Hence texts in the New Critical classroom contain ambiguity only in a certain, limited sense: they have the same set of multiple meanings for everyone.* A given text has the same ambiguity for all readers who know the conventional associations, the conventional "systematized responses" in Richards' terminology, the conventional "objective correlatives" in Eliot's terminology. Through the particular close reading prescribed by the teacher's structured questions, a particular text in a New Critical classroom discloses the same set of hidden conflicts or tensions near its outset for all readers; then through the close reading prescribed by the teacher's questions, these conflicts or tensions are shown to converge in the same harmonious balance, the same organic unity, for everyone; hence a singular structure of meanings is revealed to everyone in the class. Moreover, Diltz's practice of the Socratic encounter, in which the teacher mediates a whole-class discussion structured by the teacher's carefully designed questions, further ensures that every student in the class takes the same meaning from the poem. All this occurs despite the fact that even the New Critics themselves acknowledged that there were different possible sets of alternative reactions to the same text.

These unacknowledged limitations lead directly to the garden path problem. Because classroom discussion occurs within the parameters set by the teacher's questions, without seeming to occur within any parameters at all, only a certain set of
associations may be generated. And this is precisely what I experienced after teaching *Heart of Darkness* for a few semesters: I found I was having the same discussions over and over again, just with different sets of students, despite the fact that I thought I was teaching them the techniques they needed to become critical readers, to think for themselves. I started to feel that I was leading my students down the garden path toward the same reading of the texts, over and over again, without understanding why it was happening. If I wasn’t lecturing to them, why did they keep saying the same things, class after class? The results seemed suspiciously like what had happened to me when I had been a secondary school student, sitting in class and playing what I called the “guess the answer on the teacher’s mind” game. What used to happen in my own secondary school English classes was that the teacher would have a particular sense of ambiguity, a particular association, systematized response or objective correlative, on his or her mind, and if the right associations, the right alternative reactions to the text, were not immediately forthcoming from the students, he or she would keep asking the same question over and over again, going around the classroom saying something like, “No, not exactly” until someone by chance said the answer on the teacher’s mind, and then the teacher would give a big “Yes!” and jump up and down and gesture emphatically, while most of us in the class were at a loss as to why that particular answer or association or response or correlative was so much better than the others. But soon we would be onto the next line of the poem or the next section of the novel, and we would remember little of what we had been talking about beyond which answer had produced the big “Yes!” that we would be sure to include on our exam or term paper. Looking back now at my experience in teaching texts like *Heart of Darkness*, I think I just became more practised than my old high school teachers at designing careful questions, but that the
overall effect was much the same. My students were as effectively led down the garden path as I had been. Perhaps they were led even more effectively, as they (and I) were less aware of being led down the garden path because the teacher had not as obviously held their hands.

Hence, the concept of ambiguity itself, like Richards’ conception of poetic language and Eliot’s objective correlative, is inherently problematic in theory, and leads in practice to a pedagogy in which classroom discussion occurs within specific parameters which are set by the theory, but which are neither justified nor acknowledged. By acknowledging neither the problems inherent in the theory nor the limitations imposed by the theory, the garden path problem emerges. And the garden path problem is a symptom of an unproblematized classroom practice which emerges precisely because the theory remains in the blind spot.

In addition to these three arguments for how the limits on what counts in New Critical Practice are determined by theory, even if that theory is hidden in the blind spot, there is another way in which the problem of what counts in the New Critical classroom leads to one of the commonly cited criticisms of New Critical Practice. Recall that one of these criticisms is that New Critical Practice assumes a specific canon of texts, a canon determined by established critics which is difficult to add to or subtract from, one which is highly biased toward texts by writers who are members of a particular group or groups by virtue of their race, gender, class, and/or culture. This conception of the canon is based in New Critical theory, with its origins in two ideas from T.S. Eliot’s essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” First, Eliot maintains that literature is a comprehensive system of texts, a “simultaneous order” of works (Eliot 1950 3). Second, the value of any new work depends on its relation to that simultaneous order established
by the tradition. Thus the work of what Eliot calls the "individual talent" does not so much express a unique personality as it affects and is affected by the literature of the past (Eliot 1950 5), and the literature of any age is also a response to previous literature as a whole.

Hence one of the most important limits on what counts in the New Critical classroom, the specific texts which students will read, is determined by an unacknowledged theory. Because the text is conceived unequivocally as the work itself, as a structure of meanings whose organic unity is achieved through the ambiguity inherent in poetic language, and because literature is conceived as a comprehensive system, certain texts will work better than others. Certain texts, texts written by a subset of writers who share common characteristics such as race, gender, class, or culture, will fit better than others into a system in which common patterns of ambiguity run through the whole canon of works. And because, in New Critical theory, criticism itself is conceived as a collection of close readings of the texts included in the canon, it is seen to be systematic. This conception of criticism is clearly expressed in Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism*. In that text, Richards is quite disdainful of previous critical approaches, describing them as a "chaos" of "random apercues" and more or less "brilliant guesses" (Richards 1924 6), and he aims instead to develop a systematic approach to criticism. And, like the order of texts that constitutes literature, this system is designed and controlled by professional critics who hold positions in universities. Ransom is clear on this point in his 1937 article "Criticism Inc."

> It is from the professors of literature, in this country the professors of English for the most part, that I should hope eventually for the erection of intelligent standards of criticism. Criticism must become more scientific, more precise and systematic, and this means that it must be developed by
the collective and sustained effort of learned persons—which means that its proper seat is in the universities...Rather than occasional criticism by amateurs, I should think the whole enterprise might be seriously taken in hand by professionals. (Ransom 1984 328-329)

Moreover, the rise of the professional university critic in North America and the professional journal of literary criticism are largely products of the growth of New Criticism. The period in which New Criticism flourished in America, from 1930s to 1950s, coincides exactly with the institutional rise of English departments and the development of academic literary criticism in the United States, which has prompted Vincent Leitch to remark that during that era, “the gentleman-critic and the poet-critic [were] replaced by the professional university critic” (Leitch 1988 39). Hence, in addition to the three previous arguments for how the limits on what counts in New Critical Practice are determined by theory, the commonly cited problem of the biased canon of New Critical Practice may also be shown to be a case in which the limits on what count in the classroom are determined by theory, even if that theory is hidden in the blind spot.

2.6 The New Critical Conception of the Reader

The New Critical conception of the reader is derived from, and constrained by, the New Critical conception of the text. As such, it is a key component of New Critical theory which leads to the garden path problem in the classroom. By defining the text as the work itself, which is a structure of meanings manifested in tensions, ironies and paradoxes, whose organic unity is achieved through the ambiguity inherent in poetic language, the reader is conceived as the subject whose role it is to uncover that structure

23 In Re-Educating the Imagination, Bogdan remarks on both the “professionalization” and “non-professionalization” of literary response (Bogdan 1992 239-246).
of meanings through the prescribed process of close reading. Through this process, the reader traces the patterns inscribed by the ambiguity of the text, to identify its tensions, ironies and paradoxes, and to demonstrate its organic unity. It is important to note that, because the text as conceived in the theory of New Criticism has the same ambiguity for all readers, the conception of the reader is that of the subject who is sufficiently skilled to trace that ambiguity. In this sense, the conception of the reader in the theory of New Criticism is closer to that of an ideal reader than to an actual student in the classroom.

This position is clear in the work of Cleanth Brooks: "the formalist critic assumes an ideal reader: that is, instead of focusing on the varying spectrum of possible readings, he [sic] attempts to find a central point of reference from which he can focus upon the structure of the poem or novel" (Brooks 1951 75). And in the key essay establishing the New Critical position on the conception of the reader, entitled "The Affective Fallacy," W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley clearly state that their position is based on a conception of the "sufficiently informed" reader (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 29).

Of course, New Criticism does not deny that there are actual readers in the classroom; rather, New Criticism does not value the uninformed responses of these flesh and blood readers as relevant to the practice of criticism. The origins of this conception of the ideal, or sufficiently informed, reader, like the origins of the New Critical conception of the text, lie in the work of I.A. Richards. Richards' Practical Criticism (1929) includes a study of the written responses of several hundred Cambridge University students to a selection of short poems. In scrutinizing the students' responses to the poems, Richards identifies ten major "difficulties" which students (actual readers) have in reading poetry:

1. trouble in making out plain sense;
2. misapprehension of meter and rhythm;
3. misinterpretation of figurative language;
4. application of irrelevant personal associations;
5. reliance on stock responses;
6. sentimental overreaction;
7. inhibited response or hardness of heart;
8. restricting religious doctrines;
9. disabling technical presuppositions;
10. narrow critical preconceptions. (Richards 1929 14-15)

Richards claims that “most of the principal obstacles and causes of failure in the reading and judgment of poetry may without much straining be brought under these ten heads” (Richards 1929 15). This statement, and Richards’ list of ten “difficulties,” are extremely revealing. Moreover, just as Richards’ theory of language in Principles of Literary Criticism was so influential to the development of the conception of the text used by the American New Critics, his study of students’ responses to poetry in Practical Criticism was highly influential in shaping the conception of the ideal, or sufficiently informed, reader adapted by the American New Critics a decade later. Moreover, Richards’ list of difficulties encountered by actual students in the classroom belies a conception of an ideal reader implicit in his work.

Notice that any readings of a text that have their origins in the personal experiences of the reader, rather than the classroom experiences taught by the teacher, are characterized by Richards as “irrelevant personal associations,” “stock responses” or “sentimental overreactions,” and that these are seen as “problems” in reading the text—problems that are “principal obstacles” to, and “causes of failure” in, accurately reading the text (Richards 1929 14-15). Interpretations of a text that are derived from the
personal experiences of student readers are distinguished from interpretations of a text that are derived from classroom study of a text by these same readers. Yet it is not because of the affective or emotional nature of these reactions that they are dismissed as irrelevant by Richards; indeed, student readers are also faulted if they demonstrate an "inhibited response" or a "hardness of heart" toward a text (Richards 1929 15). Again, what makes students' readings of a text potentially problematic is the personal nature of these readings; it is because these interpretations are not in accordance with the conventions of literature taught by teachers and critics in the classroom that they are disallowed. Moreover, misreadings, or readings not according to the conventions of criticism, are dismissed as "trouble in making out plain sense," "misapprehension" of elements such as meter and rhythm, or even "misinterpretation of figurative language" (Richards 1929 15).

Yet terms such as misapprehension and misinterpretation imply that there are such things as apprehension and interpretation—and that, for whatever reason, students are not exhibiting these. And in the theory of New Criticism, such apprehension and interpretation hinge upon the conception of the text as a structure of meanings that, through close reading, may be shown to have the same patterns of ambiguity and to demonstrate the same organic unity for all readers. This means that the apprehension and interpretation valued by Richards is the one that traces that singular pattern of ambiguity, the one that demonstrates that singular organic unity—and this is the pattern of ambiguity and the organic unity taught by the teacher or expressed by the critic. Within this schema, not all formal learning experiences in which apprehensions or interpretations may be taught are valued: readings developed outside a literature class, such as "religious doctrines," "technical presuppositions" or even "critical
preconceptions,” are labelled as “restricting,” “disabling” and “narrow,” respectively (Richards 1929 14-15). Only the readings taught in a literature class are valued. Again, this belies the tacit assumption that, for Richards, there must be doctrines that are somehow less restricting, presuppositions that are less disabling, and critical preconceptions that are less narrow. Hence what is implied in Richards’ study of university students’ readings of poetry is that student readers relying on information gained outside the literature class may misread poetry, which is to say that only within the literature class they may receive the necessary material to become sufficiently informed to avoid misreading the text. Hence the conception of the reader in Richards’ theory is of an ideal reader who demonstrates a reading that is not a misreading: by the results of his study in Practical Criticism, this is clearly different from the actual student readers in Richards’ classroom at Cambridge.

Moreover, this conception of the reader implied in Richards’ work follows from his conception of the text: with the text conceived as the work itself, inscribed in poetic language and characterized by patterns of ambiguity that are the same for all readers, the conception of the reader is, naturally, as the subject who traces those patterns of ambiguity—not of an independent subject whose personal experiences, outside the literature classroom, shape his or her reading of the text. And, for the American New Critics, the conception of the reader also follows from their conception of the text. The definitive account of the New Critical conception of the reader is to be found in an essay co-authored by W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley entitled “The Affective Fallacy.” Essentially, Wimsatt and Beardsley argue against any reading of the text that is based on the personal reactions of an individual reader in the classroom. Such readings are, they argue, plagued by the “affective fallacy,” which is defined as “a confusion between the
poem and its results," or between "what it is and what it does" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 22). Any attempt to "derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem," they claim, "ends in impressionism and relativism" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 22). And the outcome of trying to develop an interpretation of a text based on the text's effects on the reader is "that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 22-23). Readings of the text that are derived from affective criteria, or from the reactions of individual readers, are dismissed as either "too physiological" or "too vague" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 28). On the one hand, physiological reports, such as the "goose-flesh experience" described by Emily Dickinson in a famous letter where she writes about "the top of her head taken off," are labelled "hallucination" by Wimsatt and Beardsley, and deemed inappropriate for criticism (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 27). On the other hand, affective criticism is also dismissed as too insubstantial:

> if the affective critic...ventures to state with any precision what a line of poetry does—as "it fills us with a mixture of melancholy and reverence for antiquity"—either the statement will be patently abnormal or false, or it will be a description of what the meaning of the line is: "the spectacle of massing antiquity in ruins." (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 28)

In either case, readings of a text that are derived from the personal reactions of actual readers are disallowed and deemed to be irrelevant to the practice of criticism.²⁴

Instead, what Wimsatt and Beardsley claim is relevant to textual interpretation are readings which are firmly grounded in the New Critical conception of the text as a

---

²⁴ In *Re-Educating the Imagination*, Bogdan describes a "taxonomy of reader responses and respondents" which further distinguishes readers in terms of their responses to literature. She identifies three categories: "total form as stasis"; "partial form, partial response" (including "stock," kinetic" and "spectator" response); and "total form as dialectic" (Bogdan 1992 112-120).
structure of meanings whose organic unity may be demonstrated by tracing the patterns of ambiguity in its poetic language. The conception of the reader implied in this theory is of the subject who is sufficiently informed to trace those patterns. Wimsatt and Beardsley tout the example of Brooks' *Well-Wrought Urn* as providing a model of a reader reading a text. According to Wimsatt and Beardsley, Brooks' demonstrations of reading a text offer "translatable emotive formulas" rather than "more physiological and psychologically vague ones" which are "cognitively untranslatable" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 29). This distinction, they hold, "even when it is a faint one," is at the dividing point between "paths which lead to polar opposites in criticism, to classical objectivity and to Romantic reader psychology," or to "the emotive" versus "the cognitive" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 29). And these distinctions will, in the long run, "produce a vastly different sort of criticism" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 29), which they evidently prefer. Brooks' work provides Wimsatt and Beardsley with an example of criticism that avoids the affective fallacy. The following quotation from their essay indicates clearly the conception of the reader that is inherent in their theory and in Brooks' critical examples:

> the more specific the account of the emotion induced by a poem, the more nearly it will be an account of the reasons for emotion, the poem itself, and the more reliable it will be as an account of what the poem is likely to induce in other—sufficiently informed—readers. (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 29, emphasis mine)

This corresponds closely with Brooks' own articulation of the New Critical conception of the reader, which I noted at the outset of this section, in which he maintains that "the formalist critic assumes an ideal reader." Brooks acknowledges that "there is no ideal reader, of course," but his reason for utilizing the conception of the ideal reader in his
theory and in his practice of close reading is his conception of the text as the work itself; only by conceiving of the text this way can the critic approach "the 'true' reading of the poem" (Brooks 1951 75).

In examining New Critical theory to uncover the roots of the garden path problem in classroom practice, we should consider that this New Critical conception of the ideal reader is further articulated in Brooks and Warren's pedagogical text *Understanding Poetry*. As with the conception of the text implied in *Understanding Poetry*, the pedagogical practice does not acknowledge that the conception of the ideal reader is a theoretical position, in contention with other possible positions. For instance, the introduction to both the first and second editions of the text expresses that any attempt to derive the meaning of the poem from something outside the structure of the work itself arises from "the basic misconceptions with which the teacher is usually confronted in the classroom." Once these "misconceptions" are disposed of, the student will be prepared to "enter upon an unprejudiced study of the actual poems" (Brooks and Warren 1938 xii, emphasis mine). By their own phrasing, it is very clear that the pedagogical practice described by Brooks and Warren is not based on a contestable claim, particularly in their use of the term "unprejudiced" (Brooks and Warren 1938 xii). Another passage from this introduction is even more revealing: in discussing the development of an interpretation of a given text, Brooks and Warren argue that "disagreement is to be encouraged rather than discouraged" but only "in so far as pure impressionism can be eliminated from the debate" [emphasis mine] (Brooks and Warren 1938 xiii). Like Richards' *Practical Criticism*, Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Poetry* sets distinct boundaries on the influences which are permitted to shape the reading of a given text: the limits allow only information gained through classroom study of the text, and not information gained
through experience outside the classroom. For Brooks and Warren, the aim of setting such boundaries is to make “competent readers of poetry” (Brooks and Warren 1938 xiv).

These competent readers are clearly those who are, in Wimsatt and Beardsley’s terms, sufficiently informed.

Hence, as with the conception of the text, the limits on what counts in New Critical Practice are determined by theory. In this case, the New Critical conception of the ideal, or sufficiently informed, reader determines what information may be included in the classroom conversation. Moreover, because the practice is not problematized, the fact that what counts is delimited by theory is not apparent to the teacher or the students. As a new teacher in a fledgling New Critical classroom, uncovering the conception of the reader in New Critical theory showed me something about the causes of the garden path problem: one of the reasons I was having the same conversation each semester teaching texts like *Heart of Darkness* was that the practice I was using was based on a conception of an ideal reader, rather than the real readers in my classroom. The questions I was asking my students required them to respond as ideal readers, rather than as themselves. And, as with the conception of the text, these limits lead specifically to some of the commonly cited shortcomings of New Critical Practice, too: students’ experiences are excluded from the classroom conversation, and readers are assumed to be relatively homogeneous in their racial, sexual, socioeconomic, and cultural composition. On this last point, Brooks and Warren, in the preface to the third edition of *Understanding Poetry* (1960), state that poetry gives us knowledge “of ourselves in relation to the world of experience, and to that world considered, not statistically, but in terms of human purposes and values” (Brooks and Warren 1960 xiii, emphasis mine). Many charges have been laid against New Critical Practice for construing “human purposes and
values" too universally, and for conceiving of the reader as an ideal construct with the appropriate backgrounds and history to "correctly" trace the patterns of ambiguity thought to be in the text.

Two further claims made by Brooks and Warren are significant for the conception of the reader articulated in Understanding Poetry. First, Brooks and Warren include the following quotation from Louis Cazamian:

it is rightly felt that if the...student of literature is to be capable of an intelligent appreciation, he [sic] must go beyond the passive enjoyment of what he reads; he must be instructed, partly at least, in the mysteries of the art. (Brooks and Warren 1938 xiv-xv, emphasis mine)

Implied in this passage is that the teacher of literature, or the critic, does the instructing. And the teacher or the critic is the one who knows the patterns of ambiguity, the objective correlatives, that form the structure of meanings which produce the sufficiently informed reading of the text. It is the teacher in the classroom or the critic in the journal who determines what counts as permissible information in developing the interpretation of a given text. For Brooks and Warren, the teacher's or critic's analysis, such as the analyses included in Understanding Poetry, is even described as "a preparation for the poem itself" (Brooks and Warren 1938 xxiv). Again, "the teacher is central" to this preparation, and Brooks and Warren stress the "importance of his mediation" in the development of the student's interpretation of the text (Brooks and Warren 1938 xxvi).

Second, Brooks and Warren maintain that "we have to grow up to the level of a poem before we can experience the direct appeal, and criticism can sometimes help us in the process" (Brooks and Warren 1938 xxiii). This statement is also revealing regarding the conception of the reader implied in Understanding Poetry. The only "direct appeals,"
the only impressions, permitted as relevant to developing a reading of a given text, are the impressions of an informed reader, a reader who has "grown up to the level of the poem" (Brooks and Warren 1938 xiii). Hence, the only information permitted as applicable to the interpretation of the poem that the reader might bring from outside the classroom study of the text is information inculcated by classroom study of other texts.25

As the conception of the ideal or sufficiently informed reader in Understanding Poetry is not argued as a contestable position, the conception in the New Critical pedagogy developed by Diltz and his inheritors in Ontario is likewise not presented as a position that requires any theoretical justification. Diltz's pedagogy builds upon the conception of the reader articulated by Richards and the American New Critics, and, like Brooks and Warren's model, is not problematized. For Diltz, texts are structures of meaning, containing patterns of ambiguity that are to be uncovered by readers: again, the same patterns are to be uncovered by all readers, and hence Diltz's pedagogy is premised on the conception of a New Critical ideal reader or sufficiently informed reader. In Patterns of Surmise, Diltz claims that "every work of art possesses a pattern of some kind." The "teaching of a good lesson" can "provide a pattern of experience for both the teacher and the pupil." In this sense, he says, "good lessons, like good poems and good prose compositions, may be patterns of surmise." And, revealingly, he claims that "learning to read and to make such patterns" is an aim of the literature class, and "one of the delightful experiences of going to school." It is crucial to note that, in Diltz's account, the same set of patterns is to be uncovered by all readers. These readers learn to "recognize in such patterns of thought, feeling, and imagination the reflection of organized mental life." That is, they all learn to recognize the same set of patterns of

25 This sets the stage for Frye's conception of the educated imagination as necessary for appreciating the forms of literature as being derived from itself (Frye 1963 24).
organization. And education, he says, "at any level, has no more valuable exercise to encourage than that provided by such habits of thought" (Diltz 1962 v-ix). Hence, the conception of the reader in Diltz's work is a product of Richards' and the American New Critics' conceptions. Furthermore, Diltz does not acknowledge that this conception of the reader requires any defense.

Moreover, as Brooks and Warren's conception of the reader is too homogenized, the reader in Diltz's pedagogy is even more so. For Diltz, the reader is specifically conceived as a member of a Christian society. In Patterns of Surmise, for instance, Diltz speaks of having students read texts that "reflect our Judeo-Christian heritage" (Diltz 1962 24). And in the following passage from Pierian Spring, Diltz's particular zeal on this point is clearly demonstrated:

in the lives of many persons the teachings of Christianity may have little meaning or significance, but unless it is possible to develop a more genuine and widespread interest in and appreciation of poetry, music, painting and kindred activities, that bear witness to the power of the spirit as the ultimate reality, we are all going assiduously to the dogs (Diltz 1946 viii).

And in Poetic Pilgrimmage, Diltz's assumptions regarding the particularly Christian homogeneity of the readers in the Ontario high school English classroom are even more obvious. Consider the following three passages:

Part of the job of education is to quicken the spirit and keep the faith...This can be achieved only by regenerated individuals obedient to the authority and will of God. (Diltz 1942 30-31)

And:
If he [the teacher of English] is a Christian and a patriot, his pupils will learn from his example all that both he and they can understand and appreciate in our way of life. If he is an atheist with a socialist's zeal for conditional patriotism, his pupils will become the dupes of the first demagogue who comes their way. (Diltz 1942 41)

And lastly:

Our way of life is paved with the practice of Christian principles...It seeks a new set of presuppositions in which the spirit of Christianity is the keystone. Our job is to teach by precept and example, even as the poets, the real experiencers, do, for the spiritual regeneration of mankind. To try to save the privileges of our free way of life by any other means, in either peace or war, is simply futile. This is the way to our salvation both as individuals and as members of the commonwealth of English-speaking peoples. It may also be eventually the way of all mankind caught in the tensions and the conflicts of the flying wheel of this world's circumstance. (Diltz 1942 45)

In each of these examples, it is clear that Diltz conceives of the reader in particularly Christian terms, terms which signal an evangelistic mission about the civilizing power of literary study.

Hence as in Understanding Poetry, the limits on what counts in New Critical Practice in Ontario are determined by theory, even though that theory resides in the teacher's blind spot. In an unproblematized New Critical Practice, these limits are not acknowledged, and the teacher using the pedagogy is not even conscious of them. As conceived in the work of Diltz and his inheritors, and in its origins in the work of Richards and the American New Critics, the conception of the reader leads in practice to the
garden path problem: it offers no defense against other possible conceptions, such as the conceptions implied by the historical, biographical or sociological theories to which New Criticism was opposed, or by Reader Response theory, which I discuss in detail in Chapter Three.

2.7 The New Critical Conception of the Author

As with the New Critical conception of the reader, the conception of the author is, essentially, derived from the New Critical conception of the text. Whereas, for the conception of the reader, the personal experiences of actual readers are disallowed in favour of a conception of an ideal reader, or a sufficiently informed reader who knows the conventions of the patterns of ambiguity taught by the teacher of the literature classroom, for the conception of the author, historical or biographical information about actual authors is disallowed in favour of the conception of an invisible author, one who effectively disappears after writing the text. In this way, just as with the New Critical conception of the reader, the same conventions of the patterns of ambiguity taught by the teacher in the literature classroom are emphasized, and this leads directly to the garden path problem in classroom practice. According to New Criticism, the author exists, of course, but biographical, historical, cultural or sociological information about the author (or from the author) is not deemed to be relevant to the practice of criticism. Criticism is focused on the text itself, and material about the author, or from the author, is held to be inadmissible.

The origins of the New Critical conception of the author are also to be found in the work of Leavis, Richards and Eliot. As we saw in section 2.2, each of these early modern writers emphasized the text itself as holding the relevant information for criticism, and
each of these writers de-emphasized information about the author. The clearest statement of the American New Critical position with respect to the author is to be found in another key article by Wimsatt and Beardsley, this one entitled “The Intentional Fallacy” and first published in 1946. In it, the writers attack the notion of the work of art as the essentially private product of the internal experience of a particular individual. They maintain that “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 3). Instead, the only acceptable standards are criteria intrinsic to the work itself.

For Wimsatt and Beardsley, the existence of the author is not in question, nor is the fact that he or she might have designed the text in a certain way. They acknowledge that a poem “does not come into existence by accident” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 3); however they hold that “to insist on the designing intellect as a cause of a poem is not to grant the design or intention as a standard by which the critic is to judge the worth of the poet’s performance” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 3). Moreover, Wimsatt and Beardsley point out the difficulties associated in locating the meaning of a text in the intention or design of its author: “One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about intention...How is he [sic] to find out what the poet tried to do?” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 3). And although they acknowledge that the “meaning of a poem may certainly be a personal one, in the sense that a poem expresses a personality or state of soul rather than a physical object like an apple,” they distinguish between the text’s dramatic speaker and its author:

But even a short lyric poem is dramatic, the response of a speaker (no matter how abstractly conceived) to a situation (no matter how universalized). We ought to impute the thoughts and attitudes of the poem
immediately to the dramatic speaker, and if to the author at all, only by an act of biographical inference. (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 4).

Wimsatt and Beardsley insist on the public nature of the text, and they claim that by keeping the critical focus on matters internal to the poem rather than on external matters, that public nature is maintained: “there is a difference between internal and external evidence for the meaning of a poem...what is internal is also public...what is external is private or idiosyncratic, not part of the work as a linguistic fact” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 7). The public nature of the text is further evidenced: “The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 4). The standard of criticism is also public: “The evaluation of the work of art remains public; the work is measured against something outside the author” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 6). Moreover, the standard of judgment remains fixed on the internal qualities of the text: “Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine. One demands that it work. It is only because an artifact works that we infer the intention of an artificer” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 3). Hence, just as for the New Critical conception of the reader, the conception of the author is, essentially, derived from the conception of the text. The key components of that conception, Richards’ theory of language, Eliot’s objective correlative and the concept of ambiguity, shape the conception of the author, much as they shape the conception of the reader.

As evidence for their conception of the author, Wimsatt and Beardsley use an example from Eliot’s poem, “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” In particular, they focus on the line “I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.” Is this line, they ask, an allusion to one of Donne’s Songs, which contains the line “Teach me to heare Mermaides
singing”? Wimsatt and Beardsley phrase the question thus: “Is Eliot’s line an allusion to Donne’s? Is Prufrock thinking about Donne? Is Eliot thinking about Donne?” Moreover, they note that there are two “radically different” ways of looking for an answer to this question. One is the way of “of poetic analysis and exegesis,” which inquires whether “it makes any sense if Eliot-Prufrock is thinking about Donne.” The other is the way of “biographical or genetic inquiry,” in which, considering that Eliot was still alive when “The Intentional Fallacy” was written, the critic might ask Eliot himself the answer to the question: “in the spirit of a man who would settle a bet, the critic writes to Eliot and asks what he meant, or if he had Donne in mind.” However, Wimsatt and Beardsley maintain that “such an answer to such an inquiry would have nothing to do with the poem ‘Prufrock.’” Such a question, for them, would not count as a “critical inquiry.” They hold that “critical inquiries, unlike bets, are not settled in this way. Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 10-11).

Notice in this passage that inquiries such as a direct appeal to the author to settle disputes about the interpretation of his or her work are dismissed because they are not seen as germane to the practice of criticism. The conception of the author as an authority on the interpretation of his or her work is disallowed in favour of a conception of the author who disappears after the act of creation, and whose disappearance leaves interpretation to the authority of the critic. The grounds offered for Wimsatt and Beardsley’s preference is their affirmation of the New Critical conception of the text as the work itself. Because the appropriate domain of criticism, for Wimsatt and Beardsley, is restricted to information about the work itself, this domain determines that information about the author, or from the author, is inadmissible.

The New Critical conception of the author as existent but irrelevant leads in
practice to the garden path problem, as can be seen by examining the pedagogical prescription in Brooks and Warren’s text *Understanding Poetry.* In *Understanding Poetry* the conception of the author is likewise grounded in the New Critical conception of the text. In a “Postscript” to the introductory section entitled “Letter to the Teacher,” dated 1950 and included in the second edition of the text, it is interesting to note that the author’s existence, biographical or historical, is not ignored, but that information about him or her, or from him or her, is de-emphasized in favour of information about the text itself: “the problem is, rather, to see how history, literary and general, may be related to poetic meaning.” Brooks and Warren acknowledge that “no intelligent teacher has ever presented poetry in a vacuum—that, on the contrary, he [sic] brings every resource he possesses to bear upon the poem.” However, the teacher is directed to use historical and biographical information *only in relation to poetic meaning,* meaning determined by the structure of the text (Brooks and Warren 1950 xxii). Hence, even with this acknowledgment, historical or biographical information about the author, or commentary from the author, is not seen as relevant to the practice of criticism.

To their credit, Brooks and Warren do attempt to address one common objection to their prescription that textual analysis ought to focus strictly on the work itself rather than on information about, or from, the author. This is an objection often voiced by students, and they phrase it thus: “He certainly couldn't have had all that in his mind when he was writing the poem.” Brooks and Warren try to counter that objection by cautioning that “many readers, even readers who ought to know better, cannot break free from the notion that somehow the poem is a mechanical projection of an ‘intention.’” In their response, they reiterate their own position, that “the poem is not a vehicle for its idea, but is its idea, its meaning” (Brooks and Warren 1950 xxiii). They locate the
meaning of the poem solely in its structure, and not in the inferred intention of its creator. Yet this becomes problematic later in the introduction to the same edition of the text, where Brooks and Warren maintain that “the question, then, about any element in a poem is not whether it is in itself pleasing, or agreeable, or valuable, or ‘poetical,’ but whether it works with the other elements to create the effect intended by the poet” (Brooks and Warren 1950 18-19, emphasis mine). Notice that, despite the fact that Brooks and Warren have dismissed authorial intention as inadmissible, even indeterminable, in their prescription for pedagogy, they cannot wholly abandon it. Hence, in attempting to counter a possible objection to their position with respect to the conception of the author, Brooks and Warren do not offer a genuine defense of their position, and are, in fact, inconsistent.

Moreover, we should note that, by the time they compiled the Third Edition of Understanding Poetry in 1960, Brooks and Warren modify their position even further, perhaps recognizing the problematic nature of their position in the earlier edition of the text. In the Preface to the third edition, they ask that the student keep the following conditions in mind as he or she reads the text:

1. Poems are written by human beings and the form of a poem is an individual’s attempt to deal with a specific problem, poetic and personal.
2. Poems come out of a historical moment, and since they are written in language, the form is tied to a whole cultural context. (Brooks and Warren 1960 xiv)

In these remarks, Brooks and Warren’s position seems further confused, and even more inconsistent. They appear to have difficulties in confining the New Critical conception of the author to the limits circumscribed by the notion of an invisible author, as well as
difficulties in maintaining that information about or from the author is always irrelevant to
the practice of criticism. Many of these problems stem from the fact that their
pedagogical practice is based on a theoretical position that is not conceived as a
theoretical position, in contention with other possible positions. Brooks and Warren do
not acknowledge that their position with respect to the author is grounded in theory, to be
defended against alternative theories which would value biographical information about
the author, or from the author, as relevant to the practice of criticism. Instead, they
simply assert their preference for a conception of the author that follows from a
conception of the text as the work itself, despite the fact that they seem to realize that that
choice is fraught with difficulties in the classroom.

As with the New Critical conception of the reader, the conception of the author as
articulated in the work of B.C. Diltz in Ontario is, essentially, an extension of the work of
the American New Critics. And like the work of Brooks and Warren, Diltz's use of the
author in his pedagogical prescription is somewhat inconsistent. In the introduction to
Patterns of Surmise, Diltz notes that "[a]ll great art is the product of careful planning of
some kind. It is intended to convey an insight into organized experience. Whenever a
work of art is created in any form, a creative artist may be said to have made a personal
statement about life" (Diltz 1962 ix). As with that of Brooks and Warren, Diltz's position
contains a degree of inconsistency. The appropriate focus for criticism is the text itself,
yet the text represents "careful planning" on the part of the author, and is "intended to
convey an insight into organized experience" (Diltz 1962 ix). We might wonder how this
is supposed to occur. The answer, suggested by Diltz's prescription discussed in
sections 2.5 and 2.6 above, is to be found in the phrase "organized experience," used in
the same passage. It is crucial to note that the patterns of this organized experience are
the patterns of ambiguity identifiable to the critic and taught by the teacher: the same patterns of ambiguity that are to be traced by all readers in the New Critical classroom. Hence the authorial intention, the author's "personal statement about life," is determined by the critic, according to the literary conventions. *In a sense, the actual author disappears, and is replaced by a creation of the critic.* The critic in a sense constructs the author as a figure who makes statements about life according to literary conventions that can be recognized by critics, taught by teachers and learned by students in a literature classroom. This is problematic, again, because it is not clearly acknowledged by Diltz as a position in theory, as one position in contention with other possible positions. Neither his own conception of the author, nor the ones to which he is opposed, is clearly articulated. Because of this lack of a clear defense against alternative positions, his conception of the author becomes limited, even problematic, in the classroom. The teacher who would focus critical attention strictly on the text itself ends up discussing the personal statements made by an author who is, in fact, primarily the critic's or teacher's own creation, who is designed to fit into the patterns of ambiguity to be traced by the students in the classroom.

Hence, as with the conceptions of the text and the reader, the conception of the author in New Critical theory limits what counts in classroom practice. Specifically, the theoretical conception of the constructed author (or the invisible author) sets distinct limits on what may be included in classroom practice; information directly drawn from actual authors is de-emphasized in favour of statements by (or about) an author which is the teacher's creation. Because the practice is not problematized, because the New Critical conception of the author is not conceived as a theoretical position, in contention with other theoretical positions, the theory remains in the blind spot, and the presence of
limits on what counts in the classroom, practice is obscured. This leads in practice to the garden path problem, because the limits on what counts, limits set by theory, permit such a narrow range of possibilities that the teacher ends up listening to the same conversation over and over again every semester. In order to avoid the contradiction of the critic-constructed author who serves the ends of a critical focus on the text itself, the pedagogical practice based on such a construction of the author needs to be problematized. As writers such as Graff, Scholes, Belsey, Richter and Eagleton point out, there is always a theory in place, and in the case of the development of the New Critical conception of the author, by the time we get to New Critical pedagogy in Ontario, that theory not only sets limits on classroom practice, but is also contradictory and problematic. And the problems with the New Critical conception of the author can only be resolved by developing a classroom practice which acknowledges the inevitability of theory.

As a new teacher working in a New Critical classroom and struggling with the garden path problem, uncovering the roots of that problem in New Critical theory was an experience of considerable astonishment. I often felt as though I was putting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, and it took some time before I had read enough New Critical theory to grasp what was going on in my classroom. However, by the time I had sorted out what I thought was wrong, I had already changed my teaching practice! Like so many English teachers in recent years, I had turned to Reader Response Practice as an alternative to New Criticism. Moreover, I had thought that by switching pedagogies, I would leave the garden path problem behind. That turned out to be the case, however, only in a limited sense. After some initial success with Reader Response Practice in my classroom, I began to feel stuck again, this time with what I call the interpretation
problem. And it wasn't until I started to read Reader Response theory that I was able to see that both of these problems were symptoms of an unproblematized classroom practice.
Chapter 3: Reader Response Criticism and the English Classroom

Indeed one might very roughly periodize the history of modern literary theory in three stages: a preoccupation with the author (Romanticism and the nineteenth century); an exclusive concern with the text (New Criticism); and a marked shift of attention to the reader over recent years.

— Terry Eagleton

The very raising of certain questions, even unanswered questions [by Reader Response critics], has had profound consequences for the commonplaces of the literary-critical profession and has, in conjunction with such movements as Deconstruction and Feminism, encouraged general shifts in the direction of literary studies.

— Peter Rabinowitz

Some revolutions occur quietly: no manifestoes, no marching and singing, no tumult in the streets; simply a shift in perspective, a new way of seeing what had always been there. [We] have been witnessing just such a change in the field of literary theory and criticism. The words “reader” and “audience,” once relegated to the status of the unproblematic and obvious, have acceded to a starring role.

— Susan Suleiman

What began as a small shift of emphasis from the narrator implied by a literary text to the reader it implies ends by becoming an exchange of world views.

— Jane Tompkins

We manifestly do not believe that for each work there is a single correct reading.

— Jonathan Culler

Meaning is the reader’s experience—all of it.

— Stanley Fish

The text is merely an object of paper and ink until some reader responds to the marks on the page as verbal symbols.

— Louise Rosenblatt

The work itself is really no more than a series of cues to the reader, invitations to construct a piece of language into meaning.

— Wolfgang Iser

A rethinking of how and why we teach literature in the secondary school is long overdue.

— Richard Beach and James Marshall
3.1 The Approach

In this chapter, I examine the pedagogical practice that has, to a significant extent, replaced New Critical Practice in Ontario secondary school English classrooms in the 1980s and 1990s. I label that pedagogy Reader Response Practice, in part because that is how most of its practitioners refer to it, and in part because most of the key components of the theory that underlies the practice are derived from Reader Response theory. I argue that, although Reader Response Practice has been thought by many teachers to have solved the problems most commonly observed in New Criticism, it in fact does not adequately solve these problems because the classroom practice in the high schools has not been problematized as it has been in the universities. Whereas in the universities, the traditional practice has been problematized as a result of challenges from a range of alternative theories to the theory that underlies that practice, in the high schools, the traditional New Critical Practice has, more simply, been replaced by Reader Response Practice. Reader Response Practice does not, any more than New Critical Practice, acknowledge that no position is self-evident and uncontroversial, that no single reading of a text can be constructed as the obvious position of its intelligibility, that any approach to teaching literature is only one of several possible approaches. Hence, despite its success, and despite its pedagogical merits, Reader Response Practice is not the solution to the problems of New Criticism that it has so often been thought to be.

I illustrate in this chapter how the interpretation problem I faced in my own classroom has its origins in Reader Response theory, because, as with the garden path problem of New Critical Practice, it is theory which determines the limits on what counts. Although the theory is substantially different from New Critical theory, and
although the limits are hence different limits than in the New Critical classroom, the stuckness I felt in my Reader Response classroom was no less profound than in my New Critical classroom. I argue in the present chapter that in order to resolve the interpretation problem of Reader Response Practice, and in fact in order to solve the problems most commonly observed in New Critical Practice, high school classrooms need to be problematized. Then theory may more successfully move out of the blind spot and the limits on what counts in classroom practice, limits determined by theory, may be made more explicit and may more easily be renegotiated, as they have been in the universities. Teachers in the high schools need to take advantage of the lesson that teachers in the universities have been learning in the past thirty years: that, as the work of writers such as Graff, Belsey, Richter, Scholes and Eagleton shows so clearly, there is no practice without theory. A more genuine way to solve the interpretation problem of Reader Response Practice, and the garden path problem of New Critical Practice, is to develop a classroom practice that acknowledges the inevitability of theory.

In searching for the roots of the interpretation problem in Reader Response theory, I first describe the development of Reader Response criticism in the universities as one of the range of theories that has emerged in the past three decades to challenge New Critical theory. In tracing this development, I observe that, although Reader Response critics are relatively united in having a common starting point in their reaction against New Criticism, the outcomes of their theories are in fact quite diverse—much more so than the New Critics. Then, I trace the development of Reader Response Practice in Ontario secondary school classrooms. After tracing the history in both the universities and the high schools, I examine in detail the key components of
Reader Response theory; I include an analysis of the Reader Response conceptions of the text, the reader and the author. Throughout this analysis, I offer comparisons to New Critical theory. Moreover, I argue that, although Reader Response Practice has been seen by many teachers as a way to solve the problems observed in New Criticism, because it is no more problematized than New Critical Practice, it fails to resolve these problems adequately. In particular, the central issue of what counts in classroom practice which is at the heart of the interpretation problem remains unaddressed because the limits on what counts are determined by theory, and in an unproblematized Reader Response Practice, theory remains in the teacher's blind spot.

3.2 The Development of Reader Response Criticism in the Universities

Reader Response theory can, in some sense, be traced at least as far back as Plato and Aristotle, both of whom considered literature's effect on the audience or reader to be a significant component of aesthetic, particularly literary, theory. For instance, in Book X of the Republic, Plato is concerned that the audience might be corrupted by texts that imitate falsely, or that concentrate the audience's attention on unworthy matters (Plato 1968 241). And in the Ion, Plato explains how the muse transmits uncritical enthousiasmos to the poet, then to the performer, then to the audience (Plato 1989 34). Moreover, in the Poetics Aristotle defines tragedy, in part, in terms of the emotional response of the audience, who undergo an emotional purging labelled catharsis (Aristotle 1996 46). In addition, Horace, in Ars Poetica, maintains that the chief criterion of the excellence of a poem is that it delight and instruct the reader or audience (Horace 1985 1087). Hence in a very real sense the notion of including the reader's response to literature as germane to the practice of criticism is
not a new idea at all.

However, a focus on the reader as the most significant component of critical theory is a relatively recent phenomenon in the modern history of literary theory. Terry Eagleton offers a succinct and accurate account of that history in his text *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. In fact, Eagleton characterizes the history of literary criticism in the past two centuries as progressing through three stages: "a preoccupation with the author (Romanticism and the nineteenth century); an exclusive concern with the text (New Criticism); and a marked shift of attention to the reader over recent years" (Eagleton 1983 74). The beginnings of this contemporary shift in focus away from the text and toward the reader are difficult to pinpoint. I.A. Richards discusses the reactions of his Cambridge students to a series of poems in *Practical Criticism* (1929), although he can hardly be labelled a Reader Response critic. Rather, Richards uses what he perceives to be the mistakes and misreadings of his students to articulate a theory that laid a part of the foundation for New Criticism, as we saw in Chapter Two. Louise Rosenblatt’s *Literature as Exploration* (1938) more genuinely values student readers’ reactions to literature, but had relatively little immediate impact on the community of literary critics in America. Rosenblatt’s text, as Wayne Booth points out in the introduction to its most recent edition, was seen for decades more as a handbook for pedagogy than as a tenable critical theory (Rosenblatt 1995 14). Walker Gibson’s essay “Authors, Speakers, Readers and Mock Readers” (1950) is in many ways a significant step toward a theory that is more reader-centred than that of mainstream New Criticism, but Gibson’s position still retains most of the conventions of the New Critics, including an emphasis on the text itself as the primary focus for critical practice. Wayne Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) puts the reader closer toward the centre
of critical practice, but like Gibson, Booth retains many of the conventions of New Criticism, including the conviction that meaning is ultimately encoded in the text itself.

In light of the works of these and other writers, it is fair to say that, even in the heyday of New Criticism in the 1940s and 1950s, voices were already beginning to sound that would eventually lead to what Eagleton characterizes as the "marked shift of attention to the reader" in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (Eagleton 1983 74). One reason that it is so difficult to pinpoint the genesis of contemporary Reader Response criticism is that, as a theory, it is far less coherent and far less unified than New Criticism. Its key proponents are often sharply divided in their views on even the most basic matters of theory. Peter Rabinowitz puts this point succinctly: "Calling it a movement...is misleading, for Reader Response criticism is less a unified critical school than a vague collection of disparate critics with a common point of departure" (Rabinowitz 1994 609). Reader Response critics share neither a unified body of critical principles nor, at times, even a distinct subject matter. What they do share is what Rabinowitz calls their common point of departure: a clear rejection of New Criticism.

In particular, Reader Response critics concur in their rejection of the central New Critical principle that the practice of criticism ought to focus strictly on the work itself. Recall from Chapter Two that that principle is clearly developed in the writings of Richards, Eliot and Leavis, and is made explicit in the works of all the American New Critics. For instance, John Crowe Ransom maintains that "the first law of criticism is that it shall be objective, shall cite the nature of the object, and recognize the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own sake" (Ransom 1941 23). And Cleanth Brooks maintains that criticism ought to focus "on the literary object itself" rather than on such "extrinsic concerns" as "the study of textual sources, social backgrounds, the history of
ideas, politics and social effects” or “the intentions of the author or the reactions of the reader” (Brooks 1974 567-568). Reader Response critics, however, reject this focus on the text itself as the only legitimate object of criticism. Instead, they focus more of their critical attention on the work’s effects on the reader, in direct opposition to the New Critical position articulated in Wimsatt and Beardsley’s essay “The Affective Fallacy.” As noted in Chapter Two, Wimsatt and Beardsley maintain that “the affective fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its results...It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of a poem and ends in impressionism and relativism” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 22). By contrast, Reader Response critics maintain that a work cannot be understood apart from its “results,” and that a work’s “psychological effects” are essential to any accurate description of its meaning, since that meaning has no real existence outside the experience of the reader. For Reader Response critics, the reader, not the text, is the appropriate focus for the practice of criticism; as Michael Riffaterre claims, “readers make the literary event” (Riffaterre 1978 116). Hence the common point of departure noted by Rabinowitz is, more precisely, a rejection of the New Critical position articulated in Wimsatt and Beardsley’s essay “The Affective Fallacy,” and establishes a counter-position which shifts the focus of criticism away from the text itself and toward the reader’s experience in reading the text.

In the rest of this section, I will briefly trace how that shared point of departure sews a common thread that runs through the work of these otherwise highly disparate Reader Response theorists. In doing so, I will distinguish between four broad areas of Reader Response theory: I label these areas Structuralist, Rhetorical, Psychological and Phenomenological Reader Response theories, respectively. Clearly, there is a
degree of arbitrariness and pigeon-holing in any such scheme, but I think that a four-part division will, on the one hand, permit a clear tracking of the key Reader Response critics from their shared point of departure, and, on the other hand, permit a clarification of the broad differences between the positions held by these writers. I prefer these four areas to the five categories described by Richard Beach in his comprehensive text, *A Teacher's Introduction to Reader Response Theories*, published by the National Council of Teachers of English in 1993. Beach identifies what he calls *Textual, Experiential, Psychological, Social and Cultural* Reader Response theories (Beach 1993 12). I prefer a different scheme, in part because the labels I have chosen come from the theorists themselves, and in part because I think they permit a more discriminating comparative examination of the positions maintained by the key writers in Reader Response theory in terms of their theoretical conceptions of the text, the reader and the author that I explore in sections 3.5 to 3.7.

Reader Response critics who have made use of a Structuralist approach, at first tentatively and limitedly, and later more explicitly and comprehensively, include Walker Gibson, Gerald Prince, Michael Riffaterre and especially Jonathan Culler. It is from Culler's work that I employ the term *Structuralist Reader Response* theory. Culler defines Structuralist criticism as "essentially a theory of reading" which aims to "specify how we go about making sense of texts" by using semiotics to study language as "a system of signs" (Culler 1975 24). According to Structuralist critics, readers make sense of literary texts based on the conventions of interpretation established by a linguistic community. Walker Gibson's 1950 essay "Authors, Speakers, Readers and Mock Readers" is an early attempt to redirect the characteristic New Critical focus on the text itself as the only object of criticism, at least in part, toward the reader. Gibson's
aim is, to a considerable degree, in line with Culler's prescription to specify how readers go about making sense of texts. However, Gibson's view of literature is still text-centred, still largely within the tradition of New Criticism, in that it locates meaning in the text itself and in that it assumes that specific training is required for the reader to extract that meaning. Yet, in retrospect, it represents one of the first steps in a series that makes use of emerging Structuralist principles gradually to direct critical attention toward the reader, particularly toward a description of how readers make sense of literary texts. Gibson's way of redirecting some of that critical attention toward the reader is his conception of the "mock reader" (Gibson 1950 265). For Gibson, the mock reader is a role that the real reader is invited to play for the duration of his or her reading of the text. Gibson writes that, in reading a text, "we assume, for the sake of experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume" (Gibson 1950 265). What is revealing about Gibson's theory is that he maintains we assume the role of the mock reader for the sake of experience. Hence, Gibson's concept of the mock reader is one of the first critical accounts in the New Critical era to permit the reader's experience as a legitimate object of critical attention. However, Gibson's theory remains within the bounds of New Criticism in most respects; he only introduces the concept of the mock reader as a way of unlocking "further treasures" in the text (Gibson 1950 269). He does so by way of an analogy with the established distinction between the actual author and the persona or narrator, whose existence is purely a function of the text. Gibson conceives of the text as a dialogue between the narrator and the mock reader; according to his theory, this dialogue reveals the "strategies" the author uses to position the real reader with respect to a whole range of values and assumptions the author wishes him or her to accept or reject (Gibson 1950
Gibson's belief that real readers try on the roles offered to them through the conception of the mock reader recognizes that the reader's experience is relevant to the practice of criticism. This is one of the first steps away from the New Critical focus on the text itself as expressed by writers such as Ransom, Brooks and Wimsatt and Beardsley, and toward a Structuralist Reader Response theory that focuses more exclusively on describing how readers make sense of literary texts.

Gerald Prince's 1973 essay "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee" develops a relationship between the narrator and what Prince refers to as the "narratee," which is analogous to the relationship established between Gibson's conception of the narrator and the mock reader. Prince goes further than Gibson in that he distinguishes between three types of readers to whom a text might be addressed: the "real reader," the "virtual reader" and the "ideal reader" (Prince 1973 178-179). The real reader is the person with the text in hand; the virtual reader is the reader the author thinks he or she is writing for; the ideal reader understands the text perfectly and approves its every nuance. Each of these types of readers is distinguished from what Prince calls the "narratee": the person to whom the narrative is directed "by the properties of the text itself" (Prince 1973 180). This may occur either explicitly (like the Caliph in The Thousand and One Nights) or implicitly (as in The Sun Also Rises). However, although Prince's account places greater critical emphasis on the experience of the reader, like Gibson's theory it does not radically question the New Critical focus on the text itself as the legitimate object of critical inquiry. The narratee, for Prince, is still a function of the text, and is still identified by the properties of text itself. Hence his focus on the different types of readers is, ultimately, another way to focus critical attention on aspects of the text itself. His theory is more an extension of the tradition established by
writers such as Ransom and Brooks than it is an alternative to that tradition. The reader for both Gibson and Prince remains, essentially, the New Critical reader of Ransom and Brooks—the reader who is schooled to trace the patterns of ambiguity that are contained within the text itself, who uncovers the single meaning that exists within the structure of that text.

Michael Riffaterre's work moves the critical focus a little further away from the text itself by claiming that literary meaning cannot exist wholly independently from the reader's relation to it. His key texts include his 1966 essay "Describing Poetic Structures: Two Approaches to Baudelaire's Les Chats," which is a critique of Levi-Strauss' and Jakobson's readings of Baudelaire's sonnet Les Chats, and his 1978 work Semiotics of Poetry, which is a more comprehensive account of his theory. In these works, Riffaterre introduces the concept of the "superreader," a construct which includes authors, critics, translators and students (Riffaterre 1978 12). In a sense, Riffaterre's superreader includes all possible theoretical constructions of readers, as well as all possible actual readers; his notion of the superreader subsumes all of Gibson's and Prince's categories of readers. Riffaterre's theory assesses the range of possible effects of a given text on all of these types of readers, real and imagined, in order to identify the features of the text that are what he calls "poetically significant" (Riffaterre 1978 67). In his account, Riffaterre describes the range of mental processes in which these various types of readers might engage, and he traces a common pattern shared by all of them. He claims that, for all of these types of readers, the text arouses certain expectations which it then either "fulfills or frustrates, predictably or unpredictably" (Riffaterre 1978 88). However, Riffaterre's theory still asserts that meaning is a property of the text itself, and not of the activities performed by any of this
wide range of potential readers. The responses of these readers are evidence of the presence of textual meaning at any given point in the text. Hence his theory of how readers make sense of literary texts does focus critical attention on the reactions of readers, both real and imagined, but it does not ultimately locate textual meaning in those reactions.

Jonathan Culler's 1975 text Structuralist Poetics moves textual meaning further from the work itself, locating it instead more fully in the reactions of the reader. For Culler, meaning is shaped by the complex system of signs readers apply to literature; moreover, readers apply this systems of signs according to conventions which are publicly agreed upon by a linguistic community. He writes that "the poem [can] be thought of as an utterance that has meaning only with respect to a system of conventions which the reader has assimilated" (Culler 1975 12). For Culler, there is an internalized "grammar" of literature, a set of conventions which directs readers to pick out certain features of the work which correspond to public notions of acceptable or appropriate interpretations (Culler 1975 23). By learning this grammar of literature, readers achieve what Culler calls a degree of "literary competence" (Culler 1975 45). According to Culler's theory, textual meaning is a function of what is agreed upon by readers belonging to a linguistic community, and criticism ought to "make explicit the underlying system which makes literary effects possible" (Culler 1975 86). Hence Structuralist Reader Response theory, culminating in the work of critics like Culler, aims to describe how readers make sense of literary texts, and does so by attempting to articulate the system of conventions agreed upon by the linguistic community to which those readers belong.

These four writers, Gibson, Prince, Riffaterre and Culler, moving from the 1950s
to the 1970s, when considered retrospectively, represent a series of steps away from the New Critical Practice of locating meaning exclusively in the text itself. These writers, viewed retrospectively, develop a theory of reading that illustrates how readers go about making sense of texts by locating meaning, to an increasing degree, in the experiences of those readers rather than exclusively in the text itself. Later in this chapter, I will examine the components of Structuralist Reader Response theories in more detail. At this point, my purpose is to trace the path these theories cut from their point of departure in the rejection of the New Critical focus on the text itself, rather than the reader, as the principal repository of meaning—particularly as illustrated in Wimsatt and Beardsley's essay "The Affective Fallacy." I take this to be the beginning of the process of uncovering the roots of the interpretation problem in Reader Response theory.

However, Structuralist Reader Response theories, ultimately encoded in the Structuralist poetics of writers such as Culler, are but one way in which Reader Response critics have departed from Wimsatt and Beardsley's position. Another path has been marked by what I label Rhetorical Reader Response theories, a term I take from Wayne Booth's 1961 text The Rhetoric of Fiction (14). Rhetorical Reader Response critics also offer an alternative to New Criticism's focus on the text itself as the exclusive focus for the practice of criticism. The defining feature of Rhetorical Reader Response theories is that they conceive the text as sending signals to the reader for interpretation. Two of the most important writers that can be considered Rhetorical Reader Response critics are Wayne Booth and Stanley Fish.

Booth's The Rhetoric of Fiction is primarily a study of narrative techniques. Booth develops the position that what New Critics label the "natural" narrative
techniques of modern fiction are in fact no less artificial than nineteenth-century (or even eighteenth-century) narrative techniques (Booth 1961 15). Booth argues that writers of fiction in any era must inevitably make use of rhetoric. The use of rhetoric in constructing a narrative is impossible to avoid; the real question, he claims, is “What sort to use?” (Booth 1961 14). In his study, Booth introduces the now familiar terms “implied author” and “unreliable narrator” (Booth 1961 15-18). Booth’s text, and his use of these two terms in particular, opens a door to a way of conceiving criticism as a practice that places a greater emphasis on the reactions of readers to the text than on the text itself. Yet Booth is distinguished from the Structuralist inquiries of writers such as Gibson and Prince in that he exhibits a greater concern for the reader’s total response to the signals sent by the text. For instance, Booth’s study shows a concern for the ethics of fiction in terms of the narrative’s effects on the reader. He poses ethical questions which, he maintains, arise in the reader’s mind as he or she reads a given text, such as, “Would I want the implied author of this book for a friend?” (Booth 1961 134). Hence Booth is not only concerned about how the reader makes sense of the text, as are Structuralist Reader Response critics; he is interested in the reader’s total response to the signals sent from the text, including the ethical dimensions of that response. Moreover, Booth’s later text The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction (1988) shows a good deal of concern for the effects of fiction on readers in that it considers particular texts and the responses of actual student readers to those texts. Hence Booth’s work shifts the focus of criticism away from an exclusive New Critical emphasis on the text itself and toward the response of the reader of the text, yet does so in a somewhat different way than the Structuralist Reader Response critics cited above. For Booth, however, the reader’s response is still very much constrained by the
features of the text itself, and Booth's theory retains many of the characteristics of the theories of the New Critics who predate him.

By contrast, Stanley Fish's position with respect to the degree to which the text itself is the ultimate repository of meaning, as it has developed through his career, departs much more significantly than Booth's from the position established by the New Critics. Like Booth, Fish sees the text as sending signals to the reader for interpretation, but even in his early work Fish places much more emphasis on the process the reader undergoes in interpreting these signals than on the source of these signals in the text itself. In his key earlier texts *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (1967), "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics" (1970) and *Self-consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (1972), Fish goes considerably beyond Booth's position. For Booth, the reader's response is constrained to a considerable degree by the text itself, and the text itself is still the ultimate object of critical attention. However, even in Fish's early work the reader's activity becomes the primary focus for the practice of criticism: for the early Fish, the reader's activity is declared to be identical with the text itself, and is the ultimate source of literary meaning. As a result, for Fish, the goal of criticism becomes a faithful description of the activity of reading. Meaning is not something a reader extracts from the text; rather, it is an experience one has in the course of reading it. Fish focuses on the developing response of the reader in relation to the signals sent by the words as they succeed one another in time—what Fish calls "a sequence of decisions, revisions, anticipations, reversals, recoveries." For the early Fish, the place "where sense is made or not made" is "the reader's mind," rather than "the printed page or the space between the covers of a book" (Fish 1972 45-46).
Hence in his earlier works, Fish maintains that specific properties in the text may create effects in the reader's mind, but it is through the reader's mental processes, the reader's experience of reading the text, that meaning is created. However, in his later works, Fish takes this argument much further, almost to the point of overturning it. For instance, in "Interpreting the Variorum" (1976), he argues that the specific properties of the text which may create effects in the reader's mind and hence cause readers to make meaning do not really exist. Textual properties, and even texts themselves, Fish maintains, cannot be shown to have any autonomous existence outside the reader's experience of them. There is, according to Fish's later work, "no preexistent text to which the reader responds" (Fish 1976 477). In fact, the "reader" is not defined by the traditional act of reading at all. Texts are "written by readers," rather than read by them, since textual properties no longer exist independently of the reader's "interpretive strategies" (Fish 1976 478). Even to describe these properties, or even to identify the text, would be, for the later Fish, to impose an interpretation on it. Any features of the text to which a reader may claim he or she has responded are, for Fish, themselves the product of a particular reader's interpretive strategy. The framework of the reader's interpretive strategies, for the later Fish, creates both the response and the text itself: there is no independent text to which we can point that exists outside those strategies.

Hence Fish's early and later work shifts the focus of criticism, partially and then fully, onto the reader, ultimately denying the existence of the objective text that, for the New Critics, was the only legitimate focus of critical attention. By contrast, Psychological Reader Response critics do not go so quite so far in their claims. For Psychological Reader Response critics, the text still exists, but critical practice ought to focus on the responses to that text of actual readers in actual social contexts. For
these critics, the primary factor which shapes the reader's response to the text is the individual reader's experience. However, Psychological Reader Response critics are not only concerned with the experiences readers undergo during their reading of the text. Unlike Rhetorical Reader Response critics, Psychological Reader Response critics focus their attention on the experiences readers bring to the text, and on how those experiences shape their readings of the text. Three of the most important Psychological Reader Response critics are Louise Rosenblatt, Norman Holland and David Bleich.

Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* (1938) was a book written far ahead of its time. As Booth clearly illustrates in his introduction to the 1995 edition, the community of literary critics in America was not prepared, in the late 1930s (even before the publication of *Understanding Poetry*), to take the views put forward in Rosenblatt's text as an articulation of a serious position in literary criticism. History has clearly determined otherwise, and Rosenblatt's position, established in *Literature as Exploration* and then extended and more formally presented in her 1978 text *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, has been accepted as a major contribution to Reader Response theory in particular and to literary criticism in general. From the beginning, Rosenblatt's work focused not on the text itself but on the experiences that actual readers in the classroom have in reading the text. Unlike Fish, for Rosenblatt the text exists in the reader's hands. However, unlike the New Critics, the text itself, alone, cannot mean anything. Only the reader's experience can bring meaning to it:

The text is an essential element of any reading act...the text is a necessary condition, but it is not a sufficient condition for the re-creation of a particular work. The text is merely an object of paper and ink until
some reader responds to the marks on the page as verbal symbols.

(Rosenblatt 1978 23)

For Rosenblatt, meaning is a combination of what is contained in the text and what the reader brings to the text from his or her personal experiences. She describes the experience of reading as a "transaction" between the text and the reader (Rosenblatt 1978 42). According to Rosenblatt, the experience of reading a literary text is best illustrated by what she calls a "transactional theory of reading" (Rosenblatt 1978 43). In that theory, reading is described as follows:

a circular process in which the reader responds to the verbal stimuli offered by the text, but at the same time he must draw selectively on the resources of his own fund of experience and sensibility to provide and organize the substance of his [sic] response. Out of this the new experience, the literary work is formed. (Rosenblatt 1978 43)

Hence Rosenblatt's theory is distinguished by its emphasis on the way the reader's personal experience shapes the stimuli provided by the text; meaning is created by individual readers, actual readers in the classroom, in the transaction they experience between the text and what they bring to it. Her theory is much more personalized, much more individualized, than those of Structuralist or Rhetorical Reader Response critics.

For Norman Holland, too, critical practice ought to focus on the responses of actual, individual readers to the text. According to Holland, readers deal with literary texts the same way in which they deal with life experience. In developing his position, Holland draws heavily on psychoanalytic theory, and Freud's influence is clearly evident in his two principal works, 5 Readers Reading and "Unity Identity Text Self,"

"Some reader responds to the marks on the page as verbal symbols."

"For Rosenblatt, meaning is a combination of what is contained in the text and what the reader brings to the text from his or her personal experiences. She describes the experience of reading as a "transaction" between the text and the reader (Rosenblatt 1978 23)."

"According to Rosenblatt, the experience of reading a literary text is best illustrated by what she calls a "transactional theory of reading" (Rosenblatt 1978 43)."

"In that theory, reading is described as follows:

a circular process in which the reader responds to the verbal stimuli offered by the text, but at the same time he must draw selectively on the resources of his own fund of experience and sensibility to provide and organize the substance of his [sic] response. Out of this the new experience, the literary work is formed. (Rosenblatt 1978 43)

Hence Rosenblatt's theory is distinguished by its emphasis on the way the reader's personal experience shapes the stimuli provided by the text; meaning is created by individual readers, actual readers in the classroom, in the transaction they experience between the text and what they bring to it. Her theory is much more personalized, much more individualized, than those of Structuralist or Rhetorical Reader Response critics."

"For Norman Holland, too, critical practice ought to focus on the responses of actual, individual readers to the text. According to Holland, readers deal with literary texts the same way in which they deal with life experience. In developing his position, Holland draws heavily on psychoanalytic theory, and Freud's influence is clearly evident in his two principal works, 5 Readers Reading and "Unity Identity Text Self,""
both published in 1975. Each reader, Holland claims, develops a particular style of coping which imprints itself on every aspect of his or her behaviour, including acts of textual interpretation. Holland labels this style of coping a person's "identity theme," and maintains that, in the process of reading, a reader filters a text through his or her characteristic identity theme (Holland 1975a 30). According to Holland, a particular reader views a particular text through his or her own "patterns of defense" and projects on it his or her "characteristic fantasies" (Holland 1975a 32). Then he or she translates that extremely personal reading experience into a "socially acceptable form" to produce an interpretation (Holland 1975a 36). Hence meaning, for Holland, is a combination of what is on the page and the experiences the reader brings to his or her encounter with that page. He notes that the reader "shapes the material the literary work offers him" (Holland 1975a 34). In this way, Holland's position is close to Rosenblatt's, particularly in its emphasis on how the experiences of an individual reader shape that reader's interpretation of a given text. His view, however, places a much greater emphasis on the reader's unconscious psychological processes than does Rosenblatt's. He writes that "interpretation is a function of identity" (Holland 1975a 36), and maintains that in the act of reading a literary text the reader merges his or her identity with that of the author by recreating the author's personal identity theme according to the reader's own characteristic patterns of response.

David Bleich, in his 1978 text Subjective Criticism, like Rosenblatt and Holland, focuses on actual readers reading actual texts. However, for Bleich, unlike Rosenblatt and Holland, the text exists as an object of criticism only insofar as it has a physical presence; its meaning depends on a process of "symbolization" that occurs in the mind of the reader (Bleich 1978 32). According to Bleich, the reader undergoes an initial
symbolization which Bleich calls a "response"; then in an effort to understand that response, the reader undergoes a process of "resymbolization" that Bleich labels "interpretation" (Bleich 1978 34-36). For Bleich, neither the initial response nor the more developed interpretation are as constrained by the particular features of the text as they are for Rosenblatt and Holland. Rather, the reader’s initial response and subsequent interpretation are formed in the context of what Bleich calls an "interpretive community" (Bleich 1978 38). This interpretive community includes the teacher and the students in the classroom, who, according to Bleich, are all engaged in a common pursuit in “deciding what counts as true” (Bleich 1978 46). Hence, for Bleich, meaning is less constrained by the features of the text than it is for Rosenblatt or Holland, and, moreover, not constrained as exclusively by the reader’s personal experiences; rather, the context of the interpretive community in which the reader reads the text determines, in large part, the meaning of the work.

Thus for Psychological Reader Response critics such as Rosenblatt, Holland and Bleich, criticism ought to focus on the responses to the text of actual readers in actual classrooms. Rosenblatt, Holland and Bleich differ from one another in the ways in which, and the degree to which, the personal experiences of the reader determine the reader’s interpretation of a literary text. However, all three Psychological Reader Response critics place more emphasis on individual readers in particular contexts than either Structuralist or Rhetorical Reader Response critics, and all of them reject the New Critical emphasis on the text itself as the ultimate repository of meaning. *Phenomenological Reader Response* critics also emphasize the responses of individual readers to literary texts, but in a different way than Psychological Reader Response critics. Phenomenological Reader Response theories the focus is on the
reader as a thinking subject, the "I" of our conscious world.

Many of the roots of the Phenomenological Reader Response theories developed in the 1970s and 1980s lie in the earlier work of Edmund Husserl. According to Husserl, the "natural attitude" we tend to exhibit that physical objects exist independently of ourselves is quite mistaken; instead, Husserl maintains that we can only be certain of how such objects appear to us "immediately in our consciousness" (Husserl 1970 34-35). Hence the external world, for Husserl, becomes reduced to the contents of our consciousness alone. All objects, all reality, must be considered pure phenomena, which Husserl defines as "appearances in our conscious mind" (Husserl 1970 36). This complete reduction of external objects to conscious phenomena is what Husserl calls "phenomenological reduction" (Husserl 1970 36).

The Phenomenological Reader Response criticism of the 1970s and 1980s is largely an application of Husserl's phenomenological reduction to works of literature. As Husserl rejects the natural attitude that objects have an independent existence, Phenomenological Reader Response critics reject the natural attitude we may have that ascribes independent significance of a literary text's historical, biographical and social context. However, the position taken by Phenomenological Reader Response critics differs significantly from the New Critics' rejection of such extrinsic concerns in favour of an exclusive focus on the text itself. For Phenomenological critics, the text itself is reduced to pure phenomena, which is a pure embodiment of the author's consciousness; hence the author's consciousness is manifested in the work itself. In the words of the Phenomenological critic Roman Ingarden, the work exists as a set of "schemata" which the reader must "actualize" (Ingarden 1973 24). These schemata are like a set of general directions to the phenomena of the author's consciousness.
The foremost Phenomenological Reader Response critic of our era is undoubtedly Wolfgang Iser. In such works as "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction" (1971), *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (1974) and *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978), Iser argues that, in the act of reading a literary text, the reader brings to the work certain "pre-understandings," certain expectations, and as the reading process proceeds, these expectations are continually modified by "new schemata" (Iser 1978:32). According to Iser, in trying to construct a coherent sense of the text, the reader undergoes a process in which he or she emphasizes certain elements from the text and organizes these in his or her consciousness, backgrounding some features and foregrounding others. Iser describes this as a process of "concretizing" certain elements of the text (Iser 1978:40). As we read, Iser claims, we "shed assumptions, revise beliefs, make inferences, draw connections, and fill gaps" (Iser 1978:45). Through all of these components of the reading process, Iser maintains, the reader constructs the meaning of the text by supplying "that portion of the text which is not written but only implied" (Iser 1978:60). Hence Phenomenological Reader Response critics, like Psychological Reader Response critics, emphasize that the reader's individual experiences co-determine textual meaning to a much greater extent than either Structuralist or Rhetorical Reader Response critics. However, their explanations of the process through which this occurs differ substantially from the accounts of Psychological Reader Response critics. Much greater emphasis is placed by Phenomenological Reader Response critics on the ways in which individual readers fill in gaps in the text. In this sense, the text sets stricter parameters on interpretation for Phenomenological Reader Response critics than for Psychological critics. And, like
critics in each of the other three areas of Reader Response theory. Phenomenological Reader Response critics clearly reject the New Critical emphasis on the text as the ultimate repository of textual meaning.

In this section, I have distinguished between four areas in Reader Response criticism: I have labelled these areas Structuralist, Rhetorical, Psychological and Phenomenological Reader Response criticism, respectively. As well, I have traced a continuous thread that runs among all four areas, starting from their common starting point in each area's rejection of the New Critical claim that criticism ought to focus on the text itself, and that the text itself is the ultimate repository of meaning. The development of Reader Response theory which I have traced in this section is distilled from the research I completed as a classroom teacher who had recently made the transition from New Critical to Reader Response Practice, and who had become frustrated by what I eventually discovered was the interpretation problem. I started to read Reader Response theory in the hope that I would find the origins of the interpretation problem, much like I had found the roots of the garden path problem in New Critical theory. It was not until later, however, that I discovered that both of these problems were the results of an unproblematized classroom practice. In sections 3.5 to 3.7, below, I examine in more detail the theoretical conceptions of the text, reader and author which operate in each of these four areas of Reader Response theory in order to locate the source of the interpretation problem. In these sections, having traced the common thread that runs through them, I identify two factors which distinguish these four areas of Reader Response criticism from one another. First, they differ regarding the primary factors that shape the reader's experience. Second, writers in these four areas differ in their views regarding the extent to which text controls or constrains the
reader's response.

The rejection of the central tenet of New Criticism by Reader Response critics is one way in which the traditional New Critical approach to teaching literature has become problematized in the universities in the past three decades. However, Reader Response theory, is not, of course, the only critique of New Criticism that has emerged since the 1960s that has contributed to the problematization of pedagogical practice in the university community. Several observers have noted that, in Rabinowitz's words, "virtually all critical schools that have developed since the 1960s" have exhibited "a negative attitude toward New Criticism" (Rabinowitz 1994 609). Yet most commentators agree that Reader Response criticism has played a leading role in the drama that has resulted in the problematization of traditional New Critical approaches to literature in the universities. Rabinowitz, for instance, assesses the contribution of Reader Response critics as follows:

the very raising of certain questions (even unanswered questions) has had profound consequences for the commonplaces of the literary-critical profession and has, in conjunction with such movements as deconstruction and feminism, encouraged general shifts in the direction of literary studies. (Rabinowitz 1994 609)

In particular, Rabinowitz emphasizes how successful Reader Response theories have been in making readers "more wary of how precarious interpretation is as a procedure and how little we can depend on the texts themselves to provide proper interpretive guidance," in opening up discussion of significant topics such as psychology, sociology, and history, in breaking down the boundaries separating literature from other disciplines, and, through questioning the belief that texts have determinable, unvarying
literary quality, in helping to "fuel the attacks on the canon that have been launched from a number of other quarters" (Rabinowitz 1994 609-610).

Jane Tompkins is another writer who notes the significant contribution Reader Response theories have made to problematizing the traditional New Critical literature classroom in the universities. She observes that there has been "an increasing effort on the part of reader-oriented critics to redefine the aims and methods of literary study" (Tompkins 1980 x). Reader Response criticism, Tompkins notes, has played a significant part in the "change in theoretical assumptions" and corresponding "change in the kinds of moral claims critics can make" which has characterized the debate in the universities in the past three decades (Tompkins 1980 x). She writes: "what began as a small shift of emphasis from the narrator implied by a literary text to the reader it implies ends by becoming an exchange of world views" (Tompkins 1980 x-xi). Hence, she concludes, Reader Response criticism has contributed significantly to the problematization of the traditional approaches to reading and teaching literary texts in the universities:

What later Reader Response critics assert is that far from there being no values to which one can appeal, no criteria for judging what is good or true, there is never a moment when we are not in the grip of some value-system, never a statement we make that is not value-laden. What they deny is the possibility of neutral description or of values that are absolute—or, in other words, of statements that exist apart from a human structure of interests...The assertion that all discourse is interested amounts to a reinsertion of literature into the stream of ordinary discourse from which formalism had removed it. The New Critics had objected to
confusing the poem with its results in order to separate literature from other kinds of discourse and to give criticism an objective basis for its procedures. The later Reader Response critics deny that criticism has such an objective basis because they deny the existence of objective texts and indeed the possibility of objectivity altogether. Relocating meaning first in the reader's self and then in the interpretive strategies that constitute it, they assert that meaning is a consequence of being in a particular situation in the world. The net result of this epistemological revolution is to repoliticize literature and literary criticism. When discourse is responsible for reality and not merely a reflection of it, whose discourse prevails makes all the difference. (Tompkins 1980 xxv)

Moreover, Terry Eagleton, too, describes the significant role Reader Response criticism has played in problematizing the university literature classroom. He notes that, with the spread of Reader Response criticism, "probably not many" students and critics of literature are likely to be "worried by the idea that a literary text does not have a single 'correct' meaning" (Eagleton 1983 89). Rather, in Eagleton's view, readers are more likely to be "engaged by the idea that the meanings of a text do not lie within them like wisdom teeth within a gum, waiting patiently to be extracted," as New Criticism would have it, and likely to be encouraged to find that "the reader has some active role in this process" (Eagleton 1983 89).

However, whereas Reader Response criticism is only one set of theories which have influenced the course of the problematization of the traditional New Critical approach to teaching literature in the universities, the situation is considerably different in the secondary schools. In the secondary school classroom, the traditional New
Critical Practice has not been problematized as a result of challenges from a range of theories. Rather, the old practice has simply been replaced by a new one: one monolithic structure has been torn down and another erected in its place. As we saw in Chapter One, North American high school English classrooms, over the past three decades, have undergone a significant and clearly demonstrated shift in pedagogy. Whereas their pedagogy used to be derived almost exclusively from New Critical theory, by 1993, 67 percent of surveyed secondary school English teachers in North America cited Reader Response criticism as having a major influence in their pedagogy, and only 4.8 percent cited neither New Criticism nor Reader Response criticism as an important influence (Applebee 1993 117-122). It might be said that secondary school English classrooms are like suburban lots which have had the old house torn down and another erected in its place (or in some cases which have had a new addition put on the old house in a new architectural style). This is a markedly different situation than in most university English classrooms, in which the lot has been subject to re-zoning, and where the house, foundations and all, has been razed and an entirely new structure (perhaps a shopping mall) has been erected. In the section that follows, I trace the development of Reader Response Practice in Ontario high schools, and I show how that development has not been characterized by the problematization of New Critical Practice. Then, in sections 3.4 to 3.7, I consider in more detail how the theoretical conceptions of the text, the reader and the author that underlie that practice lead to the interpretation problem.

3.3 The Development of Reader Response Practice in the High Schools

Because the broad range of positions within Reader Response criticism
contrasts with the much closer positioning of the New Critics, and because there has been no landmark American text in Reader Response Practice like *Understanding Poetry* and no key figure in Ontario like Diltz, the Reader Response Practice that has developed in Ontario secondary school classrooms in the 1980s and 1990s has been far less indigenous than the New Critical pedagogy that developed in the previous era. Hence, the most effective way to identify the key features of Reader Response pedagogy in Ontario will not be, as it was with New Criticism, to trace the American origins in a text like Brooks and Warren’s *Understanding Poetry* and then to trace the local origins in the works of a central figure like Diltz. Rather, because of its different evolutionary history, it will be more effective to examine the characteristics of Reader Response Practice as they are described in a key pedagogical textbook used in Ontario and across North America. In fact, most of the Reader Response texts available to Ontario English teachers in the 1990s are not published in Ontario, and the features of Reader Response Practice in Ontario classrooms are not clearly distinguishable from classrooms across North America. One of the most comprehensive and most commonly cited Reader Response textbooks used in Ontario and across North America is Richard Beach and James Marshall’s *Teaching Literature in the Secondary School*, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in 1991.

Starting with the premise that “a rethinking of how and why we teach literature in the secondary school is long overdue” (Beach and Marshall 1991 ix), Beach and Marshall offer a comprehensive guide to teaching literature using a Reader Response pedagogy. While in many cases their text considerably oversimplifies theoretical debate, and while, even more significantly, it largely ignores theoretical developments in areas outside Reader Response criticism, nonetheless *Teaching Literature in the*
Secondary School offers a comprehensive account of what has become, since its publication in 1991, mainstream Reader Response Practice in high school English classrooms in Ontario and across North America. Moreover, Beach and Marshall’s approach clearly, although inadvertently, illustrates the difference between the post-New Critical evolutionary histories in the universities and the high schools.

In the introduction to their text, Beach and Marshall describe an opposition between “old practices” and “new practices” of teaching literature, between “teacher-centred” and “student-centred” learning, and between “traditional approaches” and “alternative approaches” to pedagogy in the secondary school English classroom (Beach and Marshall 1991 ix-xi). In each of these encapsulations of this fundamental opposition, they identify the former with “New Critical” pedagogy and the latter with “Reader Response” pedagogy (Beach and Marshall 1991 6-8). Notice that Beach and Marshall’s account corresponds so well with the observations of writers such as Applebee and Appleman cited in Chapter One: by far the most significant change in North American English classrooms in the past thirty years has been the shift from New Critical Practice to Reader Response Practice. In addition, it is crucial to note that in presenting the evolution of the high school English classroom as a transition from New Critical Practice to Reader Response Practice, Beach and Marshall’s account of the secondary school classroom is markedly different than the evolution of the university classroom I traced in Chapter One. It is clear from Beach and Marshall’s account that high school English classrooms have not undergone a transition in which challenges to the underlying theory of New Criticism from a variety of alternative theories have resulted in a problematized classroom practice. Instead, their findings corroborate the evolution of the high school English classroom I traced in Chapter One, in which one
practice has simply replaced another, and in which the underlying theory remains in the teacher’s blind spot. Beach and Marshall’s account clearly sees Reader Response Practice not as an alternative to traditional New Critical Practice, the way it has been seen in the universities, but rather as the alternative to New Criticism.

Before presenting what is a comprehensive description of Reader Response pedagogy, Beach and Marshall offer a succinct encapsulation of the old New Critical Practice. In light of the history of New Criticism I traced in Chapter Two, the following excerpt from Beach and Marshall’s text illustrates that their account of New Critical Practice, although considerably oversimplified, is essentially an accurate one:

[New Critical pedagogy] is informed by broad assumptions about the nature of texts and the nature of reading that have been dominant in schools for much of the last forty years. Deriving from the New Criticism as explained by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Warren, these assumptions hold that literary texts should be considered self-contained verbal artifacts. The meaning of texts, in this view, is in the text, and the act of skillful reading requires the reader to get it out by noting the thematic unities, ironies, and image clusters embodied in the works. The act of reading literature, according to the New Criticism, was largely a process of “close reading” where the reader actively and carefully sought to determined how each part of the text was related to the whole. (Beach and Marshall 1991 10)

Furthermore, the most important assumptions which informed the New Critical pedagogy, according to Beach and Marshall, were that there was a canon of “important texts,” that each text in this canon had a “proper interpretation,” and that pedagogy
ought primarily to consist of "designing questions" to lead students to the proper interpretations of the texts included in the canon (Beach and Marshall 1991 8-9).

Having encapsulated New Critical pedagogy and having identified three of its most important underlying assumptions, Beach and Marshall offer an account of the key contrasts between New Critical and Reader Response practices. Again, it is crucial to note that they do not consider Reader Response Practice to be one of several possible alternatives to New Critical Practice, and that their account inadvertently illustrates the differences between the histories of the high schools and the universities. Beach and Marshall maintain that there are four fundamental ways in which the new pedagogy differs from the old one. First, whereas New Critical pedagogy is based on a "transmission model" of learning, in which the purpose of teaching is to "transmit to students an accumulated body of knowledge that will enable them to become full participants in a literate culture," Reader Response pedagogy is based on an "interpretation model" of learning, in which the purpose of teaching is "not to pass information on to students but to provide an opportunity for students and teachers to explore a topic collaboratively" (Beach and Marshall 1991 58). Second, whereas New Critical pedagogy uses teacher-led, "whole class discussion" as its primary mode of classroom conversation, Reader Response pedagogy employs "small group discussion" as its primary mode (Beach and Marshall 1991 63). Third, whereas day-to-day writing assignments in the New Critical classroom consist largely of answers to teacher-designed questions, day-to-day writing in the Reader Response classroom consists largely of entries in students' "response journals" (Beach and Marshall 1991 84); these response journals are designed to help students "express their responses, share their responses with others, organize their thoughts about a text, discover or
explore ideas for their own writing about literature, and compare and contrast their responses with the responses of others" (Beach and Marshall 1991 102). And fourth, larger writing assignments in the New Critical classroom consist mostly of "formal literature essays," whereas in the Reader Response classroom such assignments consist largely of "personal essays" which "develop and support the students' responses to a text" (Beach and Marshall 1991 92).

Beach and Marshall maintain that these four differences between the two pedagogies indicate that different underlying assumptions inform Reader Response Practice than inform New Critical Practice. However, in their account of these different underlying assumptions, note again that no other practices, practices which might have different underlying assumptions from either New Criticism or Reader Response, are considered; this is clearly a different history than the one that has evolved in the universities. Drawing partly on the work of Alan Purves, Beach and Marshall describe the different sets of assumptions which inform the two practices by listing eight goals for students in a Reader Response classroom, and by contrasting these goals with the goals implied by New Critical Practice. The eight goals identified by Beach and Marshall are for students

1. to articulate their own responses;
2. to trust the validity of their own responses;
3. to extend and expand on their responses;
4. to recognize the differences and similarities between their own and others' responses;
5. to experience literature as enjoyable;
6. to acquire literary and social knowledge through reading literature;
7. to infer the symbolic meanings of text;

8. to define their own attitudes and beliefs in relation to the books that they read. (Beach and Marshall 1991 44)

The authors maintain that these goals indicate Reader Response Practice is based on quite different assumptions than New Critical Practice. I explore these differences, and how they lead to the interpretation problem rather than the garden path problem, in sections 3.4 to 3.7.

The bulk of Beach and Marshall's comprehensive text is devoted to a detailed articulation of the features of Reader Response Practice. Their classroom prescription is based on what which they label a "problem-solving practice" (Beach and Marshall 1991 124), and includes a sequence of ten steps for designing a unit in a literature course. These steps are based on their view that there are four fundamental "ways of knowing literature" (Beach and Marshall 1991 241). Moreover, Beach and Marshall include a specific catalogue of response strategies for daily classroom use, a list of response activities to be used in conjunction with these strategies, and a list of goals for evaluation of student learning, all based on the problem-solving practice and the four ways of knowing literature. In the paragraphs below, I offer a brief description of each of these features of their Reader Response Practice.

According to Beach and Marshall's "problem-solving practice," Reader Response pedagogy should proceed according to the following five steps:

1. defining the needs of students;

2. determining an instructional purpose;

3. unpacking the teacher's own response to the text;

4. identifying student characteristics;
5. organizing the classroom, including solo writing, pairs, small groups and large group patterns.

(Beach and Marshall 1991 124-128)

In their textbook, the general approach described in this problem-solving practice is applied to the specific task of designing a unit for study in a Reader Response classroom. Their method of unit design consists of ten steps:

1. determining a method for organizing the unit or course;
2. selecting texts;
3. considering possible connections between texts;
4. selecting and demonstrating critical approaches;
5. defining key terms;
6. defining your goals and selecting assignments;
7. integrating reading and writing;
8. sequencing your assignments;
9. evaluating students;
10. formulating a schedule.

(Beach and Marshall 1991 180)

Moreover, the five steps in the problem-solving practice of literature instruction, and the ten steps in unit design are based on how, in Beach and Marshall’s view, students “come to know literature” (Beach and Marshall 1991 240). According to Beach and Marshall, there are four such ways of knowing literature. They label these textual, social, cultural and topical ways of knowing. **Textual knowledge** consists of knowledge about “how this text [is] like or unlike other texts in its arrangement, purpose, voice, syntax, and intended audience.” **Social knowledge** is “knowledge of our own personal
experience of the subject being addressed." Cultural knowledge is knowledge of "who we are and how we have come to be who we are." And topic knowledge includes the "different kinds and levels of background knowledge that the various readers bring to the text." Beach and Marshall claim that all four types should be used in Reader Response pedagogy "as tools to help students see the potential meanings in the texts that they read" (Beach and Marshall 1991 242-247).

This pedagogical approach contrasts sharply with the four steps I noted in my description of New Critical Practice in Chapter Two. Recall that those steps were:

1. the teacher’s selection of the text;
2. the teacher’s careful preparation of a scholarly reading of the text;
3. the teacher’s design of an elaborate sequence of questions that lead students toward an approximation of that reading;
4. the teacher’s mediation of the classroom discussion that emerges from these questions, which further ensures that students are led toward an approximation of that reading.

Likewise, the specific classroom practices differ substantially from the practices of New Critical pedagogy. Rather than having students write answers to the teacher’s carefully designed questions and then engage in a discussion based on their answers to those questions, Beach and Marshall provide a set of seven particular “response strategies” for classroom instruction, and illustrate how a teacher might apply these strategies to a text, using Phebe Hanson’s poem “Missing Lips” as a working example. The seven response strategies identified by Beach and Marshall include engaging, describing, conceiving, explaining, interpreting, connecting and judging (Beach and Marshall 1991 28). Engaging includes having students state their “emotional reactions” to the text.
Describing involves having students "restate or reproduce information that is provided verbatim in the text." Conceiving of characters, settings and language involves having students move "beyond the description of information in order to make statements about its meaning." Explaining involves developing explanations for "why characters are behaving as they are." Connecting involves students making connections between "their own experience" and "the materials in the text." Interpreting involves students employing the "reactions, descriptions, conceptions and connections" they have made "to articulate the theme or 'point' of specific episodes or of the overall text." Finally, judging includes making judgments about "the characters in the story" or "about the literary quality of the text as a whole." (Beach and Marshall 1991 28-33).

Beach and Marshall use these response strategies to design specific tasks for students that they call "response activities," which include the following:

1. Think-Alouds: opportunities for students to say aloud "what they are thinking or feeling about a text";

2. Retelling: having students "recount, summarize, or abstract what happened in the text";

3. Freewriting: a "written version of oral think-alouds";

4. Reading Journals: including students' "responses, reactions, thoughts, and ideas as they occur during their reading";

5. Learning Logs: having students at the end of a class "write for five minutes about whatever they learned in the class, even if that learning had nothing to do with the text";

6. Card Catalogues or Computer Databanks of Literary Concepts: lists of "knowledge about authors, genres, storylines, character types,
settings, themes, and techniques;  
7. **Question-Asking**: having students pose "questions about issues the don't understand or that bother them in a text";  
8. **Listing**: generating lists of "items that are similar in type—for example, the actions of a character or the images in a poem";  
9. **Parallel Listing**: Placing such lists "side by side";  
10. **Mapping**: having students "visually portray relationships in a text by drawing 'spider' or 'tree' diagrams to represent the connections between characters, events, places or ideas";  
11. **Venn Diagrams**: using circle maps to "contrast and compare different characters, settings or ideas";  
12. **Graphing**: charting the "high versus low points" in the development of a story or character;  
13. **Rating Scales**: responding to "an object, topic or concept" according to scales such as hot/cold, positive/negative, strong/weak, exciting/dull";  
14. **Storyboards**: charting events in the text in the form of scenes, "portraying characters as stick-figures," and including such movie concepts as camera shots, time and special effects;  
15. **Oral Interpretation**: having students "read aloud a text to a small or large group in a manner that conveys their own interpretation of that text";  
16. **Rewriting, Revising, and Adding onto Texts**: having students "create their own endings, add episodes, revise events, alter the style, place
the characters in different contexts, and create dialogue”;

17. Role-Play: having students “adopt characters’ perspectives”;

18. Book or Movie Reviews: having students write a review of a text in which “they summarize a book and then judge its appeal.”

(Beach and Marshall 1991 102-117)

Beach and Marshall apply these activities to “Missing Lips,” selecting certain activities to correspond with each of the response strategies. Again, these classroom activities contrast markedly with New Critical Practice, in which students’ activities are based on a set of teacher-designed questions that focus on the text itself.

In addition, Beach and Marshall describe the goals of evaluation that ought to be employed in designing such activities in a Reader Response classroom. They maintain that evaluation should accomplish three goals: to provide students with a description of what they are doing when they respond, to provide a blueprint for potential improvement, and to help students learn to evaluate themselves (Beach and Marshall 1991 210). To achieve these goals, they maintain that evaluation should be conceived as the “teacher’s response to students’ responses” (Beach and Marshall 1991 210). As such, evaluation should included the following seven components: praising, describing, diagnosing, judging, predicting and reviewing growth, record-keeping and recognizing/praising growth (Beach and Marshall 1991 211-212). Again, these contrast sharply with evaluation practices in New Critical pedagogy, in which the teacher measures the degree to which, and the clarity with which, the student has articulated the correct reading of the text.

In this section, I have described mainstream Reader Response pedagogy as it typically has been practiced in secondary school English classrooms in Ontario, and
indeed across North America, in the 1980s and 1990s by examining a pedagogical text that is comprehensive, widely cited and widely used. In my description, I have noted that the authors of that text, Beach and Marshall, consistently contrast Reader Response Practice with the New Critical Practice which predates it, and that their presentation of Reader Response pedagogy conceives of that pedagogy as the "new practice" which is the alternative to the "old practice" of New Criticism (Beach and Marshall 1991 ix). Beach and Marshall's account consistently (although inadvertently) illustrates the different evolutionary histories that have characterized the university and high school English classrooms in the past three decades: whereas university classrooms have been problematized as a result of challenges to the theory that underlies the New Critical pedagogy from a range of alternative theories, high school classrooms have remained largely unproblematic, and have instead witnessed the replacement of one practice with another practice, without acknowledging that any practice is based on conceptions in theory, even if that theory is not made explicit to the teacher or to the students. In this sense, Beach and Marshall's account corroborates quite clearly how, in Reader Response Practice, as in the New Critical Practice which predates it, theory remains in the teacher's blind spot.

3.4 Theory and Practice: The Interpretation Problem

The pedagogy I have described in section 3.3, based on the theory I outlined in section 3.2, is essentially the one I adapted in my own classroom after teaching for two years using a New Critical Practice. Like many English teachers in Ontario in recent years, I changed my teaching practice quite quickly, with little grounding in the theory underlying either the old or the new pedagogy. Hence, although I did find initially that
the garden path problem disappeared, as I began to teach texts like *Heart of Darkness* using a Reader Response pedagogy, I soon encountered the interpretation problem. And the reason I started the process of graduate school that eventually led me to write this thesis was to find a way to solve this problem. I began to search for an answer to the question my students were asking me in my Reader Response classroom: "Of all these interpretations, how do we know which is the best one? How do we know which interpretations are better than others?" And, as with the garden path problem in New Critical Practice, I found that the interpretation problem has its origins in theory. As in the New Criticism, in the Reader Response classroom it is the theory which sets the limits on what counts in classroom practice. Yet because Reader Response Practice is no more problematized than New Critical Practice, the theory still resides in the teacher's blind spot. Although the theory sets different limits on what counts than in New Critical Practice, Reader Response Practice still does not acknowledge its theoretical underpinnings. In searching for an answer to my students' question, I found that both the garden path problem and the interpretation problem were symptoms of an unproblematised classroom practice.

In the following sections of this chapter, I examine the key components of Reader Response theory, employing the same sequence I used in Chapter Two: the Reader Response conception of the text (section 3.5), the Reader Response conception of the reader (section 3.6), and the Reader Response conception of the author (section 3.7). In each of these sections, I examine how that component is conceived in the works of a key writer or writers in each of the four areas of Reader Response theory I identified in section 3.2, above: Structuralist, Rhetorical, Psychological and Phenomenological Reader Response theories. As much as
possible, I try to offer a comparative account of these conceptions among the four areas in order to examine the underlying theory. In addition, I draw comparisons between the conceptions of Reader Response critics and the conceptions of New Critics for the text, reader and author. Throughout, I argue that because Reader Response Practice is no more problematized than New Critical Practice, it does not solve the problems observed to be inherent in New Criticism, and in fact it replaces the garden path problem with the interpretation problem. Thus although the limits on what counts in classroom practice are still determined by theory, these limits cannot be made explicit or renegotiated. For these reasons, Reader Response Practice, for all of its success, is not the solution to the problems of New Criticism that it has been thought to be. I argue that a more genuine way to resolve the interpretation problem of Reader Response Practice, and to solve the garden path problem of New Critical Practice, is to problematize the high school classroom such that practice that acknowledges the inevitability of theory.

3.5 The Reader Response Conception of the Text

The conception of the text in Reader Response theory differs substantially from the conception of the text in New Critical theory. Recall that, according to the theory of New Criticism, the text is conceptualized as the work itself, which is a structure of meanings manifested in tensions, ironies and paradoxes, and whose organic unity is achieved through the ambiguity inherent in poetic language. Moreover, in completing the close reading of the text prescribed by New Criticism, an equilibrium of the opposed forces within the structure of meanings is achieved, and the one, true reading of the text is revealed. None of the key writers in the four areas of Reader Response criticism
accepts this conception of the text, nor do any accept that the practice of criticism ought to be defined by the New Critical procedure of close reading of individual texts. However, within the four areas of Reader Response theory, there is a considerable range of theoretical conceptions of the text, some nearer to, and some further from, the conception described by New Critics. For instance, Structuralist Reader Response critics such as Culler conceive of the text as the work as filtered by the reader through a system of signs or semiotic conventions which are publicly agreed upon by a linguistic community. Moreover, according to Structuralist Reader Response critics, rather than producing close readings of individual works, the practice of criticism ought to be directed toward articulating these semiotic conventions. By contrast, Rhetorical Reader Response critics such as Fish maintain that there is no preexistent text, no work itself, at all; rather, the text is re-defined as the reader's activity, and the practice of criticism ought to provide an accurate description of that activity. Psychological Reader Response critics such as Rosenblatt, Holland and Bleich conceive of the text as a transaction between the work itself and an individual reader, in which the work itself is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the creation of meaning by that reader. Criticism, for Psychological Reader Response critics, ought to be directed toward developing an individual reader's personal interpretation of a particular work. And Phenomenological Reader Response critics such as Iser conceive of the text as the work as concretized by readers, who supply that portion of the work that is not present but only implied. Criticism, according to Phenomenological Reader Response critics, ought to develop an individual reader's interpretation, but in a way that is different than that prescribed by Psychological Reader Response critics; for Phenomenological Reader Response critics, criticism ought to articulate the process by
which readers fill gaps in the text. In the paragraphs below, I offer a comparative analysis of the range of conceptions of the text held by a key writer or writers in each of these four areas of Reader Response criticism, and I show how each of these conceptions differs substantially from the New Critical conception of the text.

For Structuralist Reader Response critics such as Culler, a text "has meaning only with respect to a system of conventions which the reader has assimilated" (Culler 1975 12). For Culler, the text is conceived as the work as filtered by the reader through a complex system of signs; moreover, this process of filtering occurs according to conventions which are publicly agreed upon by a linguistic community. For Culler, a text has "structure and meaning" because it is "read in a particular way" (Culler 1975 12). Readers read in accordance with publicly agreed upon linguistic conventions which direct them to highlight certain features of the work, emphasizing some elements and de-emphasizing others. These conventions include "the rule of significance" (the "primary convention"), in which the work is read "as expressing a significant attitude to some problem concerning man and/or his relation to the universe." In addition, there is a second convention, the "convention of metaphorical coherence," which directs the reader to "attempt through semantic transformations to produce coherence on the levels of both tenor and vehicle." There is also a third, the "convention of thematic unity," which directs the reader to emphasize elements of the work which can be seen as examples of a feeling or emotion which are "integrated with the rest of the poem." Through familiarity with these conventions and through repeated application, readers develop what Culler calls "literary competence," the ability to bring to the text "an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for" (Culler 1975 102-103). Hence, for Culler, meaning is a function of what is
agreed upon by a linguistic community, and this agreement is grounded in the complex system of signs through which readers read literary texts. Moreover, the practice of criticism ought to be directed toward articulating that system of conventions that operates within a linguistic community. For Culler, the primary factors which shape the reader's experience are thus institutional: they are the conventions which are shared by a linguistic community. And the work itself constrains the reader's response not through its own inherent properties but through the literary competence of the community of readers according to which certain elements of the work are emphasized and others de-emphasized.

This is a markedly different view of the text than the one put forward by the New Critics. In fact, Culler draws this contrast himself, remarking that "it may well be misleading to speak of poems as harmonious totalities, autonomous natural organisms, complete in themselves and bearing a rich immanent meaning." Indeed, he notes that "it is important to reflect on what has been lost or obscured in the practice of an interpretive criticism which treats each work as an autonomous artifact, an organic whole whose parts all contribute to a complex thematic statement." By contrast, he maintains that the text should be "thought of as an utterance that has meaning only with respect to a system of conventions which the reader has assimilated." Moreover, he disagrees with the New Critical conception of a text's determinate meaning: "we manifestly do not believe that for each work there is a single correct reading" (Culler 1975 104-110). Hence Structuralist Reader Response critics such as Culler reject the New Critical conception of the text, replacing it with a conception that is more highly dependent upon the reading practices of a linguistic community. Moreover, the practice of criticism, for Structuralist Reader Response critics, ought to be directed
toward articulating the system of conventions shared by a linguistic community rather than toward producing close readings of individual texts.

For Rhetorical Reader Response critics such as Fish, the text is conceived as neither the work itself nor as the work as filtered by the reader through a complex system of signs which are agreed upon by a linguistic community. Instead, the text is conceived as "the reader's activity." Literature is "not an object, but an experience"; the text is not "a fixed object of attention but a sequence of events that unfold within the reader's mind." Hence, in direct contrast to the New Critical conception, meaning is "not something one extracts from a poem, like a nut from its shell, but an experience one has in the course of reading" (Fish 1972 47-48). According to Fish's later writings, the New Critical conception of "the work itself" cannot be shown to have any autonomous existence outside the reader's experience of it. There is "no preexistent text to which the reader responds." Instead, Fish goes so far as to declare that texts are "written by readers" rather than read by them since textual properties no longer exist independently of the reader's "interpretive strategies" (Fish 1976 477-478).

For Fish, the purpose of criticism is to attempt to offer a faithful description of the activity of reading; such a description is, for him, equivalent to the text. However, in practice, this offers a curious parallel to the New Critical conception of criticism, in which the purpose of criticism is to produce close readings of individual texts. The results of Fish's criticism are in fact highly detailed descriptions of the activity of reading particular works, descriptions which bear a kind of resemblance to New Critical close readings. They might be described as closer readings, especially when comparing Fish's readings of classic texts that were frequently explicated by New Critics decades earlier, such as Paradise Lost.26

26 In Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost, Fish offers a painstakingly detailed description of
For Psychological Reader Response critics such as Rosenblatt, Holland and Bleich, the conception of the text is considerably different from that of the New Critics, yet also differs substantially from that of Structuralist and Rhetorical Reader Response critics. For Psychological Reader Response critics, unlike Rhetorical Reader Response critics such as Fish, the text exists in the reader’s hands; it is “an essential element of any reading act.” Yet the conception of the text is not limited to the New Critical “work itself”; recall that, in Rosenblatt’s words, the work itself is “a necessary condition, but it is not a sufficient condition” for what she calls the “re-creation” of the text by an individual reader. A text is “merely an object of paper and ink until some reader responds to the marks on the page as verbal symbols” (Rosenblatt 1978 23). In assessing Psychological Reader Response critics’ conceptions of the text in comparison with Structuralist and Rhetorical Reader Response critics’ conceptions, we have to distinguish carefully between the object in the reader’s hands and the object of critical study. The former is what I have been referring to in this paragraph as “the work itself” which, for the New Critics, was equivalent to the text. However, Rosenblatt, in particular, uses the term “text” at times to refer to the object in the reader’s hand, rather than the object of critical study, despite the fact that, in her theory, the object of critical study includes both the work itself and the particular experiences brought to the work by an individual reader. To clarify the conception of the text that operates in the theories of Psychological Reader Response critics Rosenblatt, Holland and Bleich when comparing that conception with that of Structuralist and Rhetorical Reader Response critics, as well as with the New Critics, we should note that for Psychological

the activity of reading Paradise Lost, in which entire paragraphs are devoted to describing the mental processes a reader might undergo in reading only a single line of the text. The line-by-line nature of Fish’s commentary bears a resemblance to a New Critical close reading, but Fish’s attention is focused, in Fish’s words, on “the reader’s mind” rather than on “the printed page” (Fish 1967 20).
critics the act of reading is conceived as a "transaction" between the work itself and the experiences of an individual reader, a transaction which leads to the "re-creation" of the text by the reader. Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading offers a clear encapsulation of the conception of the text that is present in the work of Psychological Reader Response critics. Recall that reading is described by Rosenblatt as a circular process in which the reader responds to the verbal stimuli offered by the text, but at the same time draws on his or her experience to provide and organize the substance of that response. Through this process, what Rosenblatt calls "the new experience, the literary work" is formed. And it is this "new experience," which is labelled the "literary work," that is the object of critical study: this is the conception of the text used by Psychological Reader Response critics, the one we need to isolate for the purposes of our comparative study. In fact, Rosenblatt herself draws a direct contrast between her conception of the text and the "poem itself," the conception of the text for the New Critics. She faults the New Critics for "limiting themselves to analysis of the attributes of a fictive entity, the autonomous 'poem itself,' the 'verbal icon'" and replaces the New Critical conception of the text as the poem itself with a conception of the text as a transaction between the individual reader's experiences and the work that is held in the reader's hands (Rosenblatt 1978 41-43).

Holland, too, conceives of the text as a transaction between what is on the page and the experiences individual readers bring to that page. He maintains that the reader "shapes the material the literary work offers him" (Holland 1975a 34) according to his or her personal experiences. Clearly Holland's conception of the text is very similar to Rosenblatt's: it exists as an object, but has no meaning outside the reader's experiences. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the creation of meaning,
and is not, itself, the appropriate object of critical study. However, the process through which readers read, through which they invest the text with meaning, differs substantially between Rosenblatt and Holland. As we have seen in section 3.2, above, Holland places a much greater emphasis on the reader's unconscious processes than Rosenblatt. For Holland, readers project their "characteristic pattern of defense mechanisms, methods of coping, or adaptive strategies" onto the text, and they do this unconsciously. Interpretation is "a function of identity" and each reader understands the text in terms of his or her "own identity theme" (Holland 1975a 125-126). Moreover, for Bleich the text also exists in the individual reader's hands. It also is not a sufficient condition for the creation of meaning, nor is it, in and of itself, the appropriate object of critical attention. Bleich remains as strong in his view that it makes no sense to speak of textual meaning outside the context of a reader's experiences. Moreover, as we have seen in section 3.2, above, Bleich, like Holland, has his own particular explanation of the process through which readers make meaning through the transaction between the text and the individual experiences which they bring to their reading of that text. According to Bleich, a text's meaning for an individual reader depends on a process of "symbolization" that occurs in the mind of the reader, in which the reader progresses from developing a "response" to an "interpretation" of that text (Bleich 1978 34-36). For Bleich, the individual reader's initial response and his or her more developed interpretation are less constrained by the particular features of the text in his or her hand than they are for Rosenblatt and Holland. Bleich places a greater emphasis on the social context in which responses and interpretations are formed—what Bleich also calls the "interpretive community" (Bleich 1978 38). This interpretive community includes the teacher and the students in the classroom, who,
according to Bleich, are all engaged in a common pursuit in “deciding what counts as true” (Bleich 1978 46).

Hence all three key Psychological Reader Response critics share a conception of the text as a necessary but not sufficient condition for the creation of meaning. They do not deny, as Fish does, the objective existence of the text, but they disagree with the New Critics in their view that the text alone is not the proper object for critical attention. For Psychological Reader Response critics, the practice of criticism ought to be directed to studying the transaction between the text and the individual reader’s experiences which leads to the recreation of the text as the proper object of critical attention. Rosenblatt, Holland and Bleich differ from one another in the degree of emphasis they place on the reader’s unconscious processes in bringing his or her experiences to bear on the text, and on the degree of emphasis they place on the importance of the interpretive community in shaping the reader’s response to the text. Moreover, the conception of the text shared by Psychological Reader Response critics differs substantially from the conception of the New Critics. Clearly the work itself, although it is in some sense the text, is not the proper object for the practice of criticism. Instead, critical attention ought to be focused on the transaction between that work and the reader. And there is a clear contrast to the conception of the text offered by Structuralist Reader Response critics such as Culler. The text is not conceived as the work as filtered by the reader through the conventions of a linguistic community; rather, it is as a transaction between the work and the individual reader’s experiences. Even Bleich, who places considerable emphasis on the interpretive community, does not direct that emphasis, as Culler does, toward an examination of the system of linguistic conventions. Instead, Bleich sees the interpretive community of readers as
providing a social context for the individual reader's creation of meaning. The practice of criticism, for Bleich, is not to be directed toward an articulation of those linguistic conventions, as it is for Culler. Instead, for Bleich, and for Rosenblatt and Holland, the practice of criticism ought to be directed to a study of the transaction between the reader's experiences and the text itself, in order to develop the individual reader's interpretation of the work. There is a much greater focus on the individual reader, on the individual reader's creation of meaning from the text. As well, the conception of the text in the work of Psychological Reader Response critics differs substantially from the theory advocated by Rhetorical Reader Response critics such as Fish. The text is not conceived, as it is for Fish, as indistinguishable from the reader's activity, as not existing for its own sake. Rather, for the Psychological Reader Response critics, the text exists in the reader's hands, but the purpose of criticism is to develop the individual reader's interpretation according to the transaction between the individual reader's experiences and the text itself, rather than to develop a detailed description of the reader's activity. In light of this emphasis, the primary factor which influences the reader's response for Psychological Reader Response critics is the set of experiences an individual reader brings to the text. The work itself controls the reader's response only to a relatively small extent: as a necessary but not sufficient condition for the re-creation of the text, for meaning, it has a lesser effect than the experiences brought to the text by individual readers.

Like Psychological Reader Response critics, for Phenomenological Reader Response critics such as Iser the work itself is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the making of meaning. The text, for Iser, still exists in the reader's hands; the phenomenological reduction that Husserl applied to physical objects is not directly
applied by Phenomenological Reader Response critics to objective texts. Instead, the literary work exists, but it exists as what Ingarden calls a set of "schemata" or general directions, which, through the process of reading, are "actualized" by the reader (Ingarden 1973 24). This conception of the text has some parallels to the conception used by Psychological Reader Response critics: as Psychological Reader Response critics emphasize that the work itself is "merely an object of paper and in until some reader responds to the marks on the page as verbal symbols" (Rosenblatt 1978 23), Iser maintains that the work is "itself no more than a chain of organized black marks on a page" (Iser 1978 38). He maintains that without the "continuous active participation on the reader's part," there would be "no literary work at all." As Psychological Reader Response critics ascribe crucial importance to the individual reader's experiences in determining the reader's interpretation of the text, Iser ascribes importance to what he calls the "pre-understandings" that the reader brings to the text. The work itself, for Iser, is "really no more than a series of cues to the reader, invitations to construct a piece of language into meaning." In reading, the reader draws on a "tacit knowledge of the world in general and of literary conventions in particular" to create meaning out of a text. As we have seen in section 3.2, above, Iser describes a reading process through which readers concretize certain elements of the text, backgrounding some features and foregrounding others. In this process, readers "shed assumptions, revise beliefs, make inferences, draw connections and fill gaps" (Iser 1978 38-45). Readers construct the meaning of the text by supplying the portion of the text "which is not written but only implied" (Iser 1978 60). Hence, for Phenomenological Reader Response critics such as Iser, the text as the object of criticism is not simply the New Critical "work itself," but is instead the work as concretized by the reader.
In many ways, the conception of the text used by Phenomenological Reader Response critics occupies a middle position between the highly individual conception of the Psychological Reader Response critics and the more socially determined conception of the Structuralist and Rhetorical Reader Response critics. The ways in which readers fill gaps, according to Iser, are constrained by the particular features of the work itself to a greater degree than the ways in which readers make meaning according to Psychological Reader Response critics. The purpose of the practice of criticism, however, is quite close to that described by Psychological Reader Response critics: to develop a particular reader's interpretation of a given text. By comparison with Structuralist and Rhetorical Reader Response critics, Phenomenological Reader Response critics place much less emphasis on the social context of the reader's interpretation, but not so little as Psychological Reader Response critics. The text is not conceived, as it is for Structuralist Reader Response critics, as the work as filtered by the reader through a set of conventions agreed upon by a linguistic community, nor should the practice of criticism be to articulate those conventions. The emphasis is on individual readers concretizing individual works, rather than on articulating the system of linguistic conventions. And, compared with Rhetorical Reader Response critics, Phenomenological Reader Response critics do not conceive of the work itself as nonexistent, nor of the text defined strictly as the reader's activity; nor do they prescribe that the practice of criticism ought to be restricted to offering a description of the reader's activity.

When compared with Psychological Reader Response critics, on the one hand, and with Structuralist and Rhetorical Reader Response critics, on the other, the primary factors which shape the reader's response for Phenomenological Reader Response
critics are drawn somewhere in the middle. For Phenomenological Reader Response critics, there is a balance required between the characteristics of the work and the information brought to the text by the reader in determining the reader’s response, in developing an interpretation of the text. And the factors which constrain the reader’s response include the work, and its particular characteristics, which set limits. Yet these factors also include, in a characteristically middle way, the way the reader fills the gaps, the way the reader concretizes the text.

Hence the conception of the text in Reader Response theory varies considerably among the four areas described above. As a result, in examining the theory for causes of the interpretation problem which plagues Reader Response Practice, we should note that the conception of the text in Reader Response pedagogy cannot follow as neatly as it followed in the example of New Criticism illustrated in section 2.5, above. The conception of the text employed in a commonly used textbook such as Beach and Marshall’s *Teaching Literature in the Secondary School* may, in fact, be shown to be troublesome precisely because it does not take into account the range of conceptions described across the four areas in Reader Response theory. In my view, the interpretation problem emerges in classroom practice because the conception of the text used in the Reader Response pedagogy described by writers such as Beach and Marshall is no more problematized than the conception of the text that operated in the New Critical pedagogy articulated by Brooks and Warren and Diltz which preceded it. The conception of the text underlying Beach and Marshall’s pedagogy is not articulated as a position which is grounded in theory, as one of several possible positions in contention with other positions grounded in other theories. Rather, their conception of the text is seen as the only alternative to the one offered by New Criticism. This is a
significantly different situation than the one which exists in most university classrooms, as I described in Chapter One, where as a result of challenges from a wide range of alternative theories, every position must be justified, where any theoretical conception of the text is seen as only one possible conception, where no one position, or no two positions for that matter, are seen as self-evident, uncontroversial or obvious. It is precisely this avoidance of theory, despite the inevitability of theory, which leads to the interpretation problem in Reader Response Practice.

In their description of the pedagogical practice of the new high school English classroom, Beach and Marshall draw a sharp contrast between contemporary Reader Response Practice and the traditional practice of New Criticism. As we have seen in section 3.2, above, their pedagogy is premised on a set of dualities in their account of the evolution of secondary school pedagogy in North America: they trace a shift from "old models" to "new models" of teaching literature, from "traditional approaches" to "alternative approaches," and they clearly label these "New Critical" and "Reader Response" pedagogies, respectively (Beach and Marshall 1991 6-8). Beach and Marshall's account of the history of the evolution of high school pedagogy in North America illustrates how one practice has been replaced by another. And their version of this history is essentially an accurate one; it corresponds quite well with the research done by Appleby and Appleman I cited in Chapter One. Yet it must be emphasized that this is a very different history than what has happened in the universities, and that Beach and Marshall's failure to distinguish between these two histories inhibits their Reader Response pedagogy from solving the problems observed in New Critical Practice. Because of the limited attention to detail in their conception of the text, to the range of positions within the four broad areas of Reader Response theory and to the
distinction between the problematized university classroom and the unproblematized secondary school classroom, their Reader Response pedagogy, although offering some genuine improvements over New Critical pedagogy, does not resolve the problem of what counts in classroom practice.

Although Beach and Marshall clearly identify the New Critical conception of the text to which they are opposed (the text as a "self-contained verbal artifact," in which meaning is "in the text" and the reader's job is to "get it out"), they do not, in their pedagogy, offer a specific alternative to this conception (Beach and Marshall 1991:10). Their practice does not include a conception of the text that is grounded in Reader Response theory in the way that they illustrate how New Critical Practice was based on a conception of the text that was grounded in New Critical theory. This is the case despite that fact that, in the hindsight of writers such as Graff, Belsey, Eagleton, Scholes and Richter, it is clear that any classroom practice is grounded in theory, including a theoretical conception of the text. The reason for this is that Beach and Marshall conceive of Reader Response Practice as the only alternative to New Critical Practice. Because they do not distinguish between the separate pedagogical histories of the high schools and the universities, they do not see that Reader Response Practice is only one of several possible alternatives to New Critical Practice. Hence they do not see the importance of articulating their conception of the text as a position, a position in theory, a position that exists in contention with positions from other theories. By conceiving of Reader Response Practice as the only alternative to New Critical Practice, Beach and Marshall leave theory in the blind spot. Hence their pedagogy results in the interpretation problem and cannot in fact resolve the problems of New Criticism.
The closest that Beach and Marshall come to offering a theoretical conception of the text (other than simply stating their opposition to the New Critical conception) is in their claim that there are more “ways of knowing literature” than the way described by the New Critical procedure of close reading. Specifically, they maintain that there are four ways in which students in the classroom should come to know literature, as described in section 3.2, above: textual knowledge, social knowledge, cultural knowledge and topic knowledge (Beach and Marshall 1991 242). The authors maintain that all four types of knowledge should be used as tools to help students see the potential meanings in the texts that they read. However, it is unclear from their prescription exactly what counts as the text for Beach and Marshall, and in particular it is unclear how their conception of the text is related to, or derived from, the conceptions of the text articulated in Reader Response theory. Clearly Beach and Marshall’s conception of the text extends beyond the New Critical conception of the work itself conceived as a self-contained verbal artifact whose meaning is wholly in the text. Yet it is not apparent from their pedagogy which, if any, of the four disparate conceptions of the text described by Reader Response theory are being utilized. It is precisely an attentiveness to Reader Response theory, and in fact to the differences between the conceptions of the text offered by different writers from different areas within Reader Response theory which might allow Beach and Marshall to conceive of Reader Response Practice as only one of several possible alternatives to New Critical Practice. By not conceiving of Reader Response Practice as only one of many possible alternatives, Beach and Marshall thus fail to appreciate the achievement of problematization that has characterized university classrooms, and hence their Reader Response pedagogy leads, in practice, to the interpretation problem.
Turning to Reader Response theory, it does not appear that Beach and Marshall's conception of the text considers, for instance, the area of epistemological discussion articulated by Rhetorical Reader Response theorists such as Fish. Beach and Marshall neither engage in, nor acknowledge, any epistemological debate regarding the existence of the text to which the reader responds. Beach and Marshall's conception of the text also seems to bear little resemblance to the conception articulated by Structuralist Reader Response critics such as Culler, but again, that lack of resemblance is not made explicit. In their pedagogy, Beach and Marshall do not focus on how the work in the reader's hand is filtered by that reader through a set of conventions agreed upon by a linguistic community.

Although they do not acknowledge such a connection, Beach and Marshall's pedagogy seems to have more in common with the conception of the text articulated by Psychological Reader Response critics like Rosenblatt. Indeed, Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading, in which the text is conceived as a transaction between the work itself and the reader's experience, seems much more relevant to Beach and Marshall's four ways of knowing literature. Rosenblatt's conception of the text as something which includes the work itself as a necessary but not sufficient condition for the creation of meaning seems to fit well, and the notion of criticism as something meant to describe meaning for an individual reader, to describe an individual reader's personal interpretation of a text, seems closely related to Beach and Marshall's pedagogy. However, when we consider in more detail the specific components of the conception of the text articulated by Psychological Reader Response critics, it becomes clear that Beach and Marshall's pedagogy does not articulate a position wholly aligned with, or defended against, the conceptions of the Psychological Reader Response...
critics. For instance, Beach and Marshall's ways of knowing literature do not include a response to Holland's conception of the importance of the role of the unconscious in the development of the reader's interpretation, nor do they include a response to Bleich's emphasis on the role of the interpretive community of the literature classroom. Beach and Marshall's pedagogy also seems to bear some relation to the conception of the text articulated by Phenomenological Reader Response critics such as Iser. Iser's conception of the text as the work as concretized by readers, who fill gaps in the work, backgrounding and foregrounding certain features of the work while being constrained by its particular characteristics, seems to mesh with Beach and Marshall's pedagogy to a degree--certainly to a greater degree than to either Rhetorical or Structuralist Reader Response theorists' conceptions of the text. And Iser's notion that criticism ought to develop the reader's interpretation of the text, but in a way that is more closely tied to the particular characteristics of the work itself than for Psychological Reader Response critics, seems to fit quite well with the range of ways of knowing literature described by Beach and Marshall. However, because they do not articulate their conception of the text as a position to be compared with positions such as those articulated by Phenomenological or Psychological Reader Response critics, it is difficult to speculate about the degree to which Beach and Marshall's pedagogy is closer to either theorists' conceptions of the text. Because the notion of how the text constrains the reader's interpretation emphasized by Iser is not addressed by Beach and Marshall, their conception of the text is not clear; the theory remains in the teacher's blind spot.

Hence Beach and Marshall's conception of the text, because it is not articulated as a position in theory, does not take into account the range of conceptions of the text across the four areas of Reader Response theory. Hence the limits on what counts in
classroom practice are no more explicit and no more clearly negotiated than they were in the New Critical classroom; the limits are just different ones, and not necessarily less significant ones. It is precisely this avoidance of theory which leads to the interpretation problem in classroom practice. Students in Reader Response Practice are left with no way to determine which interpretations of the text are the best ones because the limits on what counts are unacknowledged. In order to address the problems observed to be inherent in New Critical Practice, the classroom practice needs to be problematized. As we saw in Chapter Two with respect to New Critical Practice, the observations made by writers such as Graff, Richter, Eagleton, Belsey and Scholes apply as much to the high schools as they do to the universities—and they apply as much to the Reader Response classroom as they do to the New Critical classroom. The fact that there is no practice without a theory is what leads students in a classroom in which theory resides in the blind spot at a loss when weighing different interpretations of a text.

Just as the garden path problem is a result of the limits on what counts in classroom practice being grounded in a theory that was hidden in the blind spot, the interpretation problem is a result of different limits grounded in a different theory which, in a still unproblematized practice, is still hidden in the blind spot. Recall that, in the New Critical classroom, interpretation was constrained by the mechanism of the teacher’s carefully designed questions, without seeming to be constrained by any factors at all, and that the result of this constraint was the experience felt so often by teachers like myself of having the same conversation about a given text over and over again each semester, regardless of the composition of the class. In the Reader Response classroom, teachers like myself also end up having the same conversation
over and over again each semester—a different conversation than the one experienced in the New Critical classroom, but equally frustrating, and equally indicative of the limits of an unproblematized classroom practice. Without an acknowledgement of theory, and hence without a clear conception of the text, what happens in the Reader Response classroom over and over again is that students, when studying a given text, use the various strategies recommended by writers such as Beach and Marshall to develop a wide range of ideas, commentary and interpretations about the text: what it is about, what it means, what is most important about it, which elements ought to be emphasized. But after discussing their ideas (again according to activities prescribed by writers such as Beach and Marshall), they are left without a way of determining which interpretations are better than others. And it is precisely because writers of Reader Response pedagogy such as Beach and Marshall, and because teachers using Reader Response Practice in their classrooms, have not explicitly grounded their pedagogy in theory, have not acknowledged theory in their practice, that the interpretation problem develops. This is the reason I had so much trouble answering my students’ question about which interpretation was right. As the garden path problem was a symptom of an unproblematized classroom practice, so, too, is the interpretation problem. It is only possible to answer my students’ question by grounding practice in theory, by moving theory out of the blind spot. Only by acknowledging that any classroom practice is based on theory, including a theoretical conception of the text, can the teacher respond in a meaningful way to that question. Only by moving theory out of the blind spot can the teacher acknowledge that the answer to this important question depends on the conception of the text (and the reader and the author) upon which the classroom practice is based. In Chapter Four, I
explore in more detail how this question might be answered in a classroom practice which acknowledges the inevitability of theory; my point here is that it is necessary to move theory out of the blind spot in order to answer that question and to resolve the interpretation problem, just as it was necessary to move theory out of the blind spot in order to resolve the garden path problem of the New Critical classroom.

3.6 The Reader Response Conception of the Reader

The conception of the reader in Reader Response theory, like the conception of the text, is substantially different from that of New Critical theory. Recall that the conception of the reader in New Critical theory was that of an “ideal reader” (Brooks 1951 75), a reader who is “sufficiently informed” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 29) to trace the patterns of ambiguity in the poetic language of the text. None of the writers in the four areas of Reader Response theory accepts this conception of an ideal reader; for each of the Reader Response critics, the reader is a flesh-and-blood human being, the subject who has the text in hand. Moreover, all of the Reader Response critics put the reader, rather than the text, in the centre of critical practice; it is the reader, not the text, who is in the spotlight. As with the conception of the text, however, there is a considerable range of conceptions of the reader across the four areas of Reader Response theory, although this range is somewhat narrower than for the conception of the text. Recall that a Structuralist Reader Response critic like Culler, for instance, sees the reader as a member of a linguistic community, a person who reads the text according to the (often implicit) shared conventions of that community, and who, in so doing, learns literary competence. By contrast, a Rhetorical Reader Response critic like Fish conceives of the reader as the subject who creates the text through the activity
of reading; the reader's interpretive strategies create both the reader's response and the text itself. Psychological Reader Response critics such as Rosenblatt, Holland and Bleich conceive of the reader as a unique person who brings his or her individual experiences to the reading act; these unique experiences co-determine the text's meaning. And Phenomenological Reader Response critics such as Iser conceive of the reader as the subject who actualizes the schemata in the text; for Iser, the reader constructs the text's meaning through the process of concretization.

In this section, I examine the conception of the reader in each of these four areas of Reader Response theory, drawing comparisons where they seem useful among the four areas themselves and between each of these areas and the conception of the reader in New Critical theory. Then I examine the conception of the reader in Reader Response pedagogy according to Beach and Marshall. I argue that, as with the conception of the text, Beach and Marshall do not explicitly articulate a conception of the reader as a part of the theory that inevitably underlies their pedagogy; their pedagogy is not problematized and, with theory still in the blind spot, the interpretation problem surfaces. According to Structuralist Reader Response critics like Culler, texts have meaning "only with respect to a system of conventions which the reader has assimilated" (Culler 1975 12). The reader, for Culler, is conceived as the subject who reads "in a particular way" (Culler 1975 12). The reader is not an ideal, not a construct, not an adjunct to the text, but instead is a real person who reads a given text according to conventions agreed upon by a linguistic community; the reader is conceived as the subject who brings to the text "an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for" (Culler 1975 102). Readers may vary in the degree to which they understand these conventions, which Culler calls "the grammar of
literature," and may have corresponding variations in their level of "literary competence" (Culler 1975 45), but critical practice for Structuralist Reader Response critics is not based upon a conception of the ideal reader (Brooks 1951 75) or Wimsatt and Beardsley's conception of the reader who is sufficiently informed to trace the patterns of ambiguity in the text (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 29).

For Rhetorical Reader Response critics such as Fish, the conception of the reader is even further removed from the New Critical notion of the ideal reader. Rather than conceiving of the reader as an ideal construct which exists to extract the one correct meaning from the text, Fish maintains that it is the reader's activity which in fact creates the text. For Fish, "texts are written by readers," and there is no such thing as a "pre-existent text to which the reader responds" (Fish 1976 477). Fish's theory turns the New Critical universe on its head: rather than conceiving of the reader as an imaginary ideal who exists only to demonstrate the one true meaning of the text, Fish conceives of the text as an imaginary entity that only exists as a result of a flesh-and-blood reader's activity. Psychological Reader Response critics such as Rosenblatt, Holland and Bleich offer an even more particularized conception of the reader. As with Structuralist and Rhetorical Reader Response critics, the reader in Psychological Reader Response theory is a real person rather than an ideal construct. In addition, however, Psychological Reader Response critics emphasize the importance of the individual experiences of particular readers in determining the text's meaning. Recall that the reader "re-creates" the text by bringing his or her personal experiences to the reading act (Rosenblatt 1978 43). For Psychological Reader Response critics, the conception of the reader is highly individualized. Holland emphasizes the importance of an individual reader's unconscious search for an identity theme in determining
textual meaning (Holland 1975a 32), and Bleich maintains that individual readers undergo a process of "symbolization" in reading a text, in which properties of the text and experiences of the individual reader co-determine meaning (Bleich 1978 34-36). Moreover, for Phenomenological Reader Response critics, the reader is also conceived as a real person who brings his or her individual experiences to the reading act. Iser describes how individual readers bring "pre-understandings" to the reading process, and how these pre-understandings are modified by the "new schemata" of the text in a process he labels "concretization" (Iser 1978 40).

Hence there is a range of conceptions of the reader across the four areas of Reader Response theory, although all of the key Reader Response critics are opposed to the New Critical conception of the ideal reader and instead employ conceptions of actual readers. As with the Reader Response conception of the text, the roots of the interpretation problem may be uncovered in the theory. This becomes clearer in considering Beach and Marshall's *Teaching Literature in the Secondary School*, which does not take this range of conceptions of the reader in theory into account. As with the conception of the text, Beach and Marshall's pedagogy is marked by a distinct avoidance of theory: not only do Beach and Marshall seem unaware of the range of conceptions of the reader that exist in the theory that underlies their pedagogical prescription for the high school English classroom, they in fact do not articulate which conception (or conceptions) of the reader informs their pedagogy at all. In this sense, Beach and Marshall's Reader Response classroom remains as unproblematized as the New Critical classroom to which they are opposed. Because they do not distinguish between the separate histories of the universities and the secondary schools, because they do not see Reader Response Practice as only one possible alternative to New
Criticism, theory in their Reader Response classroom remains in the teacher's blind spot, and as a result their pedagogy, for all of its strengths, does not resolve the problems of the New Critical classroom and results in the interpretation problem.

Beach and Marshall also hold that New Critical pedagogy is informed by broad assumptions about "the nature of reading" (Beach and Marshall 1991 10). According to these assumptions, the reader is to read in a prescribed manner, noting "thematic unities, ironies and image clusters" embodied in the text in order to extract the text's "meaning" (Beach and Marshall 1991 10). This is the New Critical "close reading," which Beach and Marshall describe as a process in which the reader actively and carefully seeks to determine "how each part of the text [is] related to the whole" in order to determine the text's "proper interpretation" (Beach and Marshall 1991 10). Yet as with the conception of the text, Beach and Marshall do not articulate an alternative to this New Critical conception of the reader in their Reader Response pedagogy. Their pedagogy is not explicitly grounded in Reader Response theory, despite the fact that, in light of the work of writers such as Eagleton, Belsey, Richter, Scholes and Graff, it is clear that any practice must presuppose theory, and that it is impossible to prescribe a pedagogy without implying a theoretical conception of the reader. Without an explicit conception of the reader, the teacher is positioned with theory in the blind spot.

The closest Beach and Marshall come to articulating a conception of the reader is in their list of eight "goals" for students in the Reader Response classroom. Considering that, according to these goals, students are to articulate, extend and trust the validity "of their own responses" and to "define their own attitudes and beliefs in relation to the books that they read," the conception of the reader implied by Beach and
Marshall would seem to be very different from the New Critical conception of the reader. Rather than conceiving of the reader as an ideal reader who performs a New Critical close reading, Beach and Marshall's eight goals for students imply a conception of the reader as a real person who develops an individual response to the text. Yet it is unclear specifically what is included in Beach and Marshall's conception of the reader, or which of the four areas of Reader Response theory, if any, influence that conception.

Moreover, it is precisely an attentiveness to theory which would allow Beach and Marshall to see Reader Response Practice as only one of several possible alternatives to New Critical Practice, and hence allow them to move theory more fully out of the blind spot and better address the problems of the New Critical classroom. For instance, something like Culler's Structuralist Reader Response conception of the reader as a member of a linguistic community who applies certain shared conventions of reading and learns literary competence seems to be implied by items six and seven in Beach and Marshall's list of eight goals for students. Yet it seems unlikely that Beach and Marshall would subscribe to Culler's focus on the importance of institutional factors in the reading process; their pedagogy seems to ascribe more importance to the individual differences between readers. Moreover, it would seem that Beach and Marshall would not accept Fish's conception of the reader as the creator of the text, whose activity is indistinguishable from the text itself; yet something like Fish's notion of the ways in which the interpretive community constrains the range and direction of the reader's response would seem to be implied in Beach and Marshall's fourth goal for students. In fact, Beach and Marshall's list of goals seems to imply a conception of the reader which is closer to that offered by Psychological Reader Response critics, in that their pedagogy values the influence of individual readers' personal experiences in
co-determining the meaning of the text; goals one to five seem to correspond well with that conception of the reader, and goals six and eight would seem to show an influence of Bleich's conception of the interpretive community of the classroom. However, the fit is far from complete; for instance, there is no acknowledgement at all of the importance of the unconscious emphasized by Holland, and it is unclear how the transaction between the reader and the text might co-determine textual meaning. Moreover, the conception of the reader in Iser's Phenomenological Reader Response theory might be implied by Beach and Marshall's entire list of student goals, particularly in items one to four and seven; Iser's process of concretizing would seem to fit quite well with Beach and Marshall's value on having students articulate their responses, but again it is unclear how this is supposed to occur, and to what degree Beach and Marshall might subscribe to Iser's theory of reading.

Hence it is clear from examining Beach and Marshall's list of goals for students that their conception of the reader, like their conception of the text, is not articulated as a position in theory, in contention with (or aligned with) positions in other theories—including the range of positions described across the four areas of Reader Response theory. Despite the observation by so many writers with respect to the university classroom that any pedagogy implies theory, Beach and Marshall's Reader Response prescription for the secondary school classroom leaves theory in the blind spot. As with the conception of the text, the interpretation problem in Reader Response Practice is a result of this lack of acknowledgment of theory.
3.7 The Reader Response Conception of the Author

As Eagleton points out, it was Romantic criticism that exhibited a preoccupation with the author (Eagleton 1983 74), and since that era relatively little criticism has focused overmuch on the importance of the author in critical practice. Neither New Criticism nor Reader Response criticism concentrates very much critical attention on the role of the author. As I observed in Chapter Two (section 2.7), the conception of the author in New Critical theory is of an invisible author, one who effectively disappears after writing the text, or even of the critic-constructed author, who makes statements about life according to literary conventions which can be recognized and taught. New Critics do not argue that the author does not exist, but they do hold that information about the author, or from the author, is not relevant to the practice of criticism. For example, recall that Wimsatt and Beardsley, in the definitive New Critical article on the role of the author, "The Intentional Fallacy," argue that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 3). They maintain that to "insist on the designing intellect as a cause of a poem" is not to "grant the design or intention as a standard by which the critic is to judge the worth of the poet's performance" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1954 3). Moreover, in section 2.7, I noted that by conceiving of the author as someone who vanishes after writing the text, and by conceiving of the reader as an ideal construct who knows all of the conventional associations or correlatives and who applies this knowledge to extract the one true reading of the text, New Critical theory leaves the authority of the text's interpretation fully in the hands of the critic.

Although Reader Response critics, like the New Critics, place little emphasis on
the role of the author in critical practice, they do not leave the authority of textual interpretation in the hands of the critic; rather, that authority lies with the reader. Reader Response critics de-emphasize the importance of the author for different reasons than the New Critics. For Reader Response critics, because meaning lies in the reader’s experience, the author is assigned a different role. Moreover, there is some variation in the role of the author across the four areas of Reader Response theory, although because the author’s role does not occupy a prominent place in Reader Response theory this variation is not as obvious, or as significant, as the variation in the conceptions of the text and reader discussed in the previous two sections. Yet as with the conception of the text and the reader, it is precisely a lack of articulation of theory which limits the effectiveness of Reader Response Practice, and which leads to the interpretation problem.

As a Structuralist Reader Response critic, Culler’s conception of the author follows from his conception of the reader. As the reader is conceived as a member of a linguistic community who reads according to “a system of conventions” which he or she has “assimilated” as a member of that community, the author is conceived as a member of the same linguistic community, as someone who has assimilated the same system of conventions and who writes according to that system. As the reader “reads in a particular way,” the author writes in a particular way. The author writes according to the same internalized “grammar” of literature with which the reader reads; because the text “has meaning only with respect to a system of conventions,” the reader can make sense of the text only if the author is writing according to the same set of conventions (Culler 1975 12). Fish’s conception of the author, however, differs substantially from Culler’s. For Fish, the author is not relevant to critical practice for different reasons
than for Culler; according to Fish, the author, like the text, cannot be shown to have any independent existence outside the reader's experience. As there is "no preexistent text to which the reader responds," there is no preexistent author in the critical process. According to Fish, texts are "written by readers," and neither textual properties nor authors may be shown to exist outside the reader's "interpretive strategies" (Fish 1976 477-478). Hence Fish conceives of the author as more completely removed from critical practice than Culler; because the author cannot be shown to exist independently of the reader's interpretive strategies, the author cannot necessarily be considered a member of the linguistic community to which the reader belongs. Similarly, Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading does not prescribe a strong role for the author. Instead, reading is a circular process in which the reader responds to the stimuli offered by the text but at the same time draws selectively on his or her own experiences to create the literary work (Rosenblatt 1978 43). The author does not figure directly in this process. Recall that Rosenblatt maintains that the text is merely an object of paper and ink until the reader responds to the marks on the page as verbal symbols (Rosenblatt 1978 23); it is not the manifestation of the design or intention of a particular author. Criticism is directed toward describing the meaning of the work as co-determined by the properties of the text and the individual reader's experiences. The author's individual history only plays a role in this process insofar as the reader's experiences might include information about the author.

Of all of the areas in Reader Response criticism, Phenomenological Reader Response critics place the greatest emphasis on the role of the author. According to Iser, as readers concretize the text, undergoing the process in which they shed assumptions, revise beliefs, make inferences, draw connections and fill gaps to
construct the portion of the text "which is not written but only implied" (Iser 1978 60), they actualize the set of "schemata" in the text (Iser 1978 32). These schemata are like a set of "general directions to the phenomena of the author's consciousness" (Ingarden 1973 24); hence in concretizing the text and actualizing its schemata, the reader is in fact constructing an interpretation that is in part an embodiment of the author's consciousness. Because Iser maintains that the reader's activity is "only a fulfillment of what is already implicit in the structure of the work" (Iser 1978 58), and because that structure is in the form of schemata that are the phenomena of the author's consciousness, the author in Phenomenological Reader Response theory is conceived as someone whose consciousness co-determines textual meaning.

Hence, as with the conceptions of the text and the reader, there is some variation in the conception of the author across the four areas of Reader Response theory. None of the key Reader Response critics accepts the New Critical conception of the invisible author whose disappearance leaves the authority of textual interpretation in the hands of the critic, yet somewhat different conceptions of the author inform each area of Reader Response theory. Moreover, as with the conceptions of the text and the reader, the theory is unacknowledged in classroom practice, which leads directly to the interpretation problem. For example, Beach and Marshall's text Teaching Literature in the Secondary School does not articulate an explicit conception of the author, a conception in theory upon which classroom practice might be based. Instead, as with the conceptions of the text and the reader, Beach and Marshall's pedagogy does not acknowledge that a theoretical conception of the author is inevitable, even if it is not made explicit to the teacher or to the students.

In sections 3.5 and 3.6, I observed that Beach and Marshall do provide a clear
encapsulation of the conceptions of the text and the reader upon which New Critical Practice was based. However, they do not include an account of the New Critical conception of the author. The model of learning which they propose, which they label the "interpretation model," is opposed to the New Critical "transmission model" (Beach and Marshall 1991 58); however, they do not articulate a conception of the author which underlies either model. Because they do not even indicate which conception it is to which they are opposed, it is even more difficult in examining their practice to uncover the conception of the author implied in their pedagogy than it was for the conceptions of the text or the reader. Neither their eight goals for students nor their four ways of knowing literature addresses the conception of the author to which they are opposed or which they espouse, and none of their specific teaching strategies include any mention of the author.

We might speculate on the degree to which their pedagogy seems to follow from any of the (unarticulated) conceptions of the author across the four areas of Reader Response theory, such as the degree to which their pedagogy implies a conception of the author as a member of the same linguistic community as the reader (Structuralist Reader Response theory), as a figure who cannot be shown to exist outside the reader's activity (Rhetorical Reader Response theory), as the anonymous producer of the paper and ink to which the reader brings his or her own experiences (Psychological Reader Response theory) or as the encoder of the phenomena of his or her consciousness (Phenomenological Reader Response theory). Any of these speculations, however, would be very limited. Tentatively, I would suggest that, as with the conception of the text and the reader, the conception of the author in Psychological Reader Response theory is the one that is most implied by Beach and Marshall's
pedagogy—although without Holland’s notion of the merging of the reader’s identity theme with the author’s. Beach and Marshall’s interpretation model of learning, in which the teacher, rather than passing on information to students, provides opportunities for students and the teacher to explore a topic collaboratively, as well as Beach and Marshall’s goals for students and their description of the ways in which students come to know literature, do emphasize the role of the individual reader’s experiences in determining textual interpretation, with the author as merely the provider of the object of paper and ink, more than they emphasize the features of the other three areas of Reader Response theory. Yet even in making this rudimentary observation, it is clear that in their conception of the author, as in their conception of the text and the reader, Beach and Marshall’s pedagogy is characterized by an avoidance of theory, despite the unavoidable nature of theory. It is clear that they conceive Reader Response pedagogy to be the only alternative to New Critical pedagogy, and as such their classroom practice is not problematized.

As a classroom teacher who had switched to Reader Response Practice to avoid the garden path problem, and who then became disenchanted with Reader Response pedagogy because of the interpretation problem, it took some time for me to determine that, like the garden path problem, the interpretation problem was rooted in the theory that, unacknowledged, underlies the pedagogy. I have presented a detailed examination of the conceptions of the text, the reader and the author in both New Critical and Reader Response theory in Chapters Two and Three because in order to uncover the origins of the garden path problem and the interpretation problem it is necessary to understand the specifics of the arguments in the theory implied by the practice. Because I was teaching full-time and taking courses in graduate school while
I was reading New Critical and Reader Response theory, it took a number of years for me to piece together the two puzzles I have called the garden path problem and the interpretation problem, and to understand the relationship between them. In reading New Critical and Reader Response theory during that period, I was again astonished at how unprepared I had been when I started using Reader Response pedagogy in my third year of teaching, at how little I knew about the theory behind the practice. In reading Reader Response theory over the past few years, I have more clearly seen the shortcomings of the Reader Response pedagogy which appeared to be so seamless when I was first introduced to it. Moreover, I have come to hold the view that Reader Response pedagogy cannot resolve the interpretation problem, nor can it solve the problems of New Criticism that it purports to resolve, unless the practice is problematized as it has been in the universities. For the past two years, during which I have been writing this thesis, I have been working on developing a problematized practice in my own classroom, a practice which, I hope, better addresses the shortcomings of both New Critical and Reader Response practices. In Chapter Four, I offer a description of that problematized practice.
Chapter 4:  
A Problematized English Classroom

As a controlled reflection on the formation of method, theory rightly proves to be entirely compatible with teaching.  

-- Paul De Man

I see that teaching and theory are always implicated in one another.  

-- Robert Scholes

At present theory is everywhere.  

-- David Richter

Pedagogy is filled with surprises, involuntary returns, and unanticipated twists.  

-- Deborah Britzman

The marriage of recent literary theory and pedagogy is at best a compromised and imperfect one, in part because few literary theorists attend to the complexity of the classroom, especially in the way that expert teachers do.  

-- Deborah Appleman

The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude.  

-- George Orwell

Knowing how much or how little emphasis to put on ideology in interpretation strikes me as the beginning of wisdom.  

-- J. Parini

As teachers, I think we should see all learners as people who can be helped to write, or construct, their lives and their culture as well as to read and understand them.  

-- Jack Thomson

Although I believe that what we call the curriculum is an infinite array of interwoven and ever-evolving relations, I am not overwhelmed by this complexity but am reassured by it. For although the beginnings and endings of curricular relations can never be located, isolated, or finally fixed—because they are always and already part of each other—they can be studied. But they can never be studied in their entirety.  

-- Dennis Sumara

If I were to propose a text for the twentieth century, it would be Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness.  

-- Timothy Findley, Headhunter
4.1 The Approach

In Chapters Two and Three, I identified four problems commonly observed in New Critical Practice, and I maintained that at the centre of each of these problems was the issue of what counts in the classroom. I argued that although Reader Response Practice has been thought to have solved these problems, it in fact does not solve them because Reader Response Practice does not adequately address the issue of what counts. I showed that Reader Response Practice cannot address this issue because the limits on what counts in classroom practice are determined by theory, and because Reader Response Practice is no more problematized than New Critical Practice, teachers are still positioned so that theory remains in the blind spot. I showed in these chapters that both the garden path problem of the New Critical classroom and the interpretation problem of the Reader Response classroom were symptoms of an unproblematized classroom practice, and I argued that in order to better resolve the problems of New Criticism, classroom practice in the high schools needs to be problematized much as it has been in the universities so that theory may more successfully move out of the blind spot and the limits on what counts may be made more explicit and be more easily renegotiated.

In Chapter Four, I develop a problematized practice as it might operate in an Ontario high school English classroom. This practice is based in part on the model of constructive reading developed by the work of Bogdan and Straw which I cited in Chapter One. Bogdan and Straw suggest that "a revolution of sorts in conceptualizations of reading is taking place," from a conception of reading as "transmission and translation" to a notion of reading as a "transactional and constructive act." They maintain that transmission and translation theories of reading
imply that "meaning is present in the text," that meaning is "determinate," and that "the reader's task is to 'figure out' what that meaning is." By contrast, transactional and constructive approaches to reading do not conceive of meaning as present in the text, but rather that meaning is "built up by the reader during the act of reading." In this sense, reading is a "meaning-constructing process" rather than a "meaning-getting process." Moreover, Bogdan and Straw argue that negotiations between reader and text are never undertaken in isolation of "the social circumstances in which learning and reading take place"; meaning-constructing occurs in a social context (Bogdan and Straw 1993 1-5).

In developing a problematized practice for a high school English classroom in the present chapter, I build upon Bogdan and Straw's work. Moreover, I make a distinction between their terms "transactional" and "constructive." In my view, to conceptualize reading as transactional is to invoke the Psychological Reader Response theory of Rosenblatt (from whose work the term is drawn), with its emphasis on reading as a process in which an individual reader draws upon his or her own personal experiences in order to create the "literary work" (Rosenblatt 1978 43). In my own classroom practice, I prefer the term constructive, without the adjunct transactional, because a conception of reading as a constructive activity in which readers build meaning by drawing on a range of resources is one on which a problematized classroom practice may be more securely based.

For the past two years in my own classroom, I have been developing a pedagogy based on Bogdan and Straw's model of constructive reading, one with which I am still experimenting. In that practice, I define a list of five categories of resources which students draw upon in constructing textual meaning, and I make use of a
particular classroom strategy which I call the interpretive sketch. In section 4.2, I offer a detailed description of this developing pedagogy. At the outset, I would like to stress that, in a problematized classroom, students are not just learning the "correct interpretation" of the text, as they did in New Critical Practice, with its conception of reading as transmission and translation. Nor are they just developing a "personal interpretation" of the text based on their own experiences, as they did in Reader Response Practice, with its conception of reading as transaction. Rather, students learn to construct textual meaning in a social context, and they also learn to develop a greater awareness of their own reading strategies. In a problematized practice, students not only study texts, they study how they read texts. In such a practice, theory is made more explicit, and the limits on what counts are more openly negotiated.

The problematized practice that I have been developing in my own high school classroom has largely been shaped by work done in the universities during the ferment of the last thirty years, particularly the arguments put forward by Belsey, Graff, Richter, Scholes and Eagleton which I cited in Chapter One. Conceptually, the framework of my present practice is based on what I have learned from these and other writers in the universities whom I have read in preparation for writing this thesis. Yet while the concept of problematization is clear in these accounts, all of them are noticeably short on specifics: there are very few details in any of them which describe precisely how a teacher would set up the kind of practice that is called for, particularly in a high school context. In addition, in searching for specific suggestions for developing a problematized practice in my secondary school classroom, I have found some very useful ideas in recent books and articles written by high school teachers who are developing the beginnings of a Post-Reader-Response Practice. These accounts offer
critiques of present Reader Response Practice based on recent developments in literary theory. While I have found some useful teaching strategies in these accounts, none of them offers quite what I would call a problematized practice in the sense of what writers such as Belsey, Graff, Richter, Scholes and Eagleton describe in the universities. Hence what I have been working on in my own classroom is an attempt to develop a teaching practice which makes use of these critiques of Reader Response Practice, but one which goes further toward developing a problematized practice of the type described by writers in the university setting. In doing so, I have had to balance the two disparate realities so aptly described by Appleman and Graff: that, as Appleman observes, "teaching literary theory is rarely attempted with secondary students" (Appleman 1993 155), even though, as Graff notes, "we are always talking theory whether we know it or not" (Graff, cited in Richter 1994 vi). In some sense, the problematized practice I describe in this chapter continues the work of writers in both the university and high school settings. In particular, this practice makes use of advances in Poststructuralism and Cultural Studies theory, for it is in these areas that the most highly developed challenges to New Criticism (in the universities) and Reader Response (in the high schools) have recently emerged. Moreover, the problematized practice I have been developing in my own classroom is informed by different conceptions of the text, the reader and the author than either New Critical or Reader Response practices. I examine the particular conceptions in the underlying theory which inform such a practice in more detail in section 4.2.

It is crucial to note that developing a pedagogy in which students draw upon five specific categories of resources in reading texts, and which uses a particular classroom strategy called an interpretive sketch to help students construct interpretations of texts,
and to help them develop a greater awareness of their own constructive reading strategies, are not ends in themselves. In any pedagogy, there are educational aims behind the teaching strategies, and this is still true of a pedagogy in which theory is made explicit and in which the limits on what counts are negotiable. Whereas in New Critical Practice the educational aims were primarily to induct students into a community of literacy, and in Reader Response Practice the educational aims were primarily to help students define their personal beliefs through their responses to literature, a problematized practice has fundamentally different aims. These address political and ethical dimensions of learning and teaching to a greater extent than either New Critical or Reader Response Practices. Encouraging students to develop interpretations of texts with an awareness of how they construct those interpretations is a means toward helping students to construct themselves, and also toward helping them to become more aware of how they are constructed. Moreover, it is a means toward encouraging students to construct their lives, their cultures, their world, and to do so with a greater awareness of their ability to make choices. When students leave the problematized classroom, they should go out into the world changed, and more prepared to change that world. They should go into the world with a greater sense of what Robert Scholes calls "textual power": the power to control their reading, their learning, their world (Scholes 1985 x). Moreover, the educational aims of the problematized practice I describe in this chapter have a greater emphasis on the political and ethical dimensions of learning and teaching because, in the hindsight of Poststructuralism and Cultural Studies theory, theory itself becomes redefined—at least to a certain degree. In a problematized high school classroom, theory expands to

27 For an examination of the educational aims in New Critical and Reader Response practices, see especially Beach and Marshall (40-44), Eagleton (42-43), Appleman (158-159) and Thomson (132-133).
28 I discuss these aims in more detail in section 4.5.
include the conditions of the teaching-learning-schooling context to a much greater extent than in either the New Critical or Reader Response classroom, and also to a greater extent than is apparent in the work of writers such as Graff or Scholes. The educational aims of a problematized high school classroom extend beyond Graff's prescription to teach the conflicts, to give students more theoretical tools to develop textual interpretations, and also beyond Scholes prescription to give students more textual power, to develop themselves as more powerful, more understanding, individuals. Students should emerge from a problematized classroom more changed, and more prepared to change the world, because the world is now more fully included in the redefined theory which underlies classroom practice.

To illustrate the development of a problematized practice based on a model of constructive reading, I return in this chapter to the narrative I began in Chapter One: I chart the development of a problematized practice in my own Post-Reader-Response classroom during the two years I have been writing this thesis. I should acknowledge that this practice is continually evolving, and that the feedback I get from my students is the most significant factor in determining the direction of that evolution. Moreover, I do not think that a problematized practice such as the one I am working on in my own classroom offers a solution for every problem that might come up in an English class. It is not a panacea, and it doesn't work perfectly every day. However, I do think that this practice offers a better solution to the problems of New Criticism than my old Reader Response Practice, and that it more genuinely resolves both the garden path problem and the interpretation problem.

In my description of a problematized practice in this chapter, I try to be as specific as possible in describing what I do in my classroom, and how what I do
addresses the garden path problem and the interpretation problem I encountered in my old New Critical and Reader Response practices. In section 4.2, I describe in some detail how I set up a problematized practice in each of my current English classes; in doing so, I articulate the differences between my present and past practices. In addition, I illustrate in this section how I think a problematized classroom practice in the high schools should be developed somewhat differently than it typically has been in the universities. Then in sections 4.3 and 4.4, I return to the example of Heart of Darkness that I used in Chapter One. In section 4.3, I offer a critique of how I taught Heart of Darkness in my New Critical and Reader Response classrooms from the perspective of my current problematized practice. While for reasons of space I obviously cannot include a description of every lesson in each version of the Heart of Darkness unit, for purposes of comparison among the three classroom practices I do include a critical account of the overall structure of each Heart of Darkness unit, and a sample lesson from each unit on a particular scene from the text. Then in section 4.4, I describe my present approach to teaching Heart of Darkness in a problematized classroom based on a model of constructive reading. I argue how a problematized practice like the one I have been developing in my own classroom these past two years more genuinely addresses the issue of what counts in the classroom, how it offers a better solution to the problems of New Criticism than my old Reader Response Practice, and how it resolves both the garden path problem and the interpretation problem. I illustrate how a problematized practice repositions teachers and students so that theory is able to move more fully out of the blind spot, and how, in a problematized classroom, the limits on what counts are made more explicit and more easily renegotiated. Throughout these sections, I draw comparisons between my own work and the work done by other
teachers in recent accounts of Post-Reader-Response high school practice. Then in section 4.5 I illustrate how theory is redefined in a problematized practice, and in section 4.6 I offer a conclusion which asks whether this problematized classroom practice ought, itself, to be subject to problematization.

4.2 Problematizing the English Classroom: Beyond Reader Response Practice

In recent years, my own classroom practice has changed considerably as a result of what I have been studying in graduate school. Through this continual evolution, I have tried to be very open with my students about how my practice is changing, and why. To their credit, my students have not hesitated to give me feedback, and their responses to my pedagogical revisions have helped considerably in shaping my current classroom practice. Now, when I begin a new English course, I encourage my students to construct interpretations of texts and to reflect on their constructive reading practices, starting on the very first day of classes.

In the past two years, I have taught grades ten and twelve. On the first day in both courses, I give out a short text. In my grade ten classes, I use the Tragically Hip song “Nautical Disaster,” and in my grade twelve classes I use Timothy Findley’s short story “Stones.” Both of these texts are Canadian, both by writers most students have heard of, and both are rich in intertextual associations. In each case I use the text differently from how I would have used a first text in either of my previous classroom practices: the agenda for our writing and discussion on the song or short story is not set by questions for textual analysis (like those I used in my New Critical classroom), nor is it set by sharing students’ open responses to the text (as it was in my Reader Response classroom). Instead, after playing the song or reading the opening scene
from the story, I ask my students to do two things. First, I ask them to write an open response to the text. That response, however, is only a starting point; it will not, as it was in my Reader Response classroom, be used directly to determine how we talk about the song or the scene from the short story. Second, after giving students time in class to write their initial responses to the text, I ask them for homework to answer the following five questions about the response they have written:

1. Highlight or underline specific passages in the song (or scene) that were particularly important in determining what you wrote in your initial response to text. Now reread these selected passages: looking back at them, what aspects or features of the text would you say were most important in shaping your initial response to it?²⁹

2. What experiences in your own personal history (recent or further in the past) would you say influenced your initial response to the text?

3. What knowledge from your previous literature education did you use in writing your initial response to the song (or scene)?

4. Consider for a moment your own social, political and cultural background: the neighbourhood, city, province, and country where you live, your family background and family history, the various groups with which you identify (such as friends, family, gender, sports, music, art, or any other interests). Which of these factors of your social/political/cultural context do you think influenced your initial response to the text? If any of these factors were different, how might you have responded differently to the text?

²⁹ Both David Bleich and Dennis Sumara utilize strategies very much like this one, in which students reread passages from a text in a particular way; see especially Bleich 1978 (128-133) and Sumara 1996 (70-73).
5. What knowledge of the author's personal history or social/political/cultural context did you draw upon in writing your response?

These questions are designed to draw students' attention to the range of resources they have drawn upon (consciously or unconsciously) in developing their initial responses to the first text in the course. I have developed five categories of these resources, based in part on Bogdan and Straw's theory of constructive reading. These categories are used throughout the course, and they are a key component of a problematized practice. They are:

1. the text;
2. the reader's personal history;
3. the reader's literature education;
4. the reader's social/political/cultural context;
5. knowledge of the author's personal history and social/political/cultural context.

After writing answers to these questions for homework, during the second class I have students share both their initial responses to the text and the answers to the reflective questions in small groups. I ask them to read their responses aloud to the group, and then their answers to the questions. Then I ask them to discuss similarities and differences among their group's responses and answers, and to take notes on the findings of their discussion.

At the end of the small group discussion in this second class (in which I have also distributed basic materials such as course outlines and textbook lists), I ask my students to write an answer to the following question for homework: "For each of the
five questions which you discussed in your group, what did you not emphasize or include in your answer that someone else in your group did?” In class the following day, I ask them to write what I call an interpretive sketch of the song or scene from the story. Like the five categories of resources, the interpretive sketch is a strategy that is key to the problematized practice I am developing, something that is used throughout the course. In an interpretive sketch, students describe their interpretation of the text (what it is about, what it means), and they also describe the process through which they constructed that interpretation: they reflect upon how they arrived at their reading of the text, including a consideration of each of the five categories of resources which they drew upon in developing their interpretation, based on their own and the other group members’ initial responses and answers to the five reflective questions. These interpretive sketches include what Jack Thomson calls students’ “reading of the text” and also “the story of their reading of the text” (Thomson 1993 143). Moreover, based on their discussion with their group, I also ask my students to include in their interpretive sketches key items from the five categories of resources which they did not include in their reading of the text which others did include.

In the fourth class, these interpretive sketches are read and critiqued by the other members of the small group. We then proceed to read the next texts in the first unit of the course. In my grade ten class, we read more Canadian poetry, moving from the Tragically Hip to Margaret Atwood’s “The Double Voice.” In my grade twelve course, in addition to completing “Stones,” we read another short story by Findley from the same collection, entitled “Dreams.” With these subsequent texts, I use a similar approach. Students write open responses and then reflect on the five categories of resources they drew upon in writing their initial responses; they share both their
responses and reflections in a small group, and then write interpretive sketches based on their own and the other group members’ work.

Sometime in the first two weeks of the course, students start asking me questions about how we are approaching these first texts, about why we are spending a lot of time reflecting on our readings and considering other students’ readings. In response to these questions, I devote one class to what I call a meta-conversation; this class is key to developing a problematized practice. We talk about how the idea of responding to a text and then reflecting on the construction of that initial response is somewhat different from how most students have approached texts in literature classes before, and I try to be as open as I can with my students about what we are doing and why we are doing it. I tell them that, in my view and in the view of a growing number of English teachers, reading is seen as primarily a constructive activity. In this view, readers construct what a text “means” or what it is “about” by drawing on many resources, including the five categories they have been reflecting on in their responses to the first two or three texts in the course: the text, the reader’s personal history, the reader’s previous literature education, and the reader’s social/political/cultural context, and the author’s personal history and social/political/cultural context. I tell them that this view of constructive reading itself has a particular history, and that it is not by any means the only way people have explained how readers read texts. Depending on what questions my students ask me in this meta-conversation, I may tell them a little about that history. I may include how the idea of constructive reading emerged as a result of teachers finding limitations and problems with other views of reading, such as the conception of reading as primarily an individual transaction (where meaning is a result of the interaction between an individual reader’s personal experiences and the
information in the text, as in Reader Response Practice), and reading as primarily transmission and translation (with meaning being something determinate inside the text that the reader has to get out, as in New Critical Practice). In addition, I try to be open about the educational aims of a practice based on a theory of constructive reading.

In any case, I emphasize to my students that the conception of reading as a constructive activity is not the only way to look at reading, but that it is the view that I and several other English teachers have come to, and the one that this course is based on. According to this view, in the social context of the classroom, some of the resources we draw upon in constructing a reading of a given text will be very much the same from reader to reader, and some will be different. The textual information, for example, will be the same for all of us because we all have the same poem or story in our hands. However, this will not be the case for all of the other resources we draw upon on determining what the text means. For instance, although we may share some of the same experiences in our personal histories, many will be different. This will also be true for our literature educations, our social/political/cultural contexts, and our knowledge about the author’s personal history and social/political/cultural context. This means that no two readers in our classroom will see a given text in exactly the same way: while there will be, undoubtedly, some things on which we agree, there will be many differences among the interpretations we develop in response to a given text. The point I emphasize to my students in this meta-conversation is that each reader’s unique interpretation of the text is a result of the particular constructive reading strategies that that reader applies to the text; each reader’s interpretation depends on the particular resources he or she draws upon in developing his or her reading. I also emphasize that, for all of us, some of those reading strategies will be applied
consciously and some unconsciously, and that our particular relationships to the learning-teaching-schooling context will influence how we apply these reading strategies.

After this meta-conversation, I have students work in small groups to develop a chart of all of the constructive reading strategies they can think of within the five categories with which we have been working that might be used in constructing an interpretation of a text. They return to their interpretive sketches of the first two or three texts they have studied so far in the course, and they develop a chart that includes as many specific examples that they can think of for how readers might use the resources of the text, their personal history, their previous literature education, their social/political/cultural context, and their knowledge of the author's personal history and social/political/cultural context to develop an interpretation of a text. Then we put each group's chart on the board for the other groups to see, and I have students add to their own chart any findings from the other groups that they think are important. Then one group volunteers to make a large chart representing the most important findings for all the groups in the class. In my grade ten course, that group uses a large sheet of paper to display our constructive reading chart on one of the bulletin boards in the classroom, and in my grade twelve course, the group uses computer graphics software to create a version of our constructive reading chart in a form which I can photocopy, and each of us puts this chart in our notebooks. In both classes, it is astonishing how often those pages will get referred to, and scribbled on, through the course.

After completing these charts of constructive reading strategies, I emphasize to my students that the conception of reading that we have described in our charts is not really very strange. I ask them to think of a song they know well, and to consider the
following question: If someone were to ask them what the song was about (or what it meant), would it seem very strange to them if, in their answer, they talked about a) features of the song itself, b) things from their personal experiences that made it meaningful for them, c) ideas they had learned from their study of music (in or outside music class), d) their own context as listeners belonging to a certain group or groups in society, and e) knowledge about the songwriter’s life and social/political/cultural context? And would it seem so strange to them that some of these were things they applied consciously, some more unconsciously, and that their social-political relationship to that person, and that song, might affect their response? I then repeat the question, substituting the example of a film they know well for the song. What my students tell me is that they don’t find the idea that as listeners and viewers and readers of texts we construct meaning all the time, making use of a range of constructive reading strategies like the ones we have been talking about, to be so foreign. What they do find unusual, however, is articulating that process and putting it all down on a big chart that sits in their English classroom. They tell me that they often use constructive reading strategies unconsciously, that they don’t tend to make explicit to themselves or their friends or classmates which strategies they are using when they read (or listen to or view) a text. I tell them that I usually don’t either, but that in this course, we are going to try to make the reading strategies that we use to construct meaning as explicit as possible to ourselves and one another. We will try to acknowledge that, as readers, we will develop differing interpretations of the texts we study, and we will try to become more aware of how these differing interpretations result from using different constructive reading strategies. I tell them that it is very important in this class that we try to define what we are including (and excluding) as
relevant or important as we develop our ideas about what a text means (or what it is about): that it is important that we try to define the limits on what counts as important or relevant to our conversation about the text’s meaning. I emphasize to them that these limits depend on which constructive reading strategies we are using.

In developing our charts, I stress that using constructive reading strategies to develop an interpretation of a text is like using a set of tools to do a job, in this case a job of reading a text. Moreover, I introduce students to the idea that we need not work in a vacuum: that it is likely that other people have already developed quite a few useful sets of tools for constructing interpretations of texts, and that it is also quite likely that they (the students) are already familiar with the names for some of these tools. I tell them that many of the reading strategies we have listed on our charts are tools that have particular names, and that they are often referred to as theories. I go through some of the most common theories with them, noting that many of these theories have been developed only in the last twenty or thirty years, and we add the names of some of these theories on our charts. In the constructive reading strategies they have listed, we might include theories such as New Criticism, Reader Response Criticism, Russian Formalism, Structuralism, Poststructuralism, Deconstruction, Archetypal Criticism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Feminist Criticism, Marxist Criticism, New Historicism and Cultural Studies theory. I try not to get too carried away with all this, and I don’t put any pressure on students to memorize all of these names. I tell my senior students a little (very little) about each of the theories we have discussed: no more than a few sentences about major ideas, key figures and origins to provide an initial orientation, mostly in response to their questions.

For all of my classes, I emphasize to my students that these theories are like a
set of tools that people have used to construct interpretations of texts, and that we will come back to them as we go through the course. All I want them to remember from the day’s discussion is that, in conceiving of reading as a constructive activity, when we read a text, we draw upon a range of resources in constructing its meaning, in deciding what it is about. Moreover, we often do this unconsciously: we often use tools, or theories, without being aware that we are doing anything special at all. And the ways in which we do this depend, to a degree, on the social and political relationships we have with one another in the educational context within which we read. I tell my students that when we discuss texts in class, we will try as much as possible to do so with an awareness of the constructive reading strategies that shape our interpretations. We will try to be aware of the tools we are using: thus we will try to work with an awareness of theory. Moreover, we will try to notice how the limits on what we include as relevant or important are determined by which constructive reading strategies we use: how the limits on what counts are determined by theory.

In developing these teaching strategies to set up a problematized practice at the start of my courses during the past two years, I have drawn on the work of several teachers in both the universities and the secondary schools. I will briefly highlight the most important of these influences here. Several lessons for high school teachers can be learned from recent work done in the universities, and in developing a problematized classroom practice I have drawn upon the work of several of the writers I cited in Chapter One. The characterization of theory as a normal part of conversation about texts, in and out of the classroom, is particularly underscored in the work of David Richter. Richter maintains that we talk about theory, inside and outside the literature classroom, whenever we “disagree about fundamental principles” and
whenever we “argue about which principles are truly fundamental” (Richter 1994 8). He emphasizes that there is “nothing mysterious” about such talk, and provides the following example:

Two teenagers arguing about whether one of the teachers is open-minded or wishy-washy, or about whether it is a band’s material or performance technique that makes it so great, can get quickly to the edge of some regions of theory, where fundamental questions about values and quality, means and ends, public and private experience, are raised. That edge is easily recognized—for in a state of theory people ask us to define or clarify our terms, and start contesting those definitions and categories. (Richter 1994 8)

Moreover, the idea of bringing attention to the idea that different constructive reading strategies produce different interpretations of a text is particularly emphasized in Gerald Graff’s Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education. Graff maintains that conflicting theories produce different readings of a given text, and his prescription for dealing with these differences between theories is to “teach the conflicts themselves” to our students, to make theory more explicit in our classrooms (Graff 1992 12). Graff urges teachers in the universities to acknowledge that “culture is a debate rather than a monologue” (Graff 1992 15), and that “literature is an arena of conflicting and contradictory social values” (Graff 1992 31). In addition to Richter and Graff, I have made use of work done by Robert Scholes. Scholes maintains that, as English teachers, “our job is not to produce ‘readings’ for our students but to give them the tools for producing their own” (Scholes 1985 ix). To do so, Scholes argues, “the first job of any teacher of criticism is to bring the assumptions that are in place out in the open for scrutiny” (Scholes 1985 x). Moreover, Scholes
maintains that Poststructuralist theory in particular offers “an extremely sophisticated and powerful set of procedures for accomplishing precisely this task” (Scholes 1985 xi). My own work in developing a problematized high school classroom is based in part on writers such as Richter, Graff and Scholes. But my problematized practice is distinguished from this work in that it includes a specific description of how the practice operates in the classroom (including items such as the five categories of resources, the interpretive sketches and the meta-conversation), and it also includes a greater awareness of how we often use reading strategies quite unconsciously and how the ways we use the tools are influenced by the social-political relationships we have in the teaching-learning-schooling context.

The lead of writers such as Richter, Graff and Scholes in the universities has been picked up by a few teachers in the high schools who write about the importance of teaching theory to our students in order to make them more aware of their own constructive reading strategies. In developing a problematized practice, I have made use of work done by some of these teachers, too. This work in the high schools might be described as the beginnings of a Post-Reader-Response Practice because much of it is based on a model of reading that conceives of reading as something more than the transaction between the individual reader’s personal experiences and the information in the text. Moreover, many of the suggested teaching strategies in this Post-Reader-Response Practice extend beyond the use of the individual reader’s responses to the text based on his or her personal history, and some even include the use of literary theory in examining the nature of these responses. Griffith, for instance, notes that “certain applications of literary theory can lay bare what the text does not say and cannot say, as well as what it does, and, as part of the same process, to make
certain aspects of the context in which the reading takes place visible as well" (Griffith 1987 86). Emig notes that the practice of having students reflect on the theories implied in their responses to a text can be clarifying: "theory then becomes a vivid matter of setting out the beliefs that we hold against the beliefs of others, an occasion for making more coherent to others, and quite as important to ourselves, just what it is we believe, and why" (Emig 1990 93). And Lynn maintains that by exposing students to a range of theories, by helping them to learn "how to inhabit the theories," they may see the possibility of a plurality of interpretations as they construct their readings of the text: "plurality offers us a richer universe, allowing us to take greater advantage of the strategies our culture makes available—strategies that do not approach a text, but rather make it what we perceive...Our students therefore should learn how to inhabit the theories mentioned here—and a good many others" (Lynn 1990 112). Each of these teachers goes beyond Reader Response Practice in including the teaching of theory to make students more aware of their own constructive reading strategies.

In addition, I have found in the work of two particular teachers more detailed and more sophisticated descriptions of how a secondary school English teacher might go about teaching theory to encourage students to become more aware of their own constructive reading strategies. Deborah Appleman, whom I cited in Chapter One, states clearly that "the direct teaching of literary theory in secondary English classes would significantly enhance traditional methods of teaching literature and better prepare adolescent readers to respond reflectively and analytically to literary texts" (Appleman 1993 156). She maintains that, in her own teaching, "introducing literary theory to students [has] helped our classroom become a place of constructive and transactive activity where students approach texts with curiosity and initiative, not with
trepidation or reverence or deference to the teacher” (Appleman 1993 169). And Jack Thomson puts very clearly what students should do in a problematized classroom based on a model of constructive reading: “As well as reading the ideologies of texts and self, readers should also make conscious to themselves their own constructive reading strategies” (Thomson 1993 133). He writes that a key question for readers to answer about their reading is, “What is it that I am bringing to the text that causes me to respond as I do?” (Thomson 1993 133). Thomson emphasizes that as students develop a greater awareness of their own constructive reading strategies, they become better readers and better learners: “This reflexive understanding is very powerful knowledge, and it helps people control their own learning processes. If we know what we know, and if we know how we came to know it, we are powerful people” (Thomson 1993 133). I discuss the work of both Appleman and Thomson in more detail in section 4.4, and note how their work has influenced my approach to teaching specific texts like *Heart of Darkness*.

In my own classroom, I emphasize to my students that the clearer we can be about which theories we’re using, and which ones we’re not using, the clearer we can be about what we’re talking about (and not talking about) with one another in the classroom; hence the clearer we can be about what gets included in our discussion, and what doesn’t get included. We can be clearer about what counts, and what doesn’t count. I ask students to bear this idea in mind as we work our way through the texts on the course. I ask them to try to be more aware of the limits that determine what counts in interpreting any text we’re reading, to be aware that these limits are set by the constructive reading strategies we are using and not using in developing that interpretation: to be aware that the limits on what counts are set by the theories we are
applying and not applying, consciously and unconsciously. And I tell them that, by being aware of those limits, we can more easily renegotiate them when we feel we have to: if we can more clearly recognize which theories we are applying in constructing a reading of a given text in a given day's discussion or writing assignment, we can more clearly question whether or not we ought to be applying these theories, and if perhaps we ought to be applying other theories, and make corresponding changes to the limits on what counts in our discussion or writing. I emphasize that we can more easily renegotiate these limits whenever we feel we need to by using the framework we've developed in these first classes of the course, including terms like initial responses, constructive reading strategies, the five categories of resources, interpretive sketches, tools and theories.

In the two years in which I have been developing a problematized practice in my classroom, I have been surprised at how much students know about their own reading strategies once you ask them. I have found that most students quite quickly become comfortable talking about their own and other students' constructive reading strategies, and that they quite readily become comfortable with the idea that different interpretations of a given text result from applying different constructive reading strategies or different theories. I have often been reminded of Eagleton's observation that most students, once the presence of theory is made explicit, feel liberated by the idea that there is not just "one correct reading" of the text (Eagleton 1983 89). In my own classes, in both grades ten and twelve, my students' awareness of the constructed nature of their initial responses to texts, and their ability to develop interpretations of texts that incorporate a degree of that awareness, develops quite rapidly through the course.
There are a few cautions I would like to mention at this point, mostly as a result of mistakes I've made in my classroom these past two years which have been pointed out by my students. The first is to resist overkill in teaching the idea of problematization. Although it has taken me several pages to describe what I do at the start of my courses, it doesn't have to feel very arduous in the classroom, for the teacher or for the students. It is enough simply to introduce the idea that different readings are possible and that different readings are the result of applying different constructive reading strategies. The detailed work of learning about the application of various reading strategies will come in the context of reading particular texts through the course. Second, do not rush students toward the inevitable observation that not all tools are equally useful or equally available in a given context; as students read different texts through the course, they will come to discuss the merits of different constructive reading strategies as they weigh different interpretations of these texts. Third, it is very important to respond openly and unhurriedly to students' questions about the nature of why we're talking about how we read texts in addition to talking about what we read, and not to feel rushed to get onto the next text in the course. It is much more important to have students feel comfortable about why we are talking about how we read texts than it is to cover more material in the first few weeks of the course.

The problematized practice I have been developing in my own high school English classroom also differs substantially from the problematized practice of most university classrooms. I have emphasized the importance of having students build the practice themselves as much as possible: to have students draw the charts of constructive reading strategies, to have them list tools they have used or heard of, to have them help build the problematized practice as much as possible from the bottom
I have stressed how important it is to move slowly, to answer lots of questions along the way about why we’re talking about these things rather than just talking about the texts themselves. In addition, I would like to emphasize that the teacher’s manner is also very important in a classroom full of adolescents. It is crucial that the students’ excitement about discovering something about how they read is handled with a certain seriousness: that it is not seen as abandoning standards of reading or speaking or writing, but as becoming more aware of these standards, and negotiating new ones where necessary. It is important to strike a balance closer to ownership than to efficiency. Typically in the universities, much less time is taken to develop the idea of a problematized approach, and often students are quite quickly thrust into the debate over contrasting readings of a given text, readings supported by a range of different "isms" or theories. This experience is noted by many of the writers I cited in Chapter One. Scholes talks about “bringing theory out for scrutiny” (Scholes 1985 x), and Belsey notes the necessity to “bring out assumptions” about what is important in reading texts (Belsey 1980 4). Moreover, Graff maintains that the “opposing views” of various theories ought to be “put into dialogue” in the classroom (Graff 1992 14), and Richter holds that we must acknowledge openly to our students that there are “no innocent stances” (Richter 1994 ix). Yet unfortunately, none of these writers in the university setting offers very much in the way of concrete suggestions for how this might come about. In fact, that is a major criticism I have for all of Graff, Richter, Scholes, Belsey and Eagleton: none of them offers a detailed treatment of how the teacher in the university classroom might set up a problematized practice at the start of a course. Not even Graff, whose book purports to be about how teaching the conflicts between rival theories can revitalize American education, provides an account of
precisely how a teacher might go about establishing the problematized classroom practice that his book advocates; nowhere in *Teaching the Conflicts* does Graff offer a detailed account of what the teacher does in the classroom in the way I have tried to describe what I do in my own classroom in this chapter.

In developing a problematized practice for the high schools based on the transition which has occurred in the universities, it is important to realize that in any practice there will be limits on what counts in the classroom, that these limits will be determined by theory, and that there will exist underlying assumptions about the text, the reader and the author. Moreover, a significant component of the challenge to traditional, New Critical theory in the universities from a range of alternative theories has in fact been to bring theory itself into the foreground. Particularly in the hindsight of Poststructuralism and Cultural Studies theory, it has become crucial to justify every position theoretically. Hence, in applying the lessons of problematization to the high schools, it becomes clear that one of the key features (perhaps the key feature) of the underlying conceptions of the text, the reader and the author which inform a problematized classroom practice is that they are no longer quite so underlying. They are more exposed, more explicit, more theorized, and this is what allows the limits on what counts in classroom practice to be made more explicit and more easily renegotiated.

For example, a key part of the conception of the text which underlies a problematized practice like the one I have described in this section for a high school English classroom is that it is specifically theorized: it is conceived as a position, a position grounded in theory, one which exists in contention with other possible positions grounded in other theories. In this sense, it differs substantially from the
conceptions of the text which underlie either New Critical or Reader Response Practice. Recall that in New Critical Practice the underlying conception of the text was of the work itself as a structure of meanings whose organic unity is achieved through the ambiguity inherent in poetic language, and that in Reader Response Practice the conception of the text was primarily of a transaction between the work itself and an individual reader, in which the work itself is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the creation of meaning. In the hindsight of the range of theories which have challenged the New Critical conception of the text in the universities (particularly Poststructuralism), the stability of the text implied in both of these conceptions is called into question. One of the lessons learned from the challenge of Poststructuralism is that textual meaning is inherently unstable, as the workings of language may be seen to inescapably undermine the meanings they make possible. Rather than being determined by presence, all language forms are "systems of differences, without positive terms" (Derrida 1989b 743). Hence texts may be shown to deconstruct themselves: their implied presuppositions may be shown to contain "inevitable contradictions," and the "metaphysical, logocentric oppositions at work within them" may be reversed and neutralized (Jefferson 1986 25).

The conception of the text which underlies a problematized practice acknowledges the inherent instability of language that has been learned from the challenges of Poststructuralism, and in this sense is theorized in a way that the New Critical and Reader Response conceptions of the text are not. With respect to the New Critical conception, for example, Poststructuralist critics such as De Man show that,

30 I examined these conceptions in sections 2.5 and 3.5 respectively. In the case of Reader Response theory, while, as I argued in Chapter Three, there is considerable variation among Reader Response critics in the conception of the text, for purposes of comparison with a problematized practice in the present chapter, I refer primarily to the conception of the text in Psychological Reader Response theory, which is, largely, the conception underlying Reader Response Practice.
rather than being characterized by organic unity and determinate meaning, the text in fact disseminates into an indefinite range of self-conflicting significations. De Man asks, "What would happen if, for once, one were to reverse the ethos of explication and try to be really precise, to attempt a reading that would no longer blindly submit to the teleology of controlled meaning?" (De Man 1983 24) His "closer readings" of classic New Critical texts illustrate how these texts may be shown to produce, rather than a single, correct reading, an "aporia of undecidable meanings" (De Man 1983 33). With respect to the Reader Response conception of the text, Poststructuralist critics such as Barbara Johnson argue that seemingly secure notions of both the work itself and the reader are in fact unstable entities. Both are situated within a whole field of signs, and the Reader Response conception of the unproblematic individual transaction between them which produces textual meaning in fact occurs within a world composed of "textual, sexual and racial difference" (Johnson 1987 64). In addition to these challenges from Poststructuralism, Cultural Studies theory emphasizes that the text cannot be treated as "an autonomous aesthetic icon separable from its conditions of production, distribution, and consumption—quite the contrary" (Leitch 1994 179).

Hence the conception of the text which underlies a problematized practice for a high school English classroom is informed by the challenges to the New Critical conception of the text (from theories such as Poststructuralism) which specifically theorize the New Critical conception, rather than replacing it with a Reader Response conception which is no more theorized than the one which preceded it. Meaning is not something determinate in the work that the reader has to get out, nor is it something determinate in the transaction between the reader and the work that the individual reader creates. Rather, meaning is inherently unstable, conditional and problematic.
Moreover, this re-conceptualization of the text in the hindsight of the challenges of Poststructuralism allows, in classroom practice, the limits on what counts to be made more explicit and more easily negotiable. If the text is no longer conceived as so determinate, and instead is more theorized, then the limits on what counts are no longer so obscured; when theory is foregrounded in the very conception of the text which informs classroom practice, the limits on what counts in interpreting a given text are much more clearly exposed, much more readily a part of the discussion. They become more explicit and more easily negotiated. I illustrate in more detail how this is the case in sections 4.3 and 4.4, with respect to the example of Heart of Darkness.

In pointing out these qualities in the conception of the text which underlie a problematized practice, my aim is primarily to acknowledge these conceptions and to illustrate how they make more explicit the limits on what counts, and how they permit these limits to be renegotiated more easily, than in either New Critical or Reader Response practices. My aim is not to defend these conceptions theoretically against the conceptions which informed previous classroom practices, nor is it to argue that they are somehow better or more sound theoretically. Much of the debate in the universities in the past three decades has been devoted to precisely those aims, and it is not my purpose to reexamine those debates here.22 Rather, I am more interested in using developments in the range of theories which have challenged New Criticism in the universities, beyond Reader Response criticism, and applying them to the high school English classroom.

22 For thorough accounts of these debates, see the works of Eagleton, Belsey, Graff, Scholes and Richter which I cited in Chapter One. In addition, see John McGowan, Postmodernism and its Critics (1991); Howard Felperin, Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory 1985; Peter Drews, Logics of Disintegration: Poststructuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory (1987); Fredric Jameson, Poststructuralism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1991); Linda Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (1988) and The Politics of Postmodernism (1989).
As with the conception of the text, the conceptions of the reader and the author which inform a problematized practice for the high schools are more specifically theorized than in New Critical or Reader Response theory. They are seen as inherently problematic, as positions grounded in theory which exist in contention with other positions grounded in other theories. Recall that, in New Critical theory, the reader is conceived as an ideal reader, as the subject who is sufficiently skilled to trace the patterns of ambiguity in the text to uncover its single, correct meaning, and the author is conceived as an invisible author, one who effectively disappears after writing the text and whose disappearance leaves the power to determine textual meaning wholly in the hands of the critic (who, as I argued in section 2.7, cannot wholly abandon the humanistic conception of the author as a source of knowledge, and who in fact constructs an author whose statements fit with the conventions of literature). Also recall that, in Reader Response theory, the reader is conceived as the actual reader in the classroom, the subject who has the text in hand; the reader is a unique person who brings his or her individual experiences to the reading act and whose experiences co-determine the text's meaning. Moreover, the Reader Response conception of the author is of the person who has inscribed the black marks on the page; the author only determines textual meaning insofar as he or she is a part of the experiences that the individual reader brings to the reading act.33 In the hindsight of the challenges to New Criticism from a range of theories in the universities (particularly Poststructuralism and Cultural Studies theory), the stable identities of these conceptions of the reader and the author have been called into question. Hence the conceptions of the reader and the

33 I examined these conceptions in sections 2.6 and 2.7, and in sections 3.6 and 3.7, respectively. Again, in the case of Reader Response theory, while, as I argued in Chapter Three, there is considerable variation among Reader Response critics in the conception of the text, for purposes of comparison with a problematized practice in the present chapter, I refer primarily to the conceptions of the reader and author in Psychological Reader Response theory, which are, largely, the conceptions underlying Reader Response Practice.
author which underlie a problematized practice for a high school English classroom based on the lessons learned in the universities are more theorized, are seen as more problematic, than in either New Critical or Reader Response Practice. No longer are the reader and the author seen as humanistic, holistic identities (whether these identities be ideal, actual or invisible), but rather both the reader and the author are conceived as being situated in particular social/political/cultural contexts.

With respect to the conception of the author, the traditional, humanistic view of the human subject as a coherent identity who is endowed with initiative and purposefulness, whose design and intentions effect the meaning of the literary text, has been called into question particularly by the challenges of Poststructuralism. The Poststructuralist critique of human identity follows from Derrida's critique of Saussure's Structuralism: by deleting the structural linguistic centre and eliminating the possibility of a controlling code in language, for Derrida the human subject (including the author of a text) becomes a purely linguistic product (Derrida 1989b 748). De Man puts this point succinctly: "We rightfully reduce the subject to the status of a mere grammatical pronoun" (De Man 1979 18). Moreover, both Foucault and Barthes signal the end of the traditional conception of the author by announcing the "disappearance of the author" (Foucault 1980 19) or even "the death of the author" (Barthes 1977 12). Neither Foucault nor Barthes deny the existence of actual authors; rather, they deny the validity of the key function or role previously assigned in Western thought to a uniquely individual and purposive subject who is the origin of knowledge, the initiator or purposive planner of a text. Foucault, for instance, maintains that the term "author" can no longer refer "purely and simply to a real individual," since "it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, several subjects, positions that can be occupied by
different classes of individuals" (Foucault 1980 20). Similarly, challenges from Cultural Studies theory critique the traditional conception of the author as a "self-coherent, purposive and determinative human subject," instead replacing it with a "disunified self subjected to the uncontrollable workings of unconscious compulsions or an unknowing conveyor of current forms of ideology or a site traversed by the cultural constructs and the discursive formations engendered by the structures of power in a given era" (Leitch 1994 180). Hence the conception of the author which underlies a problematized practice for a high school English classroom is more theorized, is seen as more problematic, than the conceptions which underlie either New Critical or Reader Response practices.

In many ways, the decentring of the author in the wake of Poststructuralist and Cultural Studies theories leaves the reader as the focal figure in the reading process. However, the reader, like the author, is stripped of the traditional humanist attributes of the subject, attributes of purposiveness, initiative and coherence. The conception of the reader which underlies a problematized practice in the high schools based on the lessons learned in the universities is, like the conception of the author, seen as problematic, more theorized. Like the author, the reader is no longer conceived as purely and simply a real individual. The reader is also conceived as several selves, several subjects, also seen as shaped by the unconscious, and by contemporary ideology, cultural constructs and structures of power (Leitch 1994 181). The reader, like the author, is situated in a particular social/political/cultural context. The conception of the reader that underlies a problematized classroom practice is not of a New Critical ideal reader, yet nor is it of a "real reader" in the classroom as in Reader Response theory. It is of a different "real" reader, perhaps of a "more real" reader: a
reader who is shaped by the forces of politics and culture.

The conceptions of both the reader and the author which inform a problematized classroom practice are a result of the challenges to traditional New Critical conceptions of the author and reader from theories like Poststructuralism and Cultural Studies theory in the universities. These different conceptions allow the limits on what counts to be made more explicit and more easily negotiable. With the reader and the author decentred, stripped of traditional attributes, more theorized, the limits on what counts are no longer so obscured. The theory is foregrounded in the very conceptions of the reader and the author which inform the classroom practice, and the limits on what counts are more exposed, more naturally a part of the discussion. I illustrate this in more detail in sections 4.3 and 4.4 with respect to the example of *Heart of Darkness*. Moreover, theory itself becomes redefined in the wake of the challenges of Poststructuralism and Cultural Studies theory to include, to a greater degree, the social-political dimensions of the classroom context.34

4.3 Back into the Heart of Darkness

In order to illustrate further what a problematized practice might look like in a high school English classroom, I would like to return to the narrative I started in Chapter One, where I described my own experiences teaching *Heart of Darkness*. In the present section, I offer a critique of my previous New Critical and Reader Response approaches to teaching Conrad's novella from the perspective of my current problematized practice. Recall that, for my first two years of teaching, I taught *Heart of Darkness* using a New Critical Practice that had its origins in Brooks and Warren and

34I examine how theory becomes redefined in more detail in section 4.5.
Diltz and Gutteridge (even if those origins were not known to me at the time), and that, of course, I did not realize that the way I was teaching *Heart of Darkness* was an approach, only one of several possible approaches to teaching the text. I did not see that my practice (like any teaching practice) was based on theory, and that there could be many alternative practices based on other theories. What I thought I was doing was just “teaching *Heart of Darkness.*” I did not see that my teaching practice set limits on what counted in my classroom, limits which were based on theory.

Accordingly, what I did in teaching the novella was follow the four-step pedagogy that I described in Chapter One:

1. I selected the text for students to study;
2. I went to the library (in this case, the D.B. Weldon library at the University of Western Ontario) and prepared my expert reading of the text: I reread the text very slowly and carefully, making copious notes and comparing these notes with the observations made by the most respectable (that is, the most highly anthologized) critics (who were inevitably American New Critics);
3. I prepared a sequence of meticulously crafted questions for my students, spending hours and hours on the wording of these questions in order to lead students to an approximation of my carefully researched reading of the text;
4. I used these questions as the basis of all of my lessons on *Heart of Darkness*, largely using teacher-led, whole-class discussion to ensure that my students “got it,” that they “understood” the interpretation to which they would be led by the questions I had so carefully prepared for them.
Using this approach, I designed what I would now call a typical New Critical teaching unit on *Heart of Darkness*. While for reasons of space I obviously cannot describe that unit in its entirety here, I will list the basic sequence of teaching strategies I used in teaching the novella:

1. The text was distributed three weeks before the beginning of the unit, with the instruction to complete an initial reading by the first day of the unit; that instruction was reinforced by telling students to be prepared to write a content test on that first day so that I could check that they had completed their reading.

2. During the students' initial reading of the text, I had them write one-paragraph answers to moral-thematic questions (a term from Gutteridge's *Brave Season*) at the end of each of the three parts of the text.

3. In the first lesson of the unit, I collected and graded the answers to these "first reading" questions, and had students write a content test on the novella. After taking this up in class, sorting out any "misreadings" and establishing the "basics," such as the major sequence of events in the plot, the when and where of the setting, and a "who's who" of the major characters, I distributed the set of questions I had so carefully prepared, and we started working on these questions.

4. During the next three weeks of classes, we worked our way through the questions, using a combination of individual writing, small group discussion and teacher-led, whole-class discussion. All questions were eventually taken up using the teacher-led, whole-class mode so I could
be sure all of the students "got it."

5. Students read T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" and viewed Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* (which is based on *Heart of Darkness*). Both the poem and the film were accompanied by more careful questions, questions I had designed to correspond with the questions they had already answered on *Heart of Darkness*.

6. In small groups, students prepared comparative seminars on *Heart of Darkness*. I chose the topics for the seminars, selecting important themes based on the questions I had designed on the novella.

7. Students wrote literature essays on *Heart of Darkness*, selecting their own topics based on our class discussions of the novella, which were, of course, entirely shaped by the questions they had already answered.

8. Evaluation for the *Heart of Darkness* unit was as follows:

   - Answers to First Reading Questions /10
   - Content Test /25
   - Submitted Answers to Selected Questions /25
   - Seminar /50
   - Essay /100
   - Class Participation /10
   - Homework /10
   - Small Group Work /10.

Without going into too much detail, I would say this was the basic structure of the unit as I taught it according to New Critical Practice in my first two years of teaching.

For purposes of comparison with both Reader Response Practice and a
problematized practice later in this section, I will also include here a brief example of how I taught a particular lesson in the New Critical Heart of Darkness unit. But first, I will include the list of scenes in the novella which I used in each of the three versions of the Heart of Darkness unit, in order to provide a context for the selected scene. Conrad’s novella is divided into three parts; I have sub divided these parts as follows (all page references have been corrected to the Penguin Classic edition of the text edited by Paul O’Prey, the edition I used for both the New Critical and Reader Response versions of the unit):

PART 1

1.1 The Narrator’s Introduction (27-32)

1.2 Marlow’s Story: Brussels (32-39)

1.3 The Outer Station (39-47)

1.4 The Central Station (47-62)

PART 2

2.1 Toward the Inner Station (63-72)

2.2 The Attack (72-89)

2.3 The Arrival at the Inner Station (89-92)

PART 3

3.1 The Russian’s Story (93-98)

3.2 Meeting Kurtz (98-104)

3.3 Marlow’s Encounter with Kurtz (104-108)

3.4 Kurtz’s Departure (108-113)

3.5 Epilogue: Kurtz’s Intended (113-121)

For purposes of comparing how I taught a single lesson, I will use the example of
Scene 1.3. This is the scene in which Marlow gets his first view of the company's ivory trading operation in the Belgian Congo, the scene in which he lands at the company's outer station, sees the dying Africans under the trees, and meets the impeccable company accountant who tells him about the mysterious Mr. Kurtz.

In teaching a lesson on this scene in my New Critical classroom, I first had students answer the following questions (these are, of course, drawn from the long sequence of questions I had prepared on the novella). The questions I had them answer for Scene 1.3 were:

1. In what ways is Marlow's description of the "merry dance of death and trade" ironic?

2. Define juxtaposition. Reread Marlow's encounters with the "black shapes" and the "miracle." Describe the effect of Conrad's use of juxtaposition of these two scenes.

3. How does the accountant describe Kurtz? What is the effect of this description on Marlow? On the reader?

In my classes, these questions formed the basis of students' writing and class discussion. I had students first write answers individually to these three questions, either for homework or in class or a combination of both. Then I asked them to share their answers with the class; in some cases, answers were first shared with a partner or a small group, but for no more than ten or fifteen minutes. In any case, we would spend the bulk of the lesson taking up their answers, using a teacher-led, whole-class discussion format in which I jotted down "main points" from the students' answers on the board, which students then wrote down in their notebooks.

Of course, in summarizing their answers in this way, I was further determining
the interpretation of this scene from the text that they would all subsequently use for their seminars and essays. In addition to selecting the three aspects of this scene which counted through the three questions I had asked them to write answers to, I was narrowing their reading of the scene even further by selecting which parts of their answers counted most by writing all the points that "fit" on the board for them to copy into their notebooks. In approaching this scene (and the Heart of Darkness unit) using a New Critical approach, I was very effectively setting the limits on what counts, limits determined by theory, in this case by the New Critical theory through which I had completed my initial expert reading of the text, designed the questions the students answered, and managed the class discussion. The students' entire encounter with this scene from Heart of Darkness occurred within these limits, without appearing to occur within any limits at all. Because I was not lecturing to the students, because the air was mostly filled with the students' voices instead of my own, I did not perceive that there were limits, and that these limits were determined by New Critical theory. And of course because of this, my practice was subject to all of the most commonly observed problems of New Criticism: I was transmitting a static body of scholarly knowledge to students; that knowledge (rather than knowledge from students' experiences, or from any other sources) was the only valid knowledge in the classroom; the text (like all of the texts on my New Critical course) was from an established canon which was difficult to change; and my questions assumed many dimensions of homogeneity within the class which were in fact quite unfounded. And, as I described in Chapter Two, this approach to Scene 1.3, and in fact to every scene in Heart of Darkness, led me, in time, to the garden path problem, in which I found myself having the same conversations over and over again every semester. I did not see at the time that, because the limits
on what counts were determined by the theory on which my practice was implicitly based, my classroom was plagued by all of these commonly observed problems of New Criticism.

After I attended Ian Underhill's Reader Response workshop, my teaching practice changed considerably, and I began to teach Heart of Darkness according to a Reader Response pedagogy. Hence I did not follow the four-step procedure of New Criticism in preparing the unit, and used quite a different approach in my classroom. My practice was very much like the one prescribed by Beach and Marshall, and accordingly I used the following procedure to design the Heart of Darkness unit:

1. I identified the characteristics and needs of my students and shaped my instructional purposes according to these.
2. I selected the text and unpacked my own response to it, based on my own history of reading and teaching the text.
3. I considered possible connections between Heart of Darkness and other texts I could think of; I was fortunate in that Timothy Findley's retelling of the story in his novel Headhunter, a novel that set Conrad's story in modern-day Toronto (of all places), had just been published.
4. I defined key terms, goals, approaches and teaching strategies.

According to this approach, I designed what I would now call a typical Reader Response unit on Heart of Darkness, using the following teaching strategies:

1. As a class, we completed our first reading of the text together, writing open responses to each scene of the text as we read them.
2. Over the course of three weeks, we discussed each of the novella's scenes as we read them, using our open responses to set the agenda.
for the day's discussion. Typically, students (and myself) would complete their reading and open response to each scene for homework, bring our responses to class, and the first few minutes of the class would involve sharing that response with either a partner or a small group. Then we would share our individual and group observations, sometimes with the class as a whole, sometimes with another small group. Throughout, our discussions were based on students' responses rather than on questions I had designed ahead of time.

3. During these classes, I encouraged students to make connections between what we were reading in Conrad and other texts they had read, as well as to their own life experiences. I also showed clips from the film Apocalypse Now and from Eleanor Coppola's documentary on the making of Apocalypse Now entitled Hearts of Darkness, using scenes which related to particular scenes in the novella. I also read students passages from T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" and Timothy Findley's recently published Headhunter (1993). As well, students brought into class scenes from texts (books, poems, music, film, television) which they thought connected with scenes from the novella, and we wrote responses to all of these.

4. Part-way through the unit, my first Reader Response class decided they all wanted to read Findley's new novel Headhunter, so we incorporated that text into our discussions, drawing connections and writing responses to both texts as we progressed through the unit.
Future sections also wanted to read *Headhunter*, and this text became an ongoing part of the Reader Response unit on *Heart of Darkness*.

5. I showed the full versions of the films *Apocalypse Now* and *Hearts of Darkness*, and students wrote responses to these as well.

6. Students presented comparative seminars on the novella and both films, this time selecting their own topics based on their response journals.

7. Students wrote essays, but this time they were response-based essays based on their responses to both *Heart of Darkness* and *Headhunter*.

8. The evaluation for the unit was as follows:

   Response Log /50
   Seminar /50
   Essay /100
   Class Participation /10

This was the basic sequence of teaching strategies I used in the Reader Response *Heart of Darkness* unit.

For purposes of comparison with my New Critical unit on *Heart of Darkness* (and to the problematized practice which I describe below), the way in which I taught Scene 1.3 was first to have students write open responses to the scene for homework, then to use these responses in class to generate either small group or whole-class discussion. Because there are no specific questions I asked students to answer, in order to facilitate a meaningful comparison to my New Critical approach to 1.3, I will reproduce four students' responses from my first Reader Response unit on *Heart of Darkness*. I
have changed the students' names, but left the responses unedited, except for correcting obvious spelling errors to facilitate easier reading.

Brian's Response

Very disturbing. The scene of contorted bodies reminded me of descriptions of the aftermath at Hiroshima: especially the lapping of water. There is also the sense that this is "the valley of death" and one is appalled by the condition of the "workers," who are truly being treated like slaves. Anger is unmusterable, and a sense of helpless frustration and pathetic witnessing pervades. I want to know why these men (or boys) are here. I wonder at their families, their stories, as unique as [word unclear] but cut short by the disease of other people. There is something holy and unholy about the scene. Like some Renaissance fresco, there are bodies in every conceivable pose, strewn in our view, yet the utter hell of their situation brings the painting a streak of terror. Are we witnessing the "Last Judgment" by Michelangelo? And who is God? It would seem, much to my chagrin, the vision/man that Marlow saw. A self-important agent of a trading company, based safely away on another continent, shielded from the desolation of its workers. This angel (or is it a devil in disguise) seems from another world, one of cuffs and superfluous costumes and slicked hair. There is too much contrast; the picture hurts my eye. I wish not to face any more.
Jen’s Response

The scene of the valley of death is like a painting, reminds me of the pictures in the news of Rwanda, people in different poses of despair, huddled together, ready to die. It also seemed like a parody of the 23rd psalm. The pilgrims are like shepherds of God with their long staves, and they guided these people to their despair. He leadeth me down to green pastures, he leadeth me to drink from fresh waters. That’s what they’re doing, but they’re dying. Commentary about the use of blacks as slaves, particularly since it is so true. There were fed foreign food and lost their strength and radiance. They could no longer do what was assigned and they’re thrown away like broken tools. The white man that is described as a “vision” is so different from the dying slaves. He’s so orderly, white and perfect. The slaves are black, crumpled and wretched. The strange link between the two is the piece of white worsted around the neck of one of the slaves. Perhaps it’s a sort of chain. He’s been “captured” by the whites and they have their hands around his neck. Maybe it’s to prove that they have killed him. Maybe the whiteness of the man with the parasol is represented in the piece of white worsted. That everything beautiful and perfect about this man is killing the slaves in the grove of death.

Colin’s Response

The scene is vividly descriptive, as is most of Conrad’s writing in the scenes in Heart of Darkness, but it [word unclear] the emotion one would
expect such a riveting descriptive passage to have. Marlow describes the
"work" taking place at the outer station. The explosions that shake the
[word unclear] destroy and rattle the black workers, one would think,
would invoke anger or sadness—but they do not—only meditation on what
is and what can happen. The effect is unusual. Likewise, the
descriptions of the native blacks living by the outer station should be
equally disturbing, but rather it is equally undisturbing, only causing
uneasiness. Marlow's attempt to reach out to these workers, his portrayal
of them as "black bones," starving, clinging tenaciously to life, should be
moving but I do not find it so. Finally Marlow's discovery of the
well-dressed white man should also be shocking—but it is not.

Geoffrey's Response

In Marlow's description there is a stark contrast between what he thinks
about the indigenous people and whites. For three paragraphs, Marlow
uses every negative term he can find to describe the Africans: black
shadows of disease and starvation, moribund shapes with an intolerable
and appalling manner. African people do not walk, they crawl, according
to Marlow. When Marlow finally sees a white, he is dazzled with such an
unexpected elegance. It is like a miracle to see a white man. This is an
example of racism.

While a detailed analysis of these responses might reveal some interesting findings
about Reader Response Practice, such an analysis is beside my purposes here. It is
35 In fact, I wrote a paper for a graduate seminar on this very topic, entitled "A Reader Response

sufficient at this point to note that the scope of these students' responses is considerably broader than my students' answers to the three questions on scene 1.3 in my New Critical unit on *Heart of Darkness*, and that, as a result, the limits on what was included in our conversation were considerably different than in the New Critical unit.

At the time, however, I did not realize that the limits on what counts are set by theory, and that these limits had changed because my Reader Response Practice was based on different theory than my New Critical Practice. In the Reader Response lesson on Scene 1.3, students shared their responses, first with a partner or a small group, and then with either another small group or with the class. Students were encouraged to take notes during these discussions, but no summary notes were put on the board. In using this practice, I perceived, at first, considerable advantages compared with my New Critical approach to this lesson (and to the New Critical *Heart of Darkness* unit). Most importantly, I did not encounter the garden path problem using a Reader Response approach to this scene (or to any of the scenes). However, over time, once my initial excitement at having overcome the garden path problem wore off, I began to notice other problems. Most importantly, my students, even the keenest ones, began to get restless. They kept coming up with all sorts of ideas and interpretations of the scene, but they began to ask me, "Of all these interpretations, how do we know which one is right, or which ones are the best ones?" I had escaped from the garden path problem, but landed right in the middle of a new problem, which I began to call the *interpretation problem*. I didn't have a good answer to my students' question, and both they and I sensed that we had to answer that question or be stuck with the answer that

---

*Approach to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," which subjected these four students' responses to a detailed analysis, using concepts in Reader Response theory from Fish, Rosenblatt, Holland, Bleich and Iser. Moreover, the responses from the members of our graduate class to both Conrad's text and my students' responses revealed some very interesting versions of the interpretation problem in Reader response practice. I explore this further in section 4.5.*
all possible interpretations of the scene were equally good: an answer neither my students nor myself were willing to accept.

Looking back at my Reader Response approach to Scene 1.3, I see now that the reason the garden path problem of New Criticism was replaced by the interpretation problem of Reader Response was that my new practice had not addressed the central problem of New Critical Practice: the issue of what counts remained unaddressed. I may have stopped students from mimicking my own New Critical reading of the text, but I did not realize that the limits on what counts were the root of the garden path problem, and that because I hadn’t addressed that problem, the new limits on what counts were also the root of the interpretation problem. I had changed practices, but I had not realized that I had also changed theories, and that it was the theory, in both the old and the new practices, which set the limits on what counted. The limits set by the new theory were causing as significant a problem in my classroom practice as the limits set by the old theory: a different problem, granted, but that was because the theory was a different theory. I didn’t realize that, in order to solve both the garden path problem and the interpretation problem, I needed to make explicit the limits on what counts by acknowledging the inevitability of theory, by moving theory out of the blind spot.

4.4 A Problematized Approach to *Heart of Darkness*

In developing a problematized classroom practice during the past two years, my approach to teaching any text, including *Heart of Darkness*, has changed considerably from both my New Critical and Reader Response practices. In section 4.2, I described how I set up a problematized practice at the start of my courses now. I emphasize that this practice is still in its infancy, still very much in an experimental stage. Moreover, I
still have only tried it for two grade levels (ten and twelve), and only with the texts I use for these courses: I have not yet had the opportunity to try this approach with *Heart of Darkness*, which is one of the texts included in the OAC1 course in the school in which I teach. This may have advantages and disadvantages for comparing my problematized approach to *Heart of Darkness* with my old New Critical and Reader Response approaches. On the one hand, my experience as a teacher in a fledgeling problematized classroom has not included the trials and errors of working with the same text I taught in my New Critical and Reader Response classrooms, but on the other it has allowed me to use those two years of experience in a problematized classroom teaching other texts before designing a problematized approach to *Heart of Darkness*. In any case, I have not had that particular experience, and in writing this thesis I have had to design the problematized unit I very likely will teach when I return to my classroom. Hence what I offer below is a unit on *Heart of Darkness* using a problematized approach, based on my specific experiences teaching that text in both a New Critical and Reader Response classroom, and also based on my experiences of the past two years teaching other texts in other courses using a problematized practice. As a means of comparison, this set of circumstances has both strengths and weaknesses, but in any case these are the circumstances in which I am currently teaching and writing. And when I do teach *Heart of Darkness* according to the approach outlined below, my experiences (and my students’ experiences) in the classroom will of course modify that approach to a certain degree.

A problematized approach to *Heart of Darkness* might begin with the very genuine question of whether to teach the text at all. In a postcolonial world, a strong case might be made for not teaching Conrad’s text in the secondary school English
curriculum; in fact, several writers have made this case, most notably Chinua Achebe in “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness”. However, thoughtful rejoinders to Achebe’s position are offered by John Willinsky in his recent book Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire’s End and by Gerald Graff in Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education. Willinsky acknowledges that Conrad’s Heart of Darkness has usually been taught in the secondary schools from a perspective which sees literature as “calling civilization back from the expansive wasteland that occupied the souls of both the modern city dwellers and the colonizers, without slipping into the darkness thought to haunt African rivers” (Willinsky 1998 222). Yet he argues persuasively that a postcolonial literature education ought not to be about “proscribing or policing any given piece of literature or form of literary criticism” (Willinsky 1998 222), but rather ought to include a study of “literary education’s formative texts,” texts such as Heart of Darkness, so that students might appreciate the “historical role of literature as an educational tool that supported, and at times stood against, the expansion of empire” (Willinsky 1998 223). Graff, too, acknowledges that Heart of Darkness has typically been taught as a “universal parable of the precarious status of civilized reason in a world overly confident of its having outgrown the primitive and the irrational” (Graff 1992 25). Moreover, he acknowledges his debt to Achebe’s essay in forcing him to rethink his interpretation of Heart of Darkness. However, Graff contends that Heart of Darkness and classic texts like it should be taught as part of a “critical debate about how to read them” (Graff 1992 31). Willinsky’s and Graff’s points are well taken, and in light of them I think Heart of Darkness is a highly worthwhile text to teach in a problematized senior high school

English classroom in a postcolonial world.\textsuperscript{37}

In teaching \textit{Heart of Darkness} in a problematized classroom, I would use an approach based on the teaching strategies I described in section 4.2. The basic pedagogical sequence I would have my students work through is as follows:

1. Students would write initial responses to the text;
2. Students would reflect on the constructive reading strategies they used to form those responses, considering each of the five categories we developed at the start of the course;
3. Students would share their initial responses and reflections with a small group;
4. Students would develop interpretive sketches based on their own and their group’s responses and reflections.

I would apply this basic sequence of teaching strategies to our study of \textit{Heart of Darkness}, making a few modifications due to the nature, length and complexity of the novella. Specifically, I would use the following approach:

1. I would have students complete their first reading of the novella individually, before we begin to study it as a class, using the Third Edition of the Norton Critical \textit{Heart of Darkness}, edited by Robert Kimbrough.\textsuperscript{38}

2. In completing their initial reading, I would have students write four

\textsuperscript{37} This does not mean that a teacher in a problematized classroom will not encounter difficulty in dealing with students’ responses to such a controversial text. I discuss some potential difficulties in section 4.5.

\textsuperscript{38} Of the myriad versions of \textit{Heart of Darkness} available, I prefer Kimbrough’s edition because it uses the 1891 version of the text from Conrad’s collected works with clear footnotes marking passages Conrad changed from each of the three earlier editions of the text. Kimbrough includes a detailed discussion of the four versions Conrad authorized of \textit{Heart of Darkness} in his “Note on the Text” in the Third Edition. In addition, Kimbrough includes a superb collection of background information and critical essays on \textit{Heart of Darkness}, many of which I use in strategies detailed below.
open responses to the text, at any point where they are moved to respond. Despite the limitations of using students' initial responses directly to set the agenda for class discussion and writing pointed out by myself and in several recent critiques of Reader Response Practice, as an initial teaching strategy, beginning with students' direct response to the text works very well in the problematized classroom. 39

3. On the first day of the unit, I would have students spend about half the class silently reading one another's responses in small groups, and the other half talking about their own and the other group members' responses. I use this strategy for students to have an opportunity to share their emotional response to the text in a small group setting, and to begin to establish what they feel is going on in this dense, complex story.

After this initial sharing of students' emotional responses to the novella as a whole, during the next four periods, I would have students study Part 1 more intensively, using the following teaching strategies for each of Scenes 1.1 to 1.4. I would have them spend approximately one class on each scene:

1. For homework before each class, I would have students reread the scene and write an open response to it. Because they have already had an opportunity the previous day to share their impressions of the novella as a whole with a small group, and to read the responses of the other members of their group, they will now have more confidence in responding to the opening scene of what, for most of them, will be a

39 In addition, David Miall emphasizes the usefulness of the open responses of Reader Response Practice to create the self through emotion (Miall 1993 76).
difficult and complex text written in a style which is quite unfamiliar.

2. After writing their response, I would ask them to reflect on what they have written in a particular way. From the approach to texts we have been developing in the course so far, which I described in section 4.2, students will be familiar with the idea of responding to a text and then reflecting on the constructive reading strategies they used in developing that initial response. Because of the length, style and complexity of *Heart of Darkness*, I would have them use a particular technique in reflecting on their initial response. First, I would ask them to highlight any passages in the text which they thought were significant in shaping their response. Then I would ask them to make notes in the margins describing how these particular passages influenced their response. This strategy is much like what Dennis Sumara calls a “commonplace book” assignment, in which students reread a text and “write in,” “respond to” and “insert notes, clippings, photographs or any other artifacts” into the text, pieces that help articulate their experience of reading and studying the text (Sumara 1996 73). In their “commonplace book” notes, I would encourage students to include ideas from each of the five categories of constructive reading strategies: the text, experiences from their own personal history and their previous literature education, their own social/political/cultural context, and the author’s personal history and social/political/cultural context that they think might have affected their response to the passage. Moreover, I would ask them to mark each of
their commonplace book notes in such a way as to designate to which of the five categories it belongs (some, of course, may belong to more than one category).

3. In class, for each of these first four scenes of the novel, I would have students spend the first half of the period exchanging their responses to the scenes and their commonplace book notes in small groups. I would encourage them to take notes on the similarities and differences between their own and other students’ responses, paying particular attention to which constructive reading strategies they and their group members seem to have in common and on which ones they seem to differ.

4. Then during the second half of the period, I would have students write individually: I would ask them to develop an interpretive sketch of the scene based on their own and the other group members’ responses and commonplace book notes, paying particular attention to the constructive reading strategies they are using and not using in developing their interpretive sketches. These interpretive sketches would be finished for homework before beginning a study of the next scene. I would emphasize that these sketches are just that, sketches, subject to revision later in the unit.

After using the above four strategies to develop interpretive sketches of each of the first four scenes in the novella, by about the sixth period I would jigsaw (or reassemble) the reading groups, forming new discussion groups composed of one member of each of the original reading groups. For example, if a class of twenty-four
students were originally divided into six reading groups of four students each, there would be four discussion groups, each containing one member of each of the six original reading groups. In these new discussion groups, I would have students spend about half a period silently reading one another's interpretive sketches of the four scenes in Part One of the novella, making notes of important points of commonality and divergence. Then I would have them spend the rest of the period discussing their findings in their new groups, and sharing what they consider to be the most important of these findings with the class.

For Parts Two and Three of the novella, I would have students approach the text similarly, but have them respond to larger chunks of the text at a time. I would give students some time in class to reread Parts Two and Three, and use the same four strategies as I used with individual scenes for Part One, giving them time to write responses, make commonplace book notes, exchange these ideas in their reading groups, and write interpretive sketches of Part Two. After they had finished developing interpretive sketches of Parts Two and Three, I would use the following teaching strategies to complete our study of Heart of Darkness:

1. In their groups, I would have students develop a chart of what they considered to be the most often used, and most useful, constructive reading strategies for the novella, divided according to the five categories we established at the start of the course: the text, the reader's personal history, the reader's previous literature education, and the reader's social/political/cultural context, and the author's personal history and social/political/cultural context. I would ask them to include textual examples (with page numbers) of instances
illustrating the application of these strategies. Based on their chart, I would then ask them to shortlist four of these constructive reading strategies that they feel would be worth doing more work on in further developing an interpretation of the novella. I would collect and photocopy these charts and distribute them to the whole class.

2. Then I would have students comb the collections of essays and articles in Kimbrough's text, noting which pieces correspond with the constructive reading strategies and textual examples shortlisted on their charts. I would have them add the titles of these essays and articles to their charts, as well. In addition to Kimbrough's text, I would have students examine Ross Murfin's Heart of Darkness: A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism (1989). While Kimbrough's text contains over thirty shorter pieces of background and criticism, Murfin's includes five longer essays from particular theoretical perspectives (Psychoanalytic criticism, Reader Response criticism, Feminist criticism, Deconstruction and New Historicism), with short introductory essays and selected bibliographies for each of these five theories.

At this point, each student would have a class set of charts shortlisting the constructive reading strategies they feel are the most important ones to pursue further, with lots of notes of the class's and their own responses to these strategies, as well as a list of secondary sources for each shortlisted strategy. This is a wealth of useful information with which they might construct interpretations or readings of the text which are grounded in particular constructive reading strategies, particular theories, for use with
the upcoming major assignments on *Heart of Darkness*. In addition, I would introduce students to other texts that might further develop their ideas, and I would also invite the students to bring in texts that they feel would help develop other students' ideas, too.\(^40\)

Using all of the information we have shared, I would then have students divide into groups to present seminars on *Heart of Darkness* according to one (or perhaps two) of the constructive reading strategies which their reading groups had shortlisted in making their chart. I would encourage them to use all of the information we have gathered from all of the texts we had discussed that might connect meaningfully to their constructive reading strategy in preparing their seminars, and I would encourage them to be creative in the presentation modes they chose. It is crucial to note that all students, regardless of their seminar topic, will be reading theory. Each group will read the essays in theory from Kimbrough’s and Murfin’s texts which apply to their topic, and they will also read background information on the theories included in the constructive reading strategies which make up their seminar topic. After the seminars have been presented, I would have students write essays on *Heart of Darkness* in which they used all of the learning they had experienced in the unit, especially one another’s seminars, to develop an interpretation of the text, focusing on a particular constructive reading strategy or strategies and corresponding aspects of the text emphasized by that strategy or strategies. As well, I would have students complete a creative writing assignment of their own design. In having students develop interpretive sketches, and in having them read theory, I want to encourage them to reflect on their reading strategies (conscious and unconscious) and on the influence of the classroom context in which they are reading. Theoretical notions about the instability of conceptions of  

\(^{40}\) Possibilities might include the films *Apocalypse Now* and *Hearts of Darkness*, Timothy Findley’s novel *Headhunter* (a retelling of *Heart of Darkness* set in Toronto) and T.S. Eliot’s poem “The Hollow Men,” which has as its epigraph a line from *Heart of Darkness*. 

the text, reader and author, as well as the way that theory is redefined so that the
limitations on what counts are broadened, will emerge from the work they do in small
groups, and in the seminars, essays and creative writing assignments.

For evaluation in the unit, I would use the following scheme, in which “S”
denotes self-evaluation, “P” denotes peer-evaluation and “T” denotes
teacher-evaluation:

Initial Open Responses to the Text (S) /10
Reading Group Evaluation (S/P) /20
Reading Group’s Chart of Reading Strategies (P/T) /20
Seminar (S/P/T) /50
Essay (S/T) /50
Creative Writing (S/T) /25

In teaching *Heart of Darkness* according to this approach, I would build on the
ways in which I had developed a problematized practice in the first few weeks of the
course, which I described in some detail in section 4.2. With respect to how I would
teach Scene 1.3, for example, a comparison to my New Critical and Reader Response
practices is easily drawn: rather than having students answer questions I had designed
on the scene according to my expert reading of the text (as in New Critical Practice),
and rather than having them use open responses to the scene to form the agenda for
class discussion (as in Reader Response Practice), students would follow the
procedure described above, in which they reread Scene 1.3, write an open response
and make notes in their commonplace books based on the story of their constructive
reading, share their observations with their reading group, and then write interpretive
sketches of the scene based on their group’s and their own responses and notes.
The problematized approach to teaching a particular text like *Heart of Darkness* which I have described in this section has been influenced by a range of work I have read over the time which I have been writing this thesis. In acknowledging these influences, however, I should emphasize that the most significant one has been the feedback I have received from my students in teaching other texts in my grade ten and twelve courses using a problematized approach. Of the writers in the university setting which I have cited in this chapter and in Chapter One, only Graff applies his critique to the examples of specific texts (including, fortunately, *Heart of Darkness*). In *Beyond the Culture Wars*, Graff describes how his own approach to teaching *Heart of Darkness* has changed as a result of the problematization of university classrooms. Graff notes how he used to teach the novella, according to a traditional New Critical approach, as “a profound meditation on a universal theme” (Graff 1992 25). Graff acknowledges that, using this approach, he thought he was “simply teaching the truth about *Heart of Darkness*, ‘the text itself’” (Graff 1992 29). He observes that his old way of teaching the text depended on “not seeing certain things or not treating them as worth thinking about” (Graff 1992 26). Then Graff describes how challenges to his old approach from a range of alternative positions (such as the one expressed in Chinua Achebe’s essay “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*”) forced him to rethink not just his “interpretation of *Heart of Darkness*” but his “theoretical assumptions about literature” as well (Graff 1992 30). He describes how he had to recognize that “he had been teaching an interpretation of the text, one that was shaped by a certain theory that told [him] what was and was not worth noticing and emphasizing in [his] classroom” (Graff 1992 29-30). Graff describes how he now teaches *Heart of Darkness* as “part of a critical debate about how to read it, which in turn is part of a larger theoretical debate
about how politics and power affect the way we read literature" (Graff 1992 31). His account of the changes in his approach to teaching *Heart of Darkness*, from a traditional New Critical Practice to a current problematized practice, helped me in setting up a conceptual framework for my own teaching of *Heart of Darkness* in a secondary school setting. However, Graff's account does not include any mention of Reader Response Practice, a point which further illustrates the difference between the separate histories of university and high school English classrooms in the past thirty years. Nor does Graff include any particular teaching strategies: he does not say, specifically, how a teacher might use *Heart of Darkness* in a problematized classroom practice, or what particular teaching strategies he uses to teach the conflicts in his own classroom. Moreover, in Graff's work, theory is not redefined to include the social-political dimensions of the learning context in the hindsight of Poststructuralism and Cultural Studies theory. Hence in developing particular teaching strategies that might be useful in a problematized practice in a high school classroom, I have also turned to accounts written by other secondary school teachers.

In recent years, several teachers have written critiques of Reader Response Practice, and in the work of these teachers is the beginnings of a Post-Reader-Response Practice based on models of reading very much like the conception of reading as construction developed by Bogdan and Straw. Among these Post-Reader-Response accounts, I have yet to find one that offers an explicitly problematized practice based on what has been learned in the universities, such as the work documented by the writers I cite in this chapter and in Chapter One. However, much good work has been done in developing a critique of Reader Response Practice, and my own problematized practice has been shaped by some of that work. In
"Post-Reader-Response: The Deconstructive Critique," for example, Pam Gilbert points out how, in the universities, through problematization, literature has been shown to be "an ideologically constructed field of discourse," which she maintains makes it a "cultural construct" (Gilbert 1987 235). She argues that the "nature of this construct" is what should engage teachers and students in the high school classroom, and that although Reader Response Practice has considerably opened up classroom discussion compared with New Critical Practice, it has not allowed teachers and students to address literature as a cultural construct. Instead, Reader Response Practice, by asking students "to respond to texts by linking personal experiences to the experience made valid in the literary text," belies assumptions made by teachers about how these personal experiences are "culturally constructed" (Gilbert 1987 235-238). Gilbert's article offers a sound argument for broadening the base of the Reader Response conception of reading, for including information about the reader's social/political/cultural context in addition to the reader's personal history. However, what Gilbert does not provide in her article is a description of a classroom alternative to Reader Response Practice that would transcend the limitations of the Reader Response classroom. Announcing itself as Post-Reader-Response, in order for her article to be more useful to English teachers, it needs to go beyond a self-proclaimed "deconstructive critique" and offer some more constructive suggestions for developing a Post-Reader-Response classroom practice.

Another critique of Reader Response Practice is offered by Theresa Rogers and Anna Soter in the collection of essays which they have recently edited, entitled Reading Across Cultures: Teaching Literature in a Diverse Society. In their introduction to this collection, Rogers and Soter note that "if we think of literary criticism and the
teaching of literature as having its own narrative, we might say that there has been a
turn in that story toward the social, cultural and political contexts of literary creation and
reception" (Rogers and Soter 1997 1). Their essay, and the collection which follows it,
offers a critique of Reader Response Practice based on four grounds: that Reader
Response Practice has not addressed the role of the author and the author's social and
cultural influences, that it has not addressed the relationship between literature and
other cultural texts, that it has failed to encompass the social complexity of the diverse
classroom community, and that it has not included the possibility for critical inquiry into
literary practices themselves and the discourses surrounding these practices (Rogers
and Soter 1997 1-4). Essentially, the argument in their introductory essay, and
throughout the collection as a whole, is that Cultural Studies theory offers new
perspectives for teachers on Reader Response Practice by showing that both authors
and readers are at least partially constructed by their own social, political and cultural
contexts. Rogers and Soter define Cultural Studies theory very broadly, to include
criticism based on differences in race, gender, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual
orientation and politics, and they argue that Cultural Studies theory thus defined gives
Reader Response Practice a new lease in the classroom.

While there have been numerous accounts of how the various branches of (what
is often referred to in retrospect as) Cultural Studies theory have contributed to the
problematization of university English classrooms, Rogers and Soter's book is relatively
rare in that it focuses specifically on the application of Cultural Studies theory to
English classrooms in elementary and secondary schools. Moreover, to their credit,
many of the essays included in Rogers and Soter's text do discuss how teachers can
incorporate perspectives from Cultural Studies theory into their classrooms, in terms of
selecting which texts to teach and which learning strategies to use. What distinguishes the problematized practice that I am working on in my own high school classroom from the practice described by Rogers and Soter is that I place a greater emphasis on having students use a broad range of theories according to the five categories of resources described above, and I use a particular technique of having students develop interpretive sketches. Whereas Rogers and Soter concentrate on adding Cultural Studies perspectives to Reader Response Practice, the problematized classroom that I am developing emphasizes having students develop interpretive sketches based on a range of theories, including but not limited to Cultural Studies theory.41

Further critiques of Reader Response Practice are offered by M.G. Roemer, Katherine McCormick and John Willinsky. In “Which Reader’s Response?” Roemer points out that most teachers in a Reader Response Practice overlook the cultural context of the responses, producing a situation reminiscent of Orwell’s Animal Farm, in which “all readers’ responses are created equal but some are more equal than others” (Roemer 1987 915). Roemer argues that the “diverse social and cultural perspectives” which shape each reader’s response should be acknowledged as important in shaping the reader’s response to the text (Roemer 1987 917). Like Roemer, McCormick sees that Reader Response Practice is limited because, in her view, students’ discussions can become indulgent “exercises in self-examination,” and students’ writing can result mostly in autobiography which has “little regard for the text” (McCormick 1985 840).

---

41 In her recently published Young Adult Literature and the New Literary Theories (1999), Soter in fact develops a set of approaches to teaching Young Adult novels based on a wider range of theories, including Psychological Criticism, Feminist Criticism, New Historicism, Narrator Strategies, Deconstruction and Cultural Studies Criticism. Soter’s purpose is to offer alternatives to the ways in which young adult literature is used in schools, alternatives which are explicitly grounded in literary theories. Included in this new work is a succinct account of the major theories themselves, presented in an extremely useful chart-format.
McCormick argues for putting response as one of several methods for teaching literature, along with attention to personal and cultural backgrounds, historical information and New Critical close reading techniques (McCormick 1985 848). Hence McCormick's account is broader than Roemer's in that she proposes that students draw on many resources in developing interpretations of the text. Like McCormick, Willinsky argues for extending Reader Response Practice beyond self-actualization for individual readers to the social construction of meaning in the classroom context in an article entitled "Beyond Actualization," included in Bogdan and Straw's Constructive Reading. Willinsky argues for including the social and political implications of Poststructuralist theories in classroom practice, for setting Reader Response Practice "among the large number of approaches that texts afford" (Willinsky 1993 21). He includes as relevant to the construction of meaning the reader's personal associations and what they have learned from previous literature classes. Gilbert, McCormick and Willinsky all offer useful critiques of Reader Response Practice, and point toward a more fully problematized classroom practice based on a model of constructive reading. However, they are all short on specific suggestions for teachers: their articles do not include any detailed accounts for how a teacher would use their critiques of Reader Response Practice to create a Post-Reader-Response practice in the classroom. More detailed treatments which discuss more specifically what teachers ought to do in the classroom to go beyond Reader Response Practice are offered by Alan Purves, Theresa Rogers and Anna Soter in the Third Edition of their textbook for teachers entitled How Porcupines Make Love: Readers, Texts, Cultures in the Response-Based Literature Classroom (1995), and by Appleman and Thomson in their aforementioned articles.

In some sense an earlier exploration of the critique of Reader Response
Practice developed in Rogers and Soter's aforementioned collection of essays, in *How Porcupines Make Love III*, the authors advocate a Reader Response teaching practice which includes Cultural Studies perspectives. They describe a progression from the past, when “we thought of [literary texts] as isolated specimens to be examined,” to the present, where “we think of literary texts as things written and read by people who enter into a new relationship to each other” in which “we are not only reading the writer, but reading the writer in a cultural context and understanding ourselves as culturally situated readers” (Purves, Rogers and Soter 1995 53). This perspective is developed in a section of their text promisingly entitled “School Literature is Guided by an Implicit Theory of Literature and Criticism,” which indicates their emphasis on one of the points I stress to my own students: the inevitability of theory. What distinguishes the work I have been doing in my own classroom from the perspective offered in *How Porcupines Make Love III* is that I might say that “School Literature is Guided by Implicit Theories of Literature and Criticism.” My own problematized practice stresses, to a greater degree than Purves, Rogers and Soter, that readers apply a range of theories in constructing meaning, that they often do it unconsciously, and that they are always situated in the social-political context of schooling.

In “Looking Through Critical Lenses: Teaching Literary Theory to Secondary Students,” Appleman advocates having students recognize the “plurality of theoretical constructs or literary theories” that reflect “different interpretive communities with varying literary and political perspectives” (Appleman 1993 169). She argues that, by “acknowledging the influence of interpretive communities on the construction of literary readings” students will be able to “examine their own membership in a community of readers”; this will enhance “their understanding of their own readings” as well as “their
understanding of the content and effects of the literary theories" (Appleman 1993 169). Appleman is critical of the limitations of Reader Response Practice, noting the problems of "a single theoretical perspective" and deploring that students are "not taught multiple critical approaches" (Appleman 1993 159). Appleman's article is one of the few I have found that offers a critique of Reader Response Practice which includes the explicit teaching of literary theory to high school students. She encourages students to use theories as tools to help construct interpretations of the text using a model of constructive reading. My own practice builds in part on these techniques, but moves further toward the kind of problematized practice advocated by the writers whose work in the universities I have cited. My own practice includes a broader range of critical theories than Appleman's, according to the five categories of constructive reading represented in the charts my students design near the beginning of my courses, and includes a particular classroom strategy, the interpretive sketch.

Another teacher who advocates teaching theory to high school students to overcome some of the limitations of Reader Response Practice, and who offers particular suggestions for teaching strategies for doing so, is Jack Thomson, whose work has been mentioned above. In "Helping Students Control Texts: Contemporary Literary Theory into Classroom Practice," Thomson includes a more comprehensive list of ways students can construct meaning than Appleman: he includes personal experience, cultural knowledge, ideology and previous experiences reading literature (Thomson 1993 132). Moreover, he argues that, by using these sets of tools, students may become more aware of their own constructive reading strategies. And he shows how, by practising constructive reading with literary texts, students can learn to construct themselves as choice-making beings and literate ones: "As teachers, I think
we should see all learners as people who can be helped to write, or construct, their lives and their culture as well as to read and understand them" (Thomson 1993 130). If students are not taught to become aware of their own constructive reading strategies, Thomson argues, if they are not taught to construct their own texts, lives and society, they will become "ciphers for the industrial and commercial machine" (Thomson 1993 135). Thomson cites the work of Scholes and Belsey in the universities in promoting the idea of making the theory explicit in the classroom. In his own class, he has students first "articulate their honest responses" to the text, and then "reflect on the knowledge implicit in these responses" in order to "tell the story of their reading" of the text (Thomson 1993 142-143). Thomson argues that, in this way, students can develop "powerful reflexive understanding" (Thomson 1993 142). His approach, particularly this last point, offers a thoughtful alternative to the limitations of Reader Response Practice, with specific suggestions for how to implement this approach in the classroom. What Thomson does not do is show how, in a problematized classroom which acknowledges the inevitability of theory (of the type advocated by Graff, Richter, Scholes, Belsey and Eagleton), the limits on what counts are made more explicit and may more easily be renegotiated. In this sense, Thomson does not directly show how a problematized practice addresses the shortcomings of both New Critical and Reader Response practices.

In sum, in developing a problematized approach to teaching Heart of Darkness, I am encouraging my students to construct readings of the text which are explicitly grounded in particular theories. By acknowledging that the limits on what counts in classroom discussion and in students' writing are determined by theory, a problematized classroom practice repositions teachers so that theory is moved further
out of the blind spot. Hence, with respect to the commonly cited problems of New Criticism, the problems associated with a transmission model of learning which does not include students' experiences are better addressed because, rather than merely substituting the students' open responses for the teacher's carefully constructed questions as what counts in classroom discussion and individual writing, a problematized practice sees those open responses as one set of tools for developing an interpretation of the text, as one constructive reading strategy among several possible strategies, as one set of theories among many possible sets of theories, for determining what the text means. Moreover, the other commonly cited problems of New Criticism, the rigid canon and the presumed homogeneity of the class, are also better addressed by a problematized practice. The debate between writers such as Achebe and Willinsky and Graff about whether to include *Heart of Darkness* in a senior English curriculum, for example, is well illustrated by a problematized approach, and it is quite possible that a version of that debate might appear in the classroom—and that, if it did, the various positions that might be taken with respect to the canon will be seen as the inevitable result of applying certain constructive reading strategies, and of not applying others. And the problem of the presumed homogeneity of the make-up of the class is better addressed in a problematized practice than in my old Reader Response Practice by including sets of constructive reading strategies which focus on that very issue with respect to the reader and the author.

In a problematized approach to *Heart of Darkness*, moreover, there is relatively little chance that the same conversation will occur over and over again, class after class, as I found with the garden path problem of my New Critical approach to *Heart of Darkness*. Because the limits on what counts are made more explicit and constantly
renegotiated, there is no single path through the garden that has already been made by the teacher. Rather, many directions of travel are possible, depending on what tools students use to find their way. And there also seems to be little chance that the garden path problem will resurface in the form of the interpretation problem the way it did in my Reader Response classroom, in which students were at a loss as to which direction they might go at all. In a problematized approach to Heart of Darkness, there is a better way to answer the question, "How do we tell which interpretation is the best one, or which interpretations are better than others?" than the one offered in the Reader Response classroom. In a problematized practice, because each interpretation is seen to be the result of using certain constructive reading strategies, and of not using certain other strategies, students have a way of talking about (and writing about) the merits of different possible readings of the text. Because theory is no longer fully in the blind spot, the tools they are using to work on the text are no longer so hidden from them, and they can more explicitly try a range of different tools in developing an interpretation of the text, and compare their work with other students who may be using different tools.

In making these observations about the ways in which a problematized practice better addresses the problems commonly observed in New Criticism, as well as the garden path problem and the interpretation problem, I should reiterate that I have not yet had the opportunity to try out this approach to Heart of Darkness in my classroom. Hence the approach I have been describing in this section is at best tentative. I have tried to describe quite specifically what I would have students do in my classroom when I return to teaching Heart of Darkness after finishing my work on this thesis, but I have had to ascertain how this approach might address the problems of New Critical and
Reader Response practices without trying it for this particular text. I have, however, had the advantage of developing this approach with a range of other texts and of getting two years' worth of feedback from my students in teaching these texts. This feedback has been extraordinarily helpful in developing the tentative approach to teaching *Heart of Darkness* in a problematized classroom described in this section.

4.5 Redefining Theory

One question I and my students still have in our experiences using a problematized approach to other novels, a question which I think my approach to *Heart of Darkness* does not yet fully answer, is: What determines which tools work better in a given situation for developing an interpretation of the text? My students seem quite capable of developing readings of a text and of seeing that each reading is a result of applying certain constructive reading strategies, or theories. And in this way they seem much further ahead than students in my Reader Response classroom, in that they now have a better way of talking about different readings of the text: they can see more clearly which tools they are using and can see the results of using different tools in different situations, and they can talk about that with other students who may be using different tools. They also have a greater awareness of the potential for applying reading strategies unconsciously, and of the importance of the social-political dimension of the schooling context. Yet despite these advantages, my students still find that some constructive reading strategies, some theories, seem to work better in some contexts. In a given situation, some tools seem to work better than others. And

---

For example, in my grade twelve Canadian literature course, I have used a problematized approach quite similar to the one I describe above for *Heart of Darkness* with novels such as Robertson Davies' *Fifth Business*, Nino Ricci's *Lives of the Saints*, Carol Shields' *The Stone Diaries*, Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, Jane Urquhart's *Away*, and Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*. 
my students and I are starting to wonder if there are particular factors which determine which theories work better in a given context.

I would not say that I feel stuck by this question the way I felt in the cases of the garden path problem and the interpretation problem in my old classroom practices. In some sense, when you get out your toolbox to do any kind of job, in or out of the English classroom, you always find that some tools will work better for that job than others—and that by having your toolbox with you, full of a wide range of tools which you are pretty practiced at using, you're already ahead of the game. Every job has its own challenges, and only experience can tell you which tools are going to work better than others for a given situation. In this sense, my students in a problematized classroom are far ahead of those in my Reader Response classroom in that they can more clearly see the tools they are using, and can more easily get experience by practising using these tools and by comparing the results with other students. But I (and they) can't help but wonder what determines which tools will work better in a given situation. Yet, I wonder, what are the consequences in the classroom of the possible answers to that question? If the application of various theories in developing interpretations of a text is something that is inevitable, can there be anything which determines which theories will work better than others in developing an interpretation of a particular text in a particular classroom?

I do not pretend to have the answers to these questions. Perhaps after trying out a problematized approach to Heart of Darkness I will feel closer to answering them. I suspect the answer may have something to do with how the various interpretations are discussed in the community of readers. Yet how that discussion influences our ways of addressing this question will depend on how we conceive of that community,
how it is composed and how it operates. Is it an "interpretive community"? If so, does it function like the interpretive communities described by Fish, Bleich or Kuhn? Because each of these conceptions of the idea of an interpretive community are different, and each would lead to different answers to the question of how we learn which theories are most useful in constructing an interpretation in a given context.43

It is in considering the role of the community of readers, the social context of what Bogdan and Straw call the actualization contract, that theory becomes redefined. In the hindsight of particular theories such as Poststructuralism and Cultural Studies theory, the conception of theory which determines what counts in classroom practice is broadened to include the conditions of the teaching-learning-schooling context. The borders of theory have recently come to extend beyond the conception of strictly literary theory. Theory has come to include more than either the New Critical or Reader Response conceptions of reading. The New Critical notion in which an ideal reader scrutinizes the text itself, which is written by an invisible author, and in which meaning is inside the text for the reader to get out, is no longer sufficient. And the Reader Response conception of reading as a transaction between an individual reader's personal experience and the series of marks on the page is also too limited. Rather, in the hindsight of Poststructuralism and Cultural Studies theory, reading is

43 Richter, Scholes and R.W. Dasenbrock address this question, although each only tentatively. Richter argues that the question of which theories used to construct an interpretation are the most accepted ones are determined by the interpretive community (Richter 1994 216). Richter cites the work of both Fish and Kuhn, but he does not clearly distinguish between their two different conceptions of interpretive communities. Scholes is more careful to distinguish between Fish's and Kuhn's notions of interpretive communities (and also Bleich's), and argues that "the notion of a single interpretive community presiding over every act of interpretation is mistaken and misleading" (Scholes 1985 158-162). Moreover, R.W. Dasenbrock, in an article entitled "Do We Write the Text We Read?" asks after the same question, and also notes the role of the interpretive community, finding useful ground on which to stand in Fish, but also acknowledging Fish's debt to Kuhn in describing the nature of interpretive communities (Dasenbrock 1995 560). In addition, in the foreword to Soter's recent Young Adult Literature and the New Literary Theories, James Phelan asks whether a text has a way to "signal which sets of questions it finds most hospitable"; Phelan argues that Soter's work shows that a given text invites certain sets of questions, but that we can choose whether to accept or decline such an invitation (Phelan, cited in Soter 1999 x).
reconceptualized: a politically and culturally situated reader constructs meaning from an unstable text, which is written by a politically and culturally situated author. In classroom practice, student readers use the five categories of resources to construct meaning by developing interpretive sketches. Hence the question of which theories work better in which contexts leads to a redefining of theory to include the social-political dimensions of the teaching-learning-schooling context. And hence the limits on what counts in classroom practice, which are determined by theory, are expanded to include the social and the political to a much greater degree than in either New Critical or Reader Response Practices.44

With theory redefined, teachers can only ever check the blind spot of theory in a certain, limited sense. In a problematized classroom, teachers can check the blind spot of literary theory, as defined by New Critical or Reader Response Practices. But the blind spot can never wholly be checked: that is what the problematized classroom illustrates. When theory is more broadly defined, it is always with us. While it is true that there is no practice without a theory, it is clear that in a problematized classroom practice extends beyond theory as it has been traditionally defined by either New Criticism or Reader Response practice. In a problematized high school classroom, it is not sufficient simply to open up discussion to include a range of literary theories, as writers such as Graff would have it. Although Graff's position is a genuine improvement over New Critical practice (or even Reader Response practice), its usefulness in the high school context is limited because theory is not redefined to include the social-political context of schooling.

With theory redefined in this way, a teacher in a problematized classroom might

44 Bogdan (1992), Hunter (1982) and Easthope (1991) all emphasize the importance of the social and political dimensions of the teaching-learning-schooling context.
look at the samples of student writing submitted by Brian, Jen, Colin and Geoffrey and see them somewhat differently than I saw them in my Reader Response classroom. While much could be said in examining these responses from the perspective of a problematized practice, I will make just two observations here. First, we might notice that, whereas Brian writes “there is too much contrast; the picture hurts my eye” and “I wish not to face any more,” Colin articulates almost the opposite reaction. Colin notes that Conrad’s description of the explosions that “destroy and rattle the black workers” should “invoke anger or sadness,” but he finds that “they do not.” Similarly, Colin finds that although “the descriptions of the native blacks living by the outer station should be equally disturbing,” they are “equally undisturbing,” and that Marlow’s discovery of the “well-dressed white man” should be “shocking,” but it is not. Whereas Brian finds himself emotionally engaged to the point where he does not wish to read further, Colin finds himself emotionally distanced from the text. In a problematized classroom, with the use of the five categories of resources and the interpretive sketches in the context of a small group study, each of these students might be more able to reflect on his responses to the text, to examine why he reacted to the text in the way that he did, because each will be accustomed to reflecting on how he constructed his responses to the text. Moreover, the teacher in a problematized classroom has more ways of accommodating Brian’s emotional difficulty with engaging the text, because students are more comfortable with the notion that their responses to texts are a product of the constructive reading strategies they apply consciously and unconsciously, and of the social-political context of the classroom in which they are situated.45

45 Bogdan calls this response to a text a “poetics of refusal” (Bogdan 1992 239-248), and it is worth noting that, when theory is redefined to include more of the social and political dimensions of the learning context, the teacher is better positioned to accommodate this type of response than in either a New Critical or a Reader Response classroom—and also than in the kind of problematized classroom which Graff prescribes, in which theory is not recast to include these dimensions of learning to the same degree.
The second observation is that Jen and Geoffrey’s responses show opposite reactions to Conrad’s depiction of the relationship between the black workers and the white accountant. Jen writes about Conrad’s “commentary about the use of blacks as slaves” who “were fed foreign food and lost their strength and radiance,” who “could no longer do what was assigned” and hence were “thrown away like broken tools” and she draws this conclusion: “everything beautiful and perfect about this man is killing the slaves in the grove of death.” Gaspar, by contrast, writes that Conrad’s depiction is “an example of racism,” and he bases his view on the fact that while “Marlow uses every negative term he can find to describe the Africans,” he is “dazzled with such an unexpected elegance” in meeting the white accountant. In a problematized classroom, students are more able to learn from the differences between their responses to the text, in that they are used to examining the processes by which these responses are constructed. This is a distinct improvement over Reader Response Practice, in which students have few tools with which to engage their different interpretations.

4.6 Conclusion: Problematizing the Problematized Classroom

Having claimed, throughout this thesis, that there is no neutral position, that we are always talking theory whether we know it or not, the question might be asked whether my conception of a problematized practice in the high school English classroom based on a model of constructive reading purports to be just that, a neutral position. In a world where there can no longer be any truly objective ground, does a problematized practice like the one I propose claim in some way to be objective? Does teaching students to develop an awareness of how various constructive reading strategies shape their responses to literature really solve everything? To what degree
are the students in my problematized classroom really free to use all of the tools in the toolbox of theory to construct textual interpretations?

I ask myself these questions every day in my classroom: I think they are some of the hardest questions to answer about the relationship between theory and practice. And I think that whatever answers there might be to these questions depend on what all of this theory is for. A problematized practice, like any other classroom practice, is not an end. It is only a means. It is a means for helping students learn to read—to read texts, to read themselves, their lives, their cultures, their world. And in helping students learn to read more constructively, with a greater awareness of their own reading strategies and their own situatedness in the teaching-learning-schooling context, a problematized practice like the one I have been developing in my own classroom, I hope, can help them make to choices in their lives with a greater awareness of their own constructed natures. Like every teacher, I hope that my students emerge from my classroom changed—but I hope that students who leave a problematized classroom are better prepared to change their world in ways that reflect a greater awareness of how that world, and themselves, are constructed. Appleman and Hines put this point succinctly in their recent article: “theories of interpretation offer not only ways of reading texts, but also, either implicitly or explicitly, ways of seeing and interpreting ourselves and our surroundings beyond the world of the classroom” (Appleman and Hines 2000 152).

As teachers, we can and should do a lot more for our students than get our theory straight. I was reminded of that point by a passage in one of the books for teachers I read in preparation for writing this thesis, How Porcupines Make Love III: “Of course, you don’t teach literature, or English, you teach students. We all know that.
People, not things, are the focus of instruction. Recently, too much attention has been paid to things, and people have been forgotten" (Purves, Rogers and Soter 1995 39). It is important to realize that the ideas I am writing about in this thesis describe only one aspect of teaching, and that students, not theories, ought to be the focus of instruction. I hope that, in spending all this time reading and writing about theory, I have made my classroom a better place for my students to learn. I have written this thesis to articulate to myself and to other teachers how, by changing our classroom practice to learn from work done in literary theory, we may address many of the shortcomings of the two dominant pedagogies we have been using in our classrooms, particularly as illustrated by the garden path problem and the interpretation problem. But I stress here that what I have written is only important as a means, only important in the context of other means for making our classrooms better places for helping students learn.

A problematized practice is not a panacea for the high school English classroom. It is neither neutral nor objective: it has a particular history, is a response to particular historical conditions, and exists in a particular social, political and cultural context. As do I: as a teacher and as the writer of this thesis, I am constructed in a particular fashion, with a particular history and according to my particular social, political and cultural characteristics. Hence having students learn to develop a greater awareness of how various constructive reading strategies shape their responses to literature does not solve everything, and students are never completely free to use all of the tools in the toolbox of theory. But neither does anything else solve everything or wholly free students. Rather, it is a question of, where else can we go? What other alternative practices are there for English teachers? If we cannot (as it seems we
cannot) return to a kind of objectivity or neutrality that does not acknowledge its own theoretical underpinnings, what else can we do but try to work with as much awareness of theory as we can—and to encourage our students to do the same? I think we are unlikely to encounter any grand theories ever again, and that we are also unlikely to rue the loss. Perhaps we ought to listen to the advice from Wendell Berry which Dennis Sumara quotes in Private Readings in Public: Schooling the Literary Imagination:

We are not smart enough or conscious enough or alert enough to work responsibly on a gigantic scale. In making things always bigger and more centralized, we make them both more vulnerable in themselves and more dangerous to everything else. Learn, therefore, to prefer small-scale elegance and generosity to large-scale greed, crudity and glamour.

(Berry, cited in Sumara 1996 7)

If I am to end this thesis with something, I will end it with literature. Because Marshall Gregory is surely right when he writes: "No one would ever choose to take the works of Jacques Derrida or Frank Kermode rather than the works of Dickens or Shakespeare to a life of solitary banishment on a desert island" (Gregory 1997 51). Every year I have taught Heart of Darkness, at the end of the unit I have read aloud to my students the final scene from Timothy Findley’s novel, Headhunter, a brilliant and horrifying retelling of Conrad’s tale set in modern-day Toronto. In this scene, Lilah Kemp, the mental patient who inadvertently sets Kurtz free from page 92 of Heart of Darkness at the Metro Reference Library and who is Marlow’s next-door neighbour, returns to her room with the novella in her hand. Regardless of which teaching practice I have been using, it has had the same effect on my students:
She sat on her bed with *Heart of Darkness* beside her.
*Who would believe it?*
No one.
Not even Marlow, himself, out in his kitchen.
*It's only a book, they would say. That's all it is. A story. Just a story.*
Works Cited


Appleman, Deborah and Mary Beth Hines. "Multiple Ways of Knowing in Literature Classrooms." English Education. 32.2 2000.


Bogdan, Deanne and Stanley B. Straw (Eds). Constructive Reading: Teaching


Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1980.


Foucault, Michel. “What is an Author?” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*: 


Gutteridge, Don. Stubborn Pilgrimage: Resistance and Transformation in


McCormick, Katherine. "Theory in the Reader: Bleich, Holland and Beyond."
*College English*. 47.1 1985.


Miller, Jane. "Trick or Treat: The Autobiography of the Question." *English*
Quarterly. 27.3 1995.


Sumara, Dennis J. “(Un)Becoming a Teacher: Negotiating Identities While


Wimsatt, W.K. and M. Beardsley. “The Affective Fallacy.” The Verbal Icon: