

**Reconfiguring Cultural Literacy:
Multi-Authored Cultural Literacy Narratives in a Post-Hirsch Age**

by

Heather D. Pavletic

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama
August 4, 2012

Keywords: Anna Deavere Smith, cultural literacy, narrative,
narrative dialogue, identity, representation

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Approved by

Marc Silverstein, Chair, Professor of English
Victor Villanueva, Professor of English
Kevin Roozen, Associate Professor of English
Sunny Stalter, Assistant Professor of English

Abstract

My dissertation argues that Hirsch's definition of cultural literacy must be updated so that it focuses on the behaviors, practices, beliefs, and ideals of individuals (any individual) and how each of these areas connects to the socially constructed nature of literacy. I employ the solo performed documentary drama of Anna Deavere Smith, comments from the blogosphere, and Victor Turner's theory of social drama to examine the role of narrative and reflection during incidents of social conflict in America and the impact narrative and reflection have on the development of cultural literacy. My analysis considers the manner in which cultural literacy can be measured and developed through the reflexive activity of reading and writing about cultural events (large-scale events such as 9/11 and more localized/personal events such as a minority student engaging a dominant ideology for the first time). Following the research on social and community literacy (Street, Flower, Gee, Delpit, Lu), I am interested in the way that cultural differences are approached, understood, and negotiated on a daily basis and how narrative can be employed to analyze cultural literacy through individual and group interactions during times of social conflict. My analysis suggests that both cultural literacy and illiteracy are made apparent during these conflicts and that the use of narrative reflection presents an opportunity for the development of cultural empathy, which can lead to cultural literacy. This conclusion presents us with the pedagogical opportunity to implement course objectives that place students in situations of social or cultural conflict through their interaction with narrative (both those written by them as well as those written by others).

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the support of several groups of people without whom this dissertation may never have been completed. I would like to thank my committee, especially my director, Dr. Marc Silverstein, for their continued support, encouragement, and feedback throughout this process. To Dr. Silverstein, thank you for helping create a project that allowed me to work in each of my fields of interest. To Dr. Kevin Roozen and Dr. Michelle Sidler, thank you for offering courses in rhetoric and composition that expanded my academic horizons beyond performance and literature. I would like to thank my friends and colleagues for the encouragement and assistance that they have given me over the years. To Pam Kersting, David Collins, and Kacy Green, thank you for your faith in my ability to finish this dissertation. To Kellye Corcoran and Lisa Kent, thank you for reading and rereading numerous drafts of this dissertation and offering valuable advice throughout the process. Finally, I thank my husband, Chris Pavletic, for his invaluable love and support throughout my academic journey; without his encouragement and confidence, none of this would have been possible.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of Figures.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Defining Cultural Literacy.....	2
Narrative: Discourse and Reflection.....	5
Narrative: Identity and Representation.....	17
Chapter 1: Cultural Literacy and Literacy Narratives.....	28
Social Approaches to Defining Literacy.....	30
Literacy at Work.....	37
Cultural Literacy.....	40
Literacy Narratives and Narrative Reflection.....	44
Chapter 2: Social Drama and Reflection.....	65
Ritual and Liminality in Social Dramas.....	70
Media, Ritual, and the Liminal Space.....	78
Social Drama: Applications.....	84
Chapter 3: Narrative, Reflection, and Anna Deavere Smith’s Documentary Drama.....	106
Anna Deavere Smith and Cultural Literacy.....	107
Reflexive Nature of Narrative and Dialogue.....	111
Social Drama to Documentary Drama.....	124
Critical Affirmation and Cultural Literacy.....	129
Conclusion: Imagined Communities, Cultural Literacy, and Pedagogy.....	140
Pedagogical Approaches.....	150
Appendix A.....	161
Appendix B.....	162
Works Cited.....	163

List of Figures

Figure 1: Comment by calmly in response to Neuman’s blog post titled “Arizona Department of Education Hates Accents” on <i>Gawker</i>	50
Figure 2: Dialogue begun by Scrubbles in response to Neuman’s blog post titled “Arizona Department of Education Hates Accents” on <i>Gawker</i>	52
Figure 3: Dialogue begun by redqueenmeg in response to Neuman’s blog post titled “Arizona Department of Education Hates Accents” on <i>Gawker</i>	54
Figure 4: Dialogue begun by Jesse Astle in response to Neuman’s blog post titled “Arizona Department of Education Hates Accents” on <i>Gawker</i>	56
Figure 5: Rescue Workers on 9/11 ("New York Injured Workers' Alliance")	80
Figure 6: An American soldier and a prisoner at Abu Ghraib ("Disturbing New Photos from Abu Ghraib")	80
Figure 7: An American soldier and a prisoner at Abu Ghraib ("Disturbing New Photos from Abu Ghraib")	80
Figure 8: Dialogue begun by ZuzuPetals in response to Stewart’s blog post titled “Lowe’s Facebook Page Explodes With Bigoted Hate Speech” on <i>Jezebel</i>	101
Figure 9: Dialogue begun by Janet Snakehole in response to Stewart’s blog post titled “Lowe’s Facebook Page Explodes With Bigoted Hate Speech” on <i>Jezebel</i>	102
Figure 10: Dialogue begun by Silverwane in response to Stewart’s blog post titled “Lowe’s Facebook Page Explodes With Bigoted Hate Speech” on <i>Jezebel</i>	104
Figure 11: Comparison of excerpt from <i>Twilight</i> and Smith’s TED performance.....	120
Figure 12: Dialogue begun by kat.bee in response to Stewart’s blog post titled “Lowe’s Facebook Page Explodes With Bigoted Hate Speech” on <i>Jezebel</i>	144
Figure 13: Diagram of the flow of dialogue between the participants of narrative dialogue thread on kat.bee’s response to Stewart’s blog post titled “Lowe’s Facebook Page Explodes With Bigoted Hate Speech” on <i>Jezebel</i>	148
Figure 14: Smith as Angela Davis (screen capture <i>Fires in the Mirror</i> , PBS).....	156

Figure 15: Smith as Anonymous Young Man #1 (screen capture *Fires in the Mirror*, PBS).... 156

Introduction

In segregation, it was not as if we were totally cut off from the white world. Many of our parents and relatives worked for white people, in their homes, in their clubs, in their businesses. We had the opportunity to learn many things about them, because we watched them. They did not work in our homes, or for our businesses, so they never had the opportunity to learn about us the way we learned about them. *It would seem, on the face of things, that this would make them less culturally literate.* (emphasis added 70)

My interest in cultural literacy stems from this statement made by Anna Deavere Smith in her book *Talk to Me: Listening Between the Lines* (2000). Smith's book is a memoir that combines her life story as a black child in Baltimore, MD, during the Civil Rights movement, with the process she went through as she put together *House Arrest* (2004), a documentary drama concerning American politics (first produced in 1997). This quote presented me with several issues and questions concerning cultural literacy. How does cultural literacy develop and interact through and with other forms of literacy? How is literacy defined beyond the ability to read and write text on a page? How does our understanding of cultural literacy change on the public and private, local and national levels? The importance of finding answers to these questions seems even more significant as Smith adds, "Yet in the year 2000, in our society, cultural literacy is only an idea, and not valued enough to really become an issue" (70). Smith is correct in her assertion that cultural literacy is not valued. It was not valued at the time that she wrote those words when we had a Caucasian president, and it has little value today in 2012, regardless of the fact that we have an African-American president. Despite of its lack of apparent value, the need

for cultural literacy is an issue, as demonstrated by the marginalized voices who possess it and especially the centralized voices who need it. The ultimate goal of my research is to demonstrate the important role that cultural literacy has in the development of identity at the individual and national levels. Specifically, my research looks at how the development of identity unfolds through the shared experiences present in and around narratives that offer opportunities for reflection concerning large- and small- scale social dramas.¹ These narratives take the form of individual biographical/social writings, multi-layered media representations, and documentary dramas. My analysis considers the manner in which cultural literacy can be measured and developed through the reflexive activity of reading and writing about cultural events such as large-scale events like 9/11 and more localized/personal events such as a minority student engaging a dominant ideology for the first time.

Defining Cultural Literacy

“In many contexts, the term ‘culture’ could easily be replaced by such terms as ‘society,’ ‘history,’ ‘social representations,’ or ‘politics’ without any loss or gain of meaning” (Brockmeier and Olson 3). The fluidity with which the term “culture” is defined and its often haphazard employment make it a somewhat awkward, yet all the more appropriate, term to use in my consideration of cultural literacy. The frustration of having no single, easy definition keeps us from becoming complacent; it keeps us thinking about how culture changes over time and distance as we look for ways to better understand our own cultures and the cultures of others. When, however, it comes to multiple cultural groups, how do we come to understand those other groups? How do we become culturally literate? When it comes to the phrase “cultural literacy,” E.D. Hirsch (1988), who will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter one, is generally the first

¹ This concept of social drama will be discussed in more depth in the following chapters as I use Victor Turner’s theory of social drama to examine the role of narrative and reflection during incidents of social conflict in America.

name mentioned. In his estimation, cultural literacy is the tacit knowledge that a writer can expect a reader to have, knowledge that is necessary if the reader plans to be able to read and understand standard texts (*Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* 4). For Hirsch, everybody and anybody can become culturally literate if they know a set, pre-determined amount of quantifiable information.

Hirsch's definition of cultural literacy, as common knowledge/facts that every American should have in order to understand texts, is overly simplistic; culture should not and cannot be reduced to a list of facts or pieces of general knowledge. Hirsch misrepresents the concept of culture in his definition by equating a general culture of knowledge with the culture he inhabits. As Hirsch explains it, "The chief function of literacy is to make us masters of this standard instrument of knowledge and communication, thereby enabling us to give and receive complex information orally and in writing over time and space" (*Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* 3). This approach to literacy, in general, and cultural literacy, in particular, does not emphasize a critical awareness of either the material needed to be culturally literate, by Hirsch's definition, or of the texts holding cultural references. In this view, the culturally literate citizen would be more like an academic robot awaiting programming, and following that programming she or he is ready to follow a particular ideology. This culturally literate citizen is opposed to the citizen who will be able to actively participate in his or her own culture and possibly the culture of another rather than merely following pre-programmed directions. Considering this, what Hirsch is arguing for is closer to a dominant ideological canonical literacy than cultural literacy.

A stronger definition of cultural literacy is suggested by Wendy Parkinson and Sherryl Saunder in their article "Cultural Literacy and Languages: Enabling Students to Learn to Live

Together” (1999), which discusses Brisbane, Australia’s new inclusion of the “Key Learning Area of Cultural Literacy and Languages” in their core curriculum. Parkinson and Saunders offer a definition of culture that focuses on the behaviors, practices, beliefs, and ideals of an individual (any individual), that connect to the socially constructed nature of literacy. They present their understanding of cultural literacy as individuals being “able to participate in and moderate their *own culture* and understand, negotiate and participate to some worthwhile extent in *the culture of others*” (4 emphases added). For them, one must be able to understand the Other if one wants to fully understand the self (4). This coincides with the understanding of cultural literacy that I draw from Smith. Whereas Hirsch’s definition of cultural literacy is only concerned with a dominant ideology (his ideology), Parkinson and Saunders’ view of cultural literacy does not privilege one culture over another. In fact, “the definition of culture is not restricted to the high culture of a community. It is concerned with the critical exploration of the cultural determination of knowledge, processes, skills, and attitudes inherent in a given curriculum area” (5). Culture becomes a multilayered entity with which one interacts rather than memorizes. This interaction comes through studying the products, behaviors, beliefs, and value systems of our own culture and the cultures around us. Often these elements are observed and/or studied through the dance, drama, media, music, and visual arts of a culture. However, this process, as discussed by Parkinson and Saunders, is not done in isolation but rather as a part of an educational process so that there is the opportunity for input and feedback through the developmental process. In addition, this view of cultural literacy demonstrates how important it is for members of one culture to invest in understanding members of another. Without cultural literacy, we lose the opportunity for potential American solidarity based on the acceptance of difference and an American culture that accepts difference as part of its cultural heritage. One tool used for

exploring the cultural heritage of America and the role difference plays in the formation of cultural literacy is narrative.

Narrative: Discourse and Reflection

The manner in which narrative functions as a tool for reflection regarding cultural literacy is important, because any text can be considered a narrative in some form or another. David Herman, in the Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (2007), defines narrative as “a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change” (3).²

He goes on to explain:

That core or prototypical instances of narrative represent or simulate

- (i) a structured time-course of particularized events which introduces
- (ii) disruption or disequilibrium into storytellers’ and interpreters’ mental model of the world evoked by the narrative (whether that world is presented as actual, imagined, dreamed, etc.), conveying
- (iii) what it’s like to live through that disruption, that is, the ‘qualia’ (or felt, subjective awareness) of real or imagined consciousness undergoing the disruptive experience. (9)

As a tool that allows society to reflect on events (great and small), narratives offer the opportunity for the writer and the audience to conduct individual (and possibly group) analysis of the world and events as presented and “evoked by the narrative.” The reflexive nature of narrative for both the author and the audience offers a potential for a disturbance in internal and external power structures as author and audience consider “what it is like to live through the

² This basic definition of narrative is a foundational concept in my research, because items such as news articles, blog posts, short responses, and brief comments are considered narratives. These narratives then become part of larger, ongoing narratives written, individually or as a group. Some comments or responses function as narratives, because they offer a view into what Kearney calls a “working through” (83) an event or thought process that assists in the analysis of cultural literacy development.

disruption” presented in the narrative. If this reflection is on disruptions experienced by those outside of the audience’s cultural comfort zone, there is a greater potential for the development of cultural literacy. Employing narrative as a tool to engage the lives of others presents opportunities for imaginary boundary crossing and community building through shared experience, even if the sharing of an experience occurs in a narrative environment, such as blogs or comment sections for online articles.

H. Porter Abbot, in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (2008), simplifies a definition of narrative to “*the representation of an event or a series of events*” (emphasis in original 13); in addition, he goes on to explain that “[t]he difference between events and their representation is the difference between *story* (the event or sequence of events) and *narrative discourse* (how the story is conveyed)” (emphasis in original 15). This distinction is relevant as narratives frequently represent the same or similar events using different narrative discourses, and it is this difference that offers opportunities for examining (a deficit in, the existence of, or the development of) cultural literacy.³ The manner in which the author and the audience interpret the narrative discourse used to convey the story allows for “differences in reading [where the] story is always mediated (constructed) by narrative discourse [and we] are always called upon to be active participants in narrative, because receiving the story depends on how we in turn construct it from the discourse” (Abbot 21-22). To construct the story, the discourse is received and then passed through the audiences’ cultural filters. At times, this process may be easy or it may present a strain on the filters as objects and ideas either pass through or are hung up on various cultural views. If the discourse meets resistance, it may never pass through and be understood, or it may alter the filter and thus the individual’s ability to interact with and

³ The term “event” has been used several times throughout this discussion of narrative. For my purpose, a broad definition of event is being used to include occurrences of a psychical or psychological nature.

understand the narrative and the individual/event. Any change could result in the development of cultural literacy or denial of alternate perspectives. Abbot adds:

Narrative could be called a kind of “rhetoric of the real” in that it accounts for things. You could in fact argue, and people have, that our need for narrative form is so strong that we don’t really believe something is true unless we can see it as a story. Bringing a collection of events into narrative coherence can be described as a way of normalizing those events. It renders them plausible, allowing one see how they all “belong.” (44)

Considering this, not all audiences will or can accept that they are, in any way, connected to events or people who are different. As we are surrounded by narrative—creating narratives all the time, even if they are not written down or shared with others—we sometimes find that there are layers of narrative discourse that can obscure a possible connection. We can, after all, narrate our own reactions to narrative. These narrated reactions become a coping mechanism, because we are able to use narrative as both a tool for reflection as well as a mask to give us a false sense of truth. Individuals who employ the latter strategy evoke a narrative distancing within themselves; they cast doubt on the reality offered through the narrative. This, in turn, keeps the audience from normalizing the events presented in the narrative, which stops the formation of cultural empathy.

This narrative distancing places the text firmly in a position of being just a story, regardless of the narrative’s status as fact or fiction. Narrative distancing, however, is not always negative. At times, narrative distance is just far enough removed from the original event to allow a critical distance, from which reflection occurs, to form. This critical distance can be seen in the user comments left on the blog entries, news articles, or videos posted to the internet where

commenters obtain a sense of anonymous distance offered through cyberspace. Finding the appropriate distance to begin reflection and not lose perspective can be a tricky process, especially if the subject of the narrative is controversial. One method, the use of imbedded narratives, alters not just distance but creates an alternate. Abbot devotes a fair amount of time to discussing how narratives can be imbedded in and/or contested by other narratives; Abbot suggest sites for imbedded narratives and contested narratives including topics “from politics to family arguments” (49). Looking at a legal proceeding, for example, we see the ongoing narrative of the trial surrounding the supposed perpetrator and victim. As this narrative is presented, the prosecution and the defense both work to create alternate narratives concerning motive and character in order to make their case. These imbedded narratives attempt to work against each other to sway the opinion of an audience who (in the case of judge or jury) may have a hand in the fate of the defendant. In addition, imbedded narratives are created by media sources and other groups or individuals as they work to understand events. Even though legal trials, with their imbedded and contesting narratives, are factual occurrences that involve real events and individuals, some audience members still feel a sense of security (similar to a reaction to works of fiction or fantasy) from these factual narratives; they believe these events could not possibly occur to or around them due to the distance offered by the judicial system or the media. Again, this insulated distance prevents the development of cultural literacy and promotes cultural illiteracy. Thus, the role the audience plays as it absorbs narrative discourse on the way to interpreting the story is vital. An example of the role that author and audience play in the distance created through narrative and the effect this has on reflection can be found in the narratives surrounding Teonna Brown’s conviction for a hate crime against Christine (Chrissy) Polis, a transgendered woman.

On Monday, April 18, 2011, Chrissy was beaten by Brown (an 18-year-old African-American female) and an unnamed 14-year-old African-American female (her name was never disclosed) in a McDonald's in Baltimore, MD. The entire incident was filmed by Vernon Hackett, an employee of the restaurant, who did nothing except film the tragedy. According to the video, one employee (possibly the manager based on his attire—black dress pants and a long sleeve blue, button-down shirt) put forth a moderate effort to separate the attackers from Chrissy, even as he offered no assistance to Chrissy as she lay curled up on the floor after having been beaten into a seizure for using the women's restroom at the restaurant.

Over the course of the beating, which lasts for more than three minutes, approximately four McDonald's employees, wearing identifying red polo shirts, jockey for good viewing positions as the two attackers hit and kick Chrissy repeatedly. Chrissy's attackers even go so far as to try and drag her out of the restaurant to continue the beating. As they manage to get her closer to the door, a customer (later identified as Vicky Thomas) finally took a stronger stand than the ineffectual manager (who seemed more intent on moving the fight out of the restaurant than helping Chrissy) and tried to protect her, only to receive a blow from one of the attackers. The video ends with footage of Chrissy convulsing on the floor directly in front of the door with nobody attempting to offer further assistance.

Following this incident, there was nearly instant coverage of the crime as the video shot by Hackett was uploaded to the Internet and quickly went viral. This brought the tragedy to the attention of the public where it became a subject for inquiry, discussion, and debate for the authorities, LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) activists, and other citizens. Follow-up videos, news articles, news reports, blogs, Facebook pages, and subsequent comments from all of the above were posted all over the internet. On Thursday, August 4, 2011, the trial of

Brown began. She was charged with first degree assault and perpetrating a hate crime against Chrissy. Brown pled guilty at the beginning of the trial, and it was only five weeks later, on Tuesday, September 13, 2011, that she was sentenced to five years in prison. At her sentencing, she stated, “I’m sorry. My mother did not raise me like this. I would really like to apologize to the victim, Miss Chrissy Polis” (Valcourt par. 8). Chrissy, however, was not able to bring herself to attend the sentencing and instead sent a letter to the judge stating, “I felt like I was going to die that day. (...) I continue to suffer seizures, bouts of crying, mental anguish and anxiety. I fear being alone. I have flashbacks about the attacks. I do not forgive them for what they did to me” (Valcourt par. 10).

Throughout the event, we can see a variety of opportunities for imbedded narratives from the time the initial video was posted. There were media representations of the event, narratives written by the general public on blogs and narratives constructed by the individuals present at the actual event. Private and professional individuals worked through, in various ways, a reflective process as they present their version of the story. In addition to her letter to the judge, Chrissy gave an interview to the *Baltimore Sun* on April 24, 2011 (nearly one week after the attack) that narrated her side of the assault. This interview (which was originally televised) is available for viewing on the Internet and it, like the news articles, blog entries, or other videos that are also available, allows audience members to post their own comments. Even if the narratives provided do not themselves demonstrate more than a casual representation of (rather than reflection on) the event the narratives offered through these sources allow readers the opportunity to reflect on what is said and represented through the narratives. Comments left by readers contribute to an ongoing narrative, as well as offering reflection on both the narrative and the event itself. In this space, a reflective dialogue is formed in a virtual public forum. Although the majority of these

articles, blogs, and video responses speak against the violence that Chrissy experienced, some individuals focus on other elements of the incident.

One particular individual, who goes by the name Hunter Wallace (it is unclear if this is the actual name of the writer or a pseudonym), writes a blog titled *Occidental Dissent / Outlaw Conservatism in Black Run Amerika*. The title of the blog and the use of the “k” in the spelling of the word America give a fair indication of Wallace’s view of the current political (at the very least) climate in the United States. Wallace appears to be an educated individual who does not spew endless racial slurs or make claims that appear to be based on some sort of immediate, emotional response to a situation. From the time of the initial incident, Wallace made a total of eight posts tagged under “Chrissy Lee Polis.” The first post, titled “Black Run America: McDonald’s Victim Was A Tranny,” gives a brief rundown of what happened to Chrissy. The main focus of the post, however, is to clarify “that the victim of the McDonald’s beating, who has been identified as Chrissy Lee Polis, is actually Christopher Lee Polis, and turned out to be a transsexual prostitute!” (par. 1). This interjection is a rhetorical ploy to alter the initial narrative representation that places Chrissy in the role of a victim. By doing this, Wallace attempts to shift some of the blame to Chrissy for not being the “White” woman that she was presumed to be. Following this, Wallace frequently refers to Chrissy as “the tranny” and ends the post with:

A few thoughts:

- (1) What happens when sanctified leftwing grievance groups collide over black homophobia?
- (2) Could this assault affect Barack Obama’s standing with LGBT community?
- (3) How comfortable are other grievance groups with McDonald’s 365Black policy and America being a Black World?

(4) Can White America identify with a White tranny (racial slurs were used) who was the victim of black-on-white violent crime? (“Black Run America: McDonald’s Victim Was A Tranny” par. 4)

Even though Wallace is not obviously condemning Chrissy, his agenda appears to be more focused on using the incident as a way to criticize left wing activist groups, imply racial stereotyping/favoritism in respect to President Obama, and prove that African Americans are violent. He states in a (later) response to a comment on his initial post, “Some articles claim that racial slurs were heard in the video. This had more to do with Polis being a crossdresser [sic] than being White. It was still a case of TNB. Blacks don’t have the self control [sic] of Whites” (“Black Run America: McDonald’s Victim Was A Tranny”).⁴ The initial narrative and subsequent comments by Wallace attempt to contest the event as it was presented by other sources. Wallace’s narrative discourse presents two views of the minority groups involved in the event. The first is of a certain racial group, asserting a claim that this group behaves in a particular manner, and the second is that there is a contest between two minority groups. Yet, the initial event was more a tragedy that resulted in violence due to a lack of cultural empathy held by the attackers and their cultural illiteracy.

This tragic incident and the public’s response are similar to the events that Smith works with in both the large-scale documentary dramas (*Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, based in large part on the riots in Los Angeles following Rodney King’s beating) and smaller local events (in 2006 she worked on The Arizona Project to commemorate the naming of ASU's Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law) that she responds to. When Smith works on a project, she seeks out narratives told and perspectives held by a variety of individuals. She uses both imbedded and contesting narratives throughout the documentary dramas. As mentioned previously, these are

⁴ Wallace uses various sets of acronyms in his blog; in this case, TNB stands for “Typical Nigger Behavior.”

also present throughout Chrissy's case. There are narratives from all perspectives as each side attempts to use narrative discourse to further its own agenda with the audience. As I presented my narrative of the events to lay a foundation for discussion, I intentionally selected words that would demonstrate how rhetorical choices influence narrative discourse and potentially manipulate the audience's reaction and subsequent discussion. I called Christine (Christopher) Lee Polis "Chrissy," and referred to her as a victim while I used the terms "offender" or "attacker" when I mentioned Teonna Brown, who I referenced by her surname. Choices such as these show an inclination on my part toward finding fault with Brown and empathizing with Polis. However, my own judgment—my reaction to the entire event—is colored by my life history. These experiences influence how I responded to what I saw in a short, violent video. Thus, as I conducted the research necessary to discuss Polis's case, my own narrative discourse was influenced by a number of factors. Yet, even as the narratives that I read influenced me as I reflected on the event, my personal cultural filters kept me from immediately considering events in a manner that did not condemn Brown from the beginning. I did not initially consider a reaction that could potentially be based on a feeling of fear at facing the unknown (Brown dealing with a transgendered individual, possibly for the first time) and choosing fight from the fight or flight option. Granted, I do not believe it is possible to view the situation from a position where Brown is able to claim self-defense. I am not attempting to excuse or justify Brown's behavior; however, if we are to be culturally empathetic and develop cultural literacy should not we, as audience members and members of society, work to have a broader view of the entire situation and not just empathy for the victim or the group facing a disruption?. Understanding, as a potential for cultural literacy, should move beyond the scope of our immediate cultural group. This understanding can develop from and through our interactions with the representations

presented in a text. Yet, to facilitate this, we must acknowledge our cultural filters and make adjustments accordingly. If we empathize with a particular individual, group, or side, we need to question why we do this. Also, we need to consider how we might use our reactions as audience members to change the way we interact with others.

James Phelan discusses the role of the audience and its reactions in his “Six Principles of a Rhetorical Theory of Narrative” (2007). Within these six principles, two of them deal with the audience in a manner that aide in understanding how reflection is filtered by the audience:

The fourth principle is about the nature of readerly interests and responses. As flesh and blood readers enter the authorial and narrative audiences, they develop interests and responses of three kinds, each related to a particular component of the narrative: mimetic, thematic, and synthetic. Responses to the mimetic component involve an audience’s interest in the characters as possible people and in the narrative world as like our own, that is, either our actual world or one that is possible given what we know and assume about the actual world. Responses to the mimetic component include our evolving judgments of characters and our subsequent emotions, desires, hopes, expectations, satisfactions, and disappointments. Responses to the thematic components involve an interest in the characters as representatives of classes of people (...). Responses to the synthetic component involve an audience’s interest in, and attention to, the characters and to the larger narrative as a made object. (210)

With respect to cultural literacy, responses to the mimetic and thematic components are the most relevant, as are the narrative judgments of the interpretive and ethical elements that Phelan goes on to explain in the fifth principle.

The fifth principle involves the significance of narrative judgments for the multilayered nature of narrative communication. The approach assumes that readers make three main types of narrative judgments, each of which has the potential to overlap with or affect the other two: interpretive judgments, ethical judgments, and aesthetic judgments. Interpretive judgments are about the nature of actions or other elements of the narrative (...). Ethical judgments are about the telling and the told, that is, the motives and the actions of characters and the values implicit in the narrator's relation to the tale and the audience, and about the underlying value system of the author and the way her relation to narrator, tale, and audience relates to that value system. (...) Aesthetic judgments are about the artistic quality of the narrative and of its parts. (212)

Even though it is not explicitly stated, the different reactions that audiences can have do not have fixed borders; this allows individuals to have complex reactions that promote reflection and discourse. These types of responses (the mimetic and thematic responses and the interpretive and ethical judgments) are more directly connected to how we see ourselves in relation to the story than the synthetic components and the aesthetic judgments. This connection is related to the cultural filters that are already in place and that influence both critical distance and dialogue. With this in mind, we can consider the responses to various narratives representing the attack on Polis and the dialogue and reflection they present.

Continuing with Wallace's blog posts, in a narrative response to the interview Polis gave to the *Baltimore Sun*, he states, "[a]dmittedly, the blacks have a point: suppose you are enjoying a nice McRib sandwich in a 365Black restaurant when a drunk tranny comes inside and starts making a scene over his 'civil right' to enter and use the women's bathroom. That wasn't cool,

bru [sic]" ("BRA Files: Baltimore Sun Interviews McDonald's Beating Victim" par. 5). This comment prompted a number of responses that can be discussed using Phelan's principles. On April 24, 2011, an individual with the username mike responds:

Admittedly "the blacks" had a point? did "the blacks" have names, or were they just generic "blacks?" ... and since when is it not cool to assert one's civil rights? your writing is vitriolic and disturbing. get help. diversity didn't assault anyone here, but you tarnished humanity.

Mike's response demonstrates an ethical judgment (to use Phelan's term) based on the fact that Wallace did not use the names of Polis's attackers; he implies that it is racial prejudice that keeps Wallace from giving them any form of individual identity. This works with the interpretive judgment of the motives behind Wallace's mention of civil rights, giving the impression that just as Wallace is asserting his right to free speech, Polis should be able to make use of her civil rights. There is also an obvious emotional element to mike's disappointment over the stand that Wallace is taking and sympathy that mike has for Polis. This response is evident in the line, "your writing is vitriolic and disturbing. get help. diversity didn't assault anyone here, but you tarnished humanity." Mike's use of less commonly used words has the possibility of being a double insult to Wallace; they imply that mike doubts that Wallace is smart enough to know what these words mean. To avoid this second implication, mike would have needed to use similar language throughout his posted response and not just in the sentence used to insult Wallace. Mike's post offers limited critical distance due to a hostile tone, which appears to offer a challenge to Wallace to make a direct response. As mike took such immediate offense to Wallace's failure to include the names of "the blacks," he failed to notice (or possibly was not aware of the fact) that the names of the attackers had not been released at the time of Wallace's

initial post. In general, making audiences aware of the way they and others respond to the representations in narrative adds depth to reflective dialogues. Audiences, as seen above, cross through different responses to a narrative and, as citizens, they need to be encouraged not only to transition that ability into their interactions in everyday life, but to work also on developing critical distance. Abbot, explains that:

[Narrative] is found not just in the arts but everywhere in the ordinary course of people's lives, many times a day. The last point is especially important. We are all narrators, though we may rarely be aware of it. A statement as simple as "I took the car to work" qualifies as narrative. [It is] a human phenomenon that is not restricted to literature, film, and theater, but is found in all activities that involve the representation of events in time. (xii)

Abbot takes audience reaction and participation out of the realm of high culture and places it in the hands of everyday life and people, where, as Raymond Williams suggests (1989), culture should be. Therefore, even as we discuss the employment of narrative representation and reflection, we need to consider how reactions and responses can be altered in day-to-day interactions between people and not just interactions between people and narrative. This seems more possible if anyone and everyone is considered a narrator and/or a writer.

Narrative: Identity and Representation

As narrative moves from being a large-scale concept created by Writers (those seemingly mythical beings that sit in drafty towers, slaving over every word written) to existing in the hands of everyday writers (people who send text messages, post status updates to Facebook, or write blog entries), Richard Kearney's (2002) take on narrative and identity comes into play.

Kearney states:

When someone asks you who you are, you tell your story. That is, you recount your present condition in the light of past memories and future anticipations. You interpret where you are now in terms of where you have come from and where you are going to. And so doing you give a sense of yourself as a narrative identity that perdures and coheres over a lifetime. (4)

Now narrative, narrative discourse, and audience reaction become tied not only to reflection but also to the construction of identity. As author and audience reflect on the past, their present interactions and subsequent understanding of their future and identity become fluid. It is this fluidity that can facilitate cultural literacy. If we acknowledge that identity is in an ongoing state of development, being culturally literate or illiterate becomes a part of an individual's or society's identity.

Through narrative, the representation and understanding of individuals and events affects the formation of identity. In Kearney's estimation:

Every human existence is a life in search of a narrative. This is not simply because it strives to discover a pattern to cope with the experience of chaos and confusion. It is also because each human life is always already an implicit story. Our very finitude constitutes us as being who, to put it badly, are born at the beginning and die at the end. And this gives a temporal structure to our lives which seek some kind of significance in terms of referrals back to our past (memory) and forward to our future (projection). So that we might say that our lives are constantly interpreting themselves—pre-reflectively and pre-consciously—in terms of beginnings, middles and ends (though not necessarily in

that order). In short, our existence is already to some extent pre-plotted before we ever consciously seek out a narrative in which to reinscribe our life as life-history.

(129)

Representation offers the possibility of interpretation and reinterpretation of narrative by both the author and the audience. Yet, this possibility also holds true for individual and societal identities. In terms of the Polis case for example, individuals gave their own interpretation of Hackett's identity based on his role as the cameraman. One reader of the article "McDonald's Employee Took Credit For Filming Brutal Beating In Baltimore Fast Food Joint" published on thesmokinggun.com on April 22 (4 days after the incident) stated, "RIIIGGHHTTTT! Just look at all those grand specimens of black 'men' who go to a defenseless persons aid. Get real. Get to church. You need to ask for forgiveness" (Sameasitevawaz). This comment demonstrates that the author sees Hackett's identity as someone who is less than a man and in need of redemption. Hackett's decision to film the attack on Polis placed his very identity in a situation where it was open to interpretation by the audience. He became a representation of "grand specimens of black 'men'" and McDonald's employees. This type of interpretation/reinterpretation helps keep narrative and our identities from suffering the finitude that afflicts a lifespan; as "lives are constantly interpreting themselves" the effect on identity construction does not end with the individual, but expands to the society of which the individual is a part. Identity also moves from being solely an individual's choice to being formed by how society perceives the individual. This coincides with Kearney's explanation that:

Once one recognises that one's identity is fundamentally narrative in character, one discovers an ineradicable openness and indeterminacy at the root of collective memory. Each nation discovers that it is at heart an "imagined community" (in

Benedict Anderson's phrase), that is, a narrative construction to be reinvented and reconstructed again and again. The benefit of such discovery is that it becomes more difficult to make the mistake of taking oneself literally, of assuming that one's inherited identity goes without saying. And that is why I would argue that the tendency of nation towards xenophobia or insularity can be resisted by its own narrative resources to imagine itself otherwise—through its own eyes or those of others. (81)

It is possible that the danger of taking oneself and one's culture too literally prohibits the development of cultural literacy. In the case of Polis, insularity led to individuals that were willing to watch someone classified as Other or different being beat into a seizure. When individuals allow themselves to imagine belonging to cultural groups with permeable boundaries, rather than single, insular cultural group, a sort of cultural empathy occurs. This, in turn, can promote cultural literacy, as the disruptions and differences represented in narrative or actual life are reflected on rather than dismissed.

The differences and disruptions captured in narrative are often negotiable representations of experiences in an individual's or a society's life-history. Stuart Hall (1997), who has devoted considerable time to the study of culture, identity, and representation, states “[r]epresentation is a complex business and, especially when dealing with ‘difference,’ it engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels than we can explain in a simple, common-sense way” (“Introduction” 226). When we are open to the differences of others, the possibility for hostility is diminished: representation of what is different is not dismissed out of hand as having no place in an individual's own life history. Representation, in the context of narrative, presents an opportunity for critical distance that

allows for reflective dialogue, which can foster a shift from cultural empathy into cultural literacy. The ability to empathize with an individual is necessary to facilitate the positive development of cultural literacy. Empathy implies a sense of understanding of and sensitivity to another's situation. Empathy speaks to a connection that we have to the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another. Without an initial layer of cultural empathy, the development of cultural literacy is likely to never begin or remain in the domain of the minority who, as Smith explained it, "had the opportunity to learn many things about them [dominant cultural group], because we watched them. They did not work in our homes, or for our businesses, so they never had the opportunity to learn about us the way we learned about them" (*Listening Between the Lines* 70). Cultural literacy gained by this method is not as positive, because it is a unilateral experience prompted by necessity and not an exchange promoted through empathy. This is where the role of narrative becomes significant because it cultivates exchange and empathy. By encountering representation from the perspective of narrative, the ensuing distance becomes a safe zone from which difference can be met in a relatively nonthreatening environment. This is not to say that there is no danger involved in entering a narrative space promoting reflection; there is, however, a sense of security in being involved with events as an observer instead of as an active participant.

As previously mentioned, not all of the narrative responses to the Polis incident were in favor of the victim. Wallace's blogged responses initially presented a narrative that was in favor of placing both parties involved in the role of Other, demonstrating a lack of empathy for either side. As Wallace continued to post brief narratives concerning the case, Polis's position as a "White" individual was enough to have Wallace acting as an advocate of sorts. Yet, even his advocacy is not without reservations. On April 24, 2011, Wallace puts forth a call to action: "I'm

calling on my fellow ‘white supremacists’ to contact Morris and Potok and urge them to be more attentive to the suffering and legal needs of Chrissy Lee Polis who is a White victim of an anti-LGBT hate crime” (“BRA Files: Why Is The SPLC So Quiet About Chrissy Lee Polis?” par. 11).⁵ In this instance, Polis is not really a representation of a transgendered woman who was the victim of a hate crime. Polis is instead a “White” who is being used to point out the perceived flaws in the SPLC by a self-proclaimed white supremacist. The attack on Polis becomes a justification to flame an organization that, in general, opposes the views held by Wallace.⁶ Through his narrative discourse, Wallace creates a representation of events in a manner that does not necessarily promote reflection in his audience so much as it seeks to obtain a specific outcome—making the SPLC look bad. Yet, even though Wallace is using his interpretation of events for a particular motive, his audience still responds according to Phelan’s principles, especially in respect to the ethical judgments, as one reader responds,

SPLC has attacked Christian conservative groups recently for “hate” because they were pro-traditional marriage and opposed “gay marriage.”

So to the SPLC, it’s “anti-gay hate” when Christians support traditional marriage, but it’s not “anti-gay hate” when Blacks beat a transgender near to death.

The SPLC has ZERO credibility. (Wandrin)

This reader has problems with the value system of the SPLC as represented through Wallace’s narrative. This reader believes Wallace has damaged the group’s credibility and, because his or her comment is public, will now affect other readers’ responses to and reflections on the

⁵ The SPLC is the Southern Poverty Law Center, which was founded in the 1970s by Morris Dees in order to promote civil rights.

⁶ Used in this context “to flame” is “an angry, hostile, or abusive electronic message” (as defined by Merriam-Webster).

situation. The public forum and potential for anonymity offered through this blog allows audience/readers safely to become participants in the creation of an ongoing narrative dialogue.

This element of safety is also available for those who are active participants in any moment being narrated, because they have the distance of time to present a reflective buffer, such as the narrative presented by Polis in her interview with the *Baltimore Sun*. In this interview, it is daytime and Polis is standing outside in front of a brick building. There are no people around her other than the reporter and cameraperson, who are an apparently empathetic and immediate audience. The intended audience may or may not be sensitive to Polis's situation; however, from the safety of a recorded interview, Polis does not have to be concerned with coming face-to-face with this next level of audience. This interview also presents the audience with direct, if secondhand, involvement in events from Polis's point-of-view. With respect to this distance, Kearney states:

As well as being distanced, we need to sufficiently *involved* in the action to feel that it matters. Catharsis, as noted, purges us by *pity* as well as fear. It comprises a double attitude of both empathy and detachment. (...) The narrated action of a drama, for example, solicits a mode of sympathy more extensive and resonant than that experienced in ordinary life. And it does so not simply because it enjoys the poetic licence to suspend our normal protective reflexes (which guard us from pain) but also because it amplifies the range of those we might empathise with – reaching beyond family, friends and familiars to all kinds of foreigners. (138)

Empathy paired with detachment allows catharsis the opportunity to bridge internal and external gaps. We see an emphasis on moving past comfort zones to engage with the representations of difference offered through narrative. Whether it is a difference in points of view, cultural

difference, or physical difference, narrative allows us to become involved in nearly any action and begin to move through sympathy to empathy and on to literacy. The narratives created by Wallace are from his comfort zone; however, his interpretations push his audience beyond complacency and into a dialogue with him and each other. This dialogue is a reflective processing of the issues presented by Wallace and other readers. This critical dialogue presents reflection on several levels. The first is Wallace's narrative response to the original incident and video. Then, there is the dialogue between the readers through their comments to his post. These levels are easily visible; however, the level that begins after people post a comment—when they work through reflection privately—is not easily seen and/or measured. This level of dialogue may be the most important with respect to cultivating cultural empathy and cultural literacy, which affects identity formation. We need to encourage people to use that reflective narrative process in a way that provides active critical distance and open dialogue across borders. This will help us to avoid being insular and promote the acceptance of different voices and interpretations.

By examining the documentary dramas constructed by Smith in conjunction with blogs and the comments constructed within the blogosphere, we can analyze how different voices and interpretations create American cultural literacy narratives at the level of both high and popular culture and how these narratives function as tools for reflection by the average citizen when narrative dialogue is used to explore traumatic events. Smith's documentary dramas, as an element of high culture, offer audience members narrative dialogues created by and represented through Smith. In her documentary dramas, Smith blends high and low culture by presenting the views of everyday citizens alongside those of celebrities, elite academics, and political figures. In terms of blogs, as representatives of popular culture, the audience is presented with an interactive, internet-based narrative interpretation of an event as seen through the eyes of the

writer of the blog entry. These two variations on culture connect through Williams's explanation that:

Culture is ordinary (...). Every human society has its own shape, its own purpose, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land. The growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind. The making of a mind is, first, the slow learning of shapes, purposes, and meanings, so that work, observation and communication are possible. Then, second, but equal in importance, is the testing of these in experience, the making of new observations, comparisons, and meanings. (4)

Both Smith's documentary dramas and blogs are examples of members of a society attempting to find common meanings and directions while engaging in active, open narrative dialogue. Each individual (through representation, interpretation, or interaction) has the opportunity to reflect on how they learn the shapes, purposes, and meanings surrounding their identity and the identity of their cultural affiliations. These two genres open up paths of observation and communication within society as members of the audience are able to craft their own narrative responses to events as each individual reflects on their connection (or lack of connection) to both the primary event and the representation of that event. This interaction presents audience members with a form of civic engagement that functions as an element in their respective ongoing social dramas. By using these narratives to observe the paths social dramas take, they can participate in a form of civic engagement that allows for reflection on the cultures and identities represented within

the narrative and the necessity for constructing new observations, comparisons, and meanings. This process gives them an opportunity to take a closer look at the manner in which cultural empathy or cultural literacy influences how identities shift or remain unchanged through the procession of a social drama.

Chapter one of this dissertation argues that Hirsch's definition of cultural literacy must be updated so that it focuses on the behaviors, practices, beliefs, and ideals of an individual (any individual) and how each of these areas connects to the socially constructed nature of literacy. Following the research on (Street, Flower, Gee, Delpit, Lu) social and community literacy, this chapter looks at how cultural differences are approached, understood, and negotiated on a daily basis and how narrative can be employed to analyze cultural empathy through individual and group interactions as seen on blogs such as *Gawker*.

In Chapter two, I employ Victor Turner's theory of social drama to examine the role of narrative and reflection during incidents of social conflict in America; I focus on the effect narrative and reflection have on the facilitation of cultural empathy and the development of cultural literacy. My analysis considers the manner in which cultural literacy can be measured and developed through the reflexive activity of reading and writing about cultural events. In this chapter, I discuss 9/11 in terms of Turner's theory; my analysis suggests that both cultural literacy and illiteracy are made apparent during these conflicts and that the use of narrative reflection creates an opportunity for the development of cultural literacy.

In Chapter three, I turn to Anna Deavere Smith and her solo performed documentary dramas and apply the theory presented in Chapters one and two to them. The conclusion presents a discussion of pedagogical approaches for implementing course objectives that place students in

situations of social or cultural conflict through their interaction with narrative (both those written by them as well those written by others).

Chapter 1: Cultural Literacy and Literacy Narratives

My interest in this first chapter is not to enter into a discussion of what literacy means or to analyze the history of literacy, although I will touch on both subjects briefly. My interest in this first chapter is to reintroduce the subject of cultural literacy to literacy studies; the approach that I will use, however, will be one that has not been fully explored. Following this, I will look at how narrative enhances our understanding of literacy and culture. This discussion will incorporate the narrative discussion present in blog entries such as those found on *Gawker* and the documentary dramas of Anna Deavere Smith. Before I can present in-depth discussions of cultural literacy or narrative and the roles they play in American lives, I must touch on what it traditionally means to be literate in this socially dynamic era.

Following the New Literacy Studies approach, there is no cut-and-dry definition for what literacy means. In *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography and Education* (1995), Brian Street explains:

The trend has been towards a broader consideration of literacy as a social practice and in a cross-cultural perspective. Within this framework an important shift has been the rejection by many writers of the dominant view of literacy as a “neutral,” technical skill, and the conceptualization of literacy instead as an ideological practice, implicated in power relations and embedded in specific cultural meanings and practices, what I have described as the “New Literacy Studies” (cf. Street, 1993a and b; cf. also Gee, 1990). (1)

Street is stressing the contexts that surround a text and the ideological miasma in which those contexts exist. Pulling in the importance of ideology and the role it plays in power relations in respect to literacy reveals the bias that can envelop issues of what it means to be literate in society or, more importantly, what it means to be illiterate. The concept of illiteracy, according to William Fagan in "Literacy and Cultural Thoughtfulness" (1996), involves a stigma that makes addressing the social context particularly important, as "[t]he main criterion for literacy is whether the individual functions adequately within his/her cultural context. (...) It must be emphasized that the individual is not subservient to the context. Rather, the individual interprets context including cultural wisdom in creating his/her own role, his/her own self-image" (5). By focusing on the manner in which illiteracy is socially constructed, the stigma and power imbalance may be reduced or even abolished. Robert Yagelski, in *Literacy Matters: Writing and Reading the Social Self* (2000), enhances this notion of contextualization, stating:

We must conceive of literacy not simply as a social and cultural activity, but as an inevitably local act manifested in specific statements and specific texts, as a set of social and cultural practices that play out in myriad ways in the individual acts of writing and reading completed by individual writers and readers; literacy is thus a function of discourse, but at the same time it is a product of individual agents working within and sometimes against discourses—a manifestation, that is, of a writer's circumscribed and situated agency. (82)

By looking at both Street and Yagelski, we see that there is a spiraling connection between the influence of context on situated agency and the changes that enhanced situated agency can feed into the surrounding context. This is relevant in a society where the dominant ideological group has more control over the construction of local context than minority groups. Socially

constructed literacy implies that this constructed meaning is created by the manufactured social situation from which literacy is presented and that shapes the context in which literacy is utilized and defined. Then, with the addition of Yagelski, we find that local context manipulates the agency of the individual; when these concepts are paired with issues of power, the intentional formation of advantageous contexts, as well as the destruction of competing contexts, becomes a concern. The ability to manipulate social contexts rewards a lack of empathy on the part of the group perceived as literate; there is no apparent benefit to developing empathy for those who do not possess the desired literacy. In the case of literacy with written texts, the majority or dominant group fails to work toward empathy. In respect to cultural literacy, the reverse is true. In order to determine potential paths for narrative reflection and facilitate cultural empathy, it is necessary to understand the social nature of literacy and the influence it has on identity formation.

Social Approaches to Defining Literacy

Attempting to define literacy, while having already acknowledged the shifty context that it inhabits, is tricky unless one is satisfied with a basic definition — that literacy is the ability to read and write. Even such a plain definition has problems as we are forced to ask, “What are we reading and writing?” In *The Labyrinths of Literacy: Reflections on Literacy Past and Present* (1987), Walter Graff explains that three tasks are required for the interpretation and study of literacy. He states:

The first is a consistent definition that serves comparatively over time and across space. Basic or primary levels of reading and writing constitute the only flexible and reasonable indications or signs that meet this essential criterion (...) [Next the] *second* task in defining literacy (...) is to stress, to underscore the fact, that

literacy is above all *a technology or set of techniques for communications and for decoding and reproducing written or printed materials*: it cannot be taken as anything more or less. (...) [Finally, l]iteracy must be seen as a basis, a foundation, not as an end or conclusion. (emphasis added 6-10)

For Graff, a basic definition is essential, because it provides a solid baseline for flexible applications. However, Graff also specifies “written or printed materials” in respect to “communication,” which limits the applicability of the basic definition. This conflicts with what Graff later discusses in terms of multiple literacies. He goes on to say:

There are many kinds of “literacies,” a crucial point insufficiently recognized. We need to distinguish not only between basic or elementary kinds of literacy and higher levels of education and schooling but also among the alphabetic, visual and artistic, spatial and graphic (what geographers are beginning to call “graphicacy”), mathematical (“numeracy”), symbolic, technological, and mechanical among other varieties of literacy. (...) [A]n understanding of any one type of literacy requires special care in qualifying terms and specifying what precisely is meant by reference to “literacy.” These many “literacies,” we note, are all conceptually distinct but nonetheless interrelated. (20)

Graff acknowledges numerous types of literacy; however, not all of these forms of literacy focus on “written or printed materials.” Graff admits that his focus is on alphabetic literacy and this, paired with his emphasis on “written or printed materials,” illuminates the significance of replicability. He follows this notion of replicability by stating, “The history of literacy shows clearly that there is no one route to universal literacy, and there is no one path to succeed in the achievement of mass literacy” (20). This is important to remember when there are so many

political and academic groups pushing for standardized academic literacy. Standard academic literacy has tended to emphasize one route, one correct path that must be taken if one is to become successfully literate. One route, one correct path sounds too close to one identity, one ideology, one homogenous society. A standard academic literacy ignores the variety of literacies available and the influence society has. This approach deemphasizes critical thinking skills. Considering the desire to foster critical thinking, standard academic literacy becomes problematic in terms of being clearly definable and quantifiable. In order to move away from this rigid concept of standard academic literacy and Graff's desire for flexibility, we come again to Brian Street and his connection to New Literacy Studies.

In *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (1984), Street represents himself as a proponent of New Literacy Studies. He looks at literacy "as a shorthand for the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing" (1). He further explains:

What the particular practices and concepts of reading and writing are for a given society depends upon the context; that they are already embedded in an ideology and cannot be isolated or treated as "neutral" or merely "technical." (...) What practices are taught and how they are imparted depends upon the nature of the social formation. (1)

Where Graff stresses the technical nature of literacy, Street argues that literacy should not be perceived as a mere technical skill to be taught but as a skill that may arise out of social formations, formations that we need to understand and incorporate into our construction of literacy. Within this understanding, there is no one standard societal context into which the culture of literacy fits. This implies there is no one form of literacy or one cultural group. Hall explains:

Culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings—the “giving and taking of meaning”—between the members of a society or group. To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other. Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and ‘making sense’ of the world, in broadly similar ways.

(“Introduction” 2)

Literacy is concerned with the same thing with which Hall claims culture is concerned.

Individuals can belong to multiple cultures, and they can be literate in a number of areas, which allows them to meaningfully interpret their surroundings. Acknowledging this multiplicity within our cultural heritage can lead individuals to the ability to understand, to varying degrees, the culture of another as one can have a basic grasp of what it means to be fully literate in an unfamiliar field.

As a continuation of his argument for understanding literacy as socially constructed and controlled, Street wrote *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography and Education* (1995). He makes a more direct connection to the practical nature of literacy and literacy studies. Reacting to the potentially objective and dominating concept of a standard literacy, Street discusses the impact it would have on individual and national identities:

The pedagogized literacy that we have been discussing becomes, then... an organizing concept around which ideas of social identity and value are defined; what kinds of collective identity we subscribe to, what kind of nation we want to belong to, are encapsulated within apparently disinterested accounts of the

function, purpose and educational necessity of this kind of literacy. Literacy, in this sense, becomes a symbolic key to many of society's gravest problems: issues of ethnic identity, conflict, achievement (or underachievement) can be diverted into accounts of how literacy acquisition can be improved and the distribution of literacy enhanced (...). (125)

This is a key concept, because the formation of identity through narrative requires a certain degree of literacy. It would seem that, in order for an identity to be altered, a degree of literacy would need to be developed. If we consider the social nature of reading and writing, and the context in which it occurs, as Street suggests we can avoid individual and national identities that are shaped by rigid dominant ideologies that attempt to force all cultures into one predetermined mold. It also works in tandem with my views on forming a culturally literate society. In both instances, "literacy learning is not just about acquiring content but about learning a process. (...) The student is learning cultural models of identity and personhood, not just how to decode script or to write a particular hand" (Street, *Social Literacies* 140). In this case, literacy becomes less prescriptive and more approachable. There are, then, advantages to moving our understanding of literacy outside of the classroom, with its single academic literacy, into the multiple literacies discussed by Graff. This then connects two other scholars with our discussion, Yagelski and James P. Gee, who stress the importance of considering the variety of literacies that individuals possess and how this influences their identities.

Robert P. Yagelski's *Literacy Matters: Writing and Reading the Social Self* (2000) is a study that combines Yagelski's own experiences with acquiring academic literacy with those of his students. He stresses the manner in which academic practices fail to connect with students and their lives outside of an academic setting. The main point to consider from Yagelski's work,

as it will connect with Gee, is that “Literacy...is at heart an effort to construct a self within ever-shifting discourses in order to participate in those discourses; that effort is always local in the sense that any construction of a self within discourse, although inherently social, is mediated by a variety of factors unique to a specific act of reading and writing within a specific situation” (9). Yagelski’s work becomes a thread that connects Graff, Street, and Gee before coming to his own conclusion that we need to make connections between “a way of understanding and engaging in literacy that enables [students] to imagine themselves as active participants in their world; to do so is to help them find ways to write themselves into the discourse that affect their lives and thus to begin to close the gap between school-sponsored literacy and the vital role of literacy in their lives as citizens” (173). Yagelski’s concept of citizenry complicates the notion of the social situation by introducing the role that students or individuals will have as citizens. By participating as a citizens, students would contribute to an ongoing narrative like that of the Polis case. Then it is no longer a question of academic literacy versus home literacy, but of how literacy transitions from being merely a learned academic skill to being a beneficial aspect of citizenship. In addition, reflection through narrative becomes a part of what it means to be a citizen, and the identity formed through such pursuits becomes tied to dialogue. Working from Gee’s concepts of Discourse (*Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* (2006) and “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction and What Is Literacy?” (2001)), Yagelski is able to offer an argument for presenting literacy in a way that allows students or individuals to construct an identity that goes beyond academic essays, an identity that spans multiple literacies without throwing out their initial home-based literacies. This relationship with home-based literacies generates better public understanding and awareness for students/citizens because they are able to connect their individual identity to a world they participate in rather than a world that

only acts upon them. Identities that are not restricted to one literacy, but that move through various literacies, point to the work that Gee does as he presents a definition of literacy that turns it into what he calls Discourse. Thus, literacy and identity form a dialogue through the understanding of Discourse.

James Gee's *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* figures heavily into my understanding of cultural literacy and its place in society. Gee defines Discourses:

Ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or "types of people") by specific *groups of people*, whether families of a certain sort, lawyers of a certain sort, bikers of a certain sort (...). Discourses are ways of being "people like us." They are "ways of being in the world:" they are "forms of life." They are, thus, always and everywhere *social* and products of social histories. (viii)

Gee continues the trend of linking literacy and discourse to the social circumstances in which they are found; however, Gee also acknowledges the transient nature of literacy, discourse, and identity. Gee clearly explains that we do not belong to just one discourse community and that we will, in fact, belong to multiple discourse communities throughout our lives. However, the salient point here is that, for Gee, Discourse encompasses more than just reading and writing; it also includes "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking" (viii). Thus, we get a more complete notion of individuals and their identity as opposed to only their reading and writing habits and abilities. He also opens up the concept of being literate in a way that involves more than reading and writing texts, because individuals can read or interpret the way people behave, interact, and speak. As engaged citizens, therefore, we are interpreting and being

interpreted by those around us. Literacy becomes a matter of navigating our beliefs through the beliefs of others, through the way others behave, interact, and speak. We must consider how literacy moves in the community and academic spheres and how our identity is formed through such interactions.

Literacy at Work

Linda Flower's *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement* (2008) looks at the connection between social situations and the academy. In this study, Flower looks at the Community Literacy Center in Pittsburgh, PA (CLC) and the interactions between mentors from Carnegie Mellon University and urban teenagers as they worked through issues that the teenagers feel are problems in the community. Flower argues that community literacy projects promote rhetorical agency:

Community literacy makes a distinctive contribution to our thinking about agency and rhetoric by demonstrating that rhetorical agency can be the work of everyday people. Such people may indeed stand outside the discourse of privilege or power. But they are nevertheless carrying out the demanding work of discovery and change that is at the heart of rhetoric. The teens, tenants, mothers, low-wage workers, and college students of community literacy take rhetorical agency not just by speaking up but by acts of engaged interpretation and public dialogue carried out in the service of personal and social transformations. (206)

Active agency, created through involvement outside of one's expected discourse community, is a repeated concept found in socially constructed literacy. Considered from the angle of rhetorical agency, and the verbal and written narratives created by the everyday individual to make improvements and changes to their communities, there is a sense that the social contexts

surrounding literacy are not set in stone but are malleable. This moldable nature can then be attached to the identities that are constructed by those in the community literacy projects. Even though it may seem that each participant already has a constructed identity, each individual can find there is still room for growth and adaptation as he or she navigates the beliefs and actions of others. For example, Flower discusses the involvement of a teenager named Shirley. Shirley was paired with a student from Carnegie Mellon; Shirley's partner, however, was "not an advisor, guide, or teacher but a supporter whose job is to draw out Shirley's expertise and best thinking" (55). Flower looks at how the urban teenagers grew in their understanding of rhetorical agency (even if they do not know the term) and how the mentors understood the influence their standard academic literacy had in a community setting. Rhetorical agency works in both directions in this case. This is not just about an authority figure or member of the dominant discourse handing out her or his ideology to a potentially marginalized group; the process increases the importance of socially constructed literacy and shifting contexts in the construction of socially aware citizens. As Flower explains:

Community literacy, you might say, rewrites the script in decidedly relational terms as "an everyday person rising to reflective engagement over issues of shared concern." Rhetorical agency is an interdependent, not an independent action—however, choosing and rising to take it is a significant and a personal choice. (207)

Not only the social context, but also the manner in which individuals work together to engage in rhetorical activity is important. In the context of the CLC, Shirley and her mentor were part of a group that worked on a booklet concerning stress and teenagers (60). Through this process, the teenagers created a narrative. Shirley personally contributed a description of an "encounter with

police and racism that became coupled in her mind with the recent murder of a classmate [which] fueled her own stress and fear” (60). The interaction between the individuals in the group demonstrates Phelan’s claim that:

The rhetorical approach conceives of narrative as purposive communicative acts. In this view, narrative is not just a representation of events but is also itself an event—one in which someone is doing something with a representation of events. (...) The focus on purposes included a recognition that narrative communication is a multi-layered event, one in which tellers seek to engage and influence their audiences’ cognition, emotions, and values. (203)

This project created a narrative dialogue that began within the CLC and extended to the community beyond the center. The narrative became a representation of the individuals’ identities (found in their personal descriptions), the teenagers from the community, and the combined group made up of the teenagers and their mentors. The narrative then presents the layered identity of the individuals in addition to the layered narrative dialogue they created in order to take a stand on an issue important to the teenagers.

Ellen Cushman focuses on promoting action through the combined efforts of multiple individuals in her article “The Rhetorician as Agent of Social Change” (1996). For Cushman, the elite academic needs to venture forth from his or her ivory tower to use his or her knowledge and abilities for the good of the community. Scholars need to become activists for the communities they are either a part of or trying to hold themselves apart from. Cushman expands this basic concept by stating that academics and scholars need to do more than use their abilities, they need to empower others. She states that:

Activism means accepting a civic duty to empower people with our positions, a type of leftist stealing from the rich to give to the poor. To empower, as I use it, means: (a) to enable someone to achieve a goal by providing resources for them; (b) to facilitate actions—particularly those associated with language and literacy; (c) to lend our power or status to forward people’s achievement. (14)

Cushman’s view of the activist academic combines Flower’s rhetorical agency with Street’s socially constructed literacy in order to bring the everyday literacy practices of community members into a prominent position. This position indicates that these literacy practices are important not only to the people who work with them on a daily basis, but to academics and scholars as well. Literacy becomes a beneficial aspect of everybody’s life. Thus, literacy events become a part of the everyday, not just a part of scholarly pursuits. In this case, the internet offers a valuable resource for the everyday individual to achieve rhetorical agency. In the case of the blog *Occidental Dissent*, for example, Wallace presented posts that created a public forum for responders to share their thoughts on the Polis incident and even offered calls to action. Perhaps academics prefer their ivory tower, because it allows them to maintain (the illusion) control over the rhetorical situation and social contexts in which literacy is fostered. If literacy is constructed in social contexts, it is influenced by the cultures to which we belong. Thus far we have primarily discussed the nature of literacy as it applies to reading and writing standard texts. However, in shifting my focus, cultural literacy revolves around the ability to understand (and not just recognize) the different cultures that exist around us.

Cultural Literacy

In the Introduction, I outlined the manner in which E. D. Hirsch applied the concept of cultural literacy to education. His view, that being culturally literate means an individual has the

tacit knowledge necessary to read and understand standard texts, disregards the multitude of cultures present in the United States. In addition, his position advocates placing the power to determine the knowledge necessary for cultural literacy in the hands of carefully selected scholars. It is this point that often causes the most contention between Hirsch and other literacy scholars. Brian Street and Harvey Graff, for example, consider the argument for and understanding of cultural literacy to be superficial, naïve, and overly prescriptive. They concentrate more on the term “literacy” as opposed to the entire concept of cultural literacy. Other scholars (Bizzell, Daniel, Reynolds, Warnok, Worsham) who have used Hirsch in their discussion of literacy in education have also focused on the tacit knowledge that he presents; one of their major concerns is “how canonical knowledge gets established” (Bizzell 147). This group is concerned with the manner of selecting the knowledge that constitutes cultural literacy as Hirsch defines it. We need a definition of cultural literacy that takes into account Brockmeier and Olson’s (2002) conclusion that “[i]n many contexts, the term ‘culture’ could easily be replaced by such terms as ‘society,’ ‘history,’ ‘social representations,’ or ‘politics’ without any loss or gain in the meaning (3). Wendy Parkinson and Sherryl Saunder’s definition of cultural literacy offers this flexibility with their focus on how individuals “participate in and moderate their own culture and understand, negotiate and participate to some worthwhile extent in the culture of others” (4). The project with which Parkinson and Saunder worked in the Brisbane school system revolved around education in the liberal arts; however, one way that cultural literacy can be presented that keeps it from being only connected to the liberal arts is through the concept of critical affirmation.

Min-Zhan Lu's concept of critical affirmation is a key concept in my view of literacy and literacy's role in cultural literacy. In her article "Redefining the Literate Self: The Politics of Critical Affirmation" (1999), Lu associates four goals with critical affirmation:

- (1) To end oppression rather than to empower a particular form of self, group, or culture;
- (2) To grapple with one's privileges as well as one's experience of exclusion;
- (3) To approach more respectfully and responsibly those histories and experiences which appear different from what one calls one's own; and
- (4) To affirm a yearning for individual agency shared by individuals across social divisions without losing sight of the different material circumstances against which each of us must struggle when enacting such a yearning. (173)

These goals mean slightly different things depending on if one is part of a dominant group or a marginalized group, in addition, some of the goals are more applicable to one or the other group. The first two are universal in their wording while the third and fourth have a stronger resonance with dominant and marginalized groups respectively. Although both the third and fourth goals can be applied to the opposing groups, it is often the marginalized who need to work toward achieving individual agency and a stronger public voice (see Cushman and Flower). On the other hand, dominant groups need to look outside of their own histories and experiences to those around them. Cultural literacy, in light of critical affirmation and Parkinson and Saunders's article, is a tricky skill to teach as learning about the Other does not passively occur. Cultural literacy is often best served through the formation of narrative that allows the writers and the audience to reflect on experiences and employ what Kearney refers to as "narrative remembrance" where we "can ...represent the past as it really was or reinvent it as it might have

been” (69). From both of these practices, dialogue allows individuals to reflect on their situations and the manner in which they relate to each other.

Cultural literacy develops through a process of dialogue with both the people and artifacts of another culture. Returning to the goals presented by Lu, the fourth one acts as a starting place for this dialogue (on an internal and external level) as well as a beginning point for all of the goals. If an individual starts with the fourth goal and works back toward the first one listed, cultural empathy is slowly obtained through the dialogue inspired by the process. The fourth goal involves coming to terms with our own agency, which then can lead to third goal where we approach the experiences of Others with respect and responsibility. Once this understanding of the Other is achieved, we can then address the privileges that we have had or the exclusions that we have faced (goal two) before we attempt to end oppression of the Other. Individuals generally learn another skill that connects to cultural literacy while working through this process (such as art appreciation, world literature, or composition). In this way, cultural literacy skills function in similar ways to critical thinking skills, because they both call for individuals to think outside of their personal and immediate understanding. One way that this process of culturally literate critical affirmation can be fostered is through the use of literacy narratives. Lu explains that:

Attention to one another’s paradox of privilege could also be used by the powerful to irresponsibly dismiss accounts of oppression and exclusion by the powerless under the pretense that the Other has not sufficiently scrutinized her own complicity with various systems. In short, reflections and revisions of one’s privileged social placements must be used to bring to the foreground rather than

push back and out of hearing the histories, experiences, and voices of oppressed social groups. (189)

Reflections that Lu discusses are an essential component of the literacy narrative, because they look at the way that literacy develops; in addition, those who write literacy narratives consider how their voice works to undermine or empower his or her voice in past. The writer, simultaneously is encouraged to think about how his or her own voice might be reflected in the future. Literacy narratives are not only written concerning an individual's progression with literacy; they can also be written as representations of a society's interaction with literacy. In both cases, "[e]very narrative bears some evaluative charge regarding the events narrated and the actors featured in the narration. (...) There is no narrated action that does not involve some response of approval or disapproval relative to some scale of goodness or justice—though it is always up to us readers to choose for ourselves from the various value options proposed by the narrative" (Kearney 155). Thus, narrative serves as a tool to evaluate interactions between individuals.

Literacy Narratives and Narrative Reflection

There are two particular articles that have been written about literacy narratives that are especially beneficial to this study: Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen's "Reading Literacy Narratives" (1992), which has become the primary reference text for those writing about literacy narratives, and Mary Soliday's "Translating Self and Difference through Literacy Narratives" (1994). Eldred and Mortensen use George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* to illustrate the function of literature as a literacy narrative; they investigate implications of that narrative being applicable to real-life situations as well as the fictional ones presented in the play. They present the

differences between several categorizations of literacy narratives. Two of the four categories are relevant to this project. The first is “narratives of socialization,” which they describe as:

Stories that chronicle a character's attempt to enter a new social (and discursive) arena. Many texts, especially coming-of-age stories that show characters negotiating the world around them, often contain detailed and insightful investigations of how language is acquired and how it creates particular regional and private identities. In these narratives, literacy is a necessary, component, although it is not emphasized (see Eldred). (513)

The second is “literacy narratives,” identified as:

Stories, like Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, that foreground issues of language acquisition and literacy. These narratives are structured by learned, internalized “literacy tropes” (Brodkey 47), by “prefigured” ideas and images (see White 1-23). Literacy narratives sometimes include explicit images of schooling and teaching, they include texts that both challenge and affirm culturally scripted ideas about literacy. (513)

The manner in which I have been discussing literacy narratives combines both of these categorizations and will be important in subsequent discussion as I look at texts that are not directly connected to literacy learning (reading and writing composed texts) and as the focus of this discussion narrows to cultural literacy. In addition, bringing the two categories together stresses the way that Eldred and Mortensen’s focus, Eliza and Henry, interact with society and how that interaction influences literate development. Henry becomes the sole inventor of Eliza’s socially constructed literacy, which is detrimental to her development; he views her as someone who “knows nothing and is worth nothing: 'She's so deliciously low—so horribly dirty' (40)”

(518). Shaw demonstrates the danger in socially constructed literacy if the marginalized voice (in this example, Eliza's voice) allows the cultural context of its origin to be belittled and degraded by a member of the dominant group, Henry. This dynamic alters the fluid nature of socially constructed literacy as it becomes a solidified structure that benefits the dominant group's ideology because, as Eldred and Mortensen state, "memory of origin—of place, of region—is essential if literacy is to have context and meaning" (528). Allowing Henry to reduce Eliza's initial socially constructed literacy to a negative literacy removes the meaning of and influence, both positive and negative, on the construction of her identity. This is one of the reasons that Eliza finds herself "caught between old and new selves, misplaced (...) [as she explains,] 'I have forgotten my own language and can speak nothing but yours' (123)" (519). Taking this further, it is not just her language that is forgotten, but her origins, which makes it difficult to go back. In this case, there is no initial opportunity for a negotiation of the social nature of her literate development, which makes her identity brittle as this memory of origin transitions into the manner in which identity is constructed and understood.

The construction of identity, as understood through Eldred and Mortensen, connects back to Kearney's explanation that "one's identity is fundamentally narrative in character" and that "the tendency of a nation toward xenophobia or insularity can be resisted by its own narrative resources to imagine itself otherwise—through its own eyes or those of others" (81). Eldred and Mortensen's treatment of Shaw's narrative demonstrates the prominence of xenophobia and insularity. Shaw also presents the repercussions as Eliza realizes, at the end of the play, what she has lost by giving up her cultural heritage in favor of inclusion in and acceptance by the dominant culture. Eliza's accent is one of the primary factors that puts her on Henry's radar, and for her accent is a major indicator of the cultural and social difference between them.

The obvious indicator of cultural difference present in an individual's accent is a pretty constant issue in respect to instances of cultural illiteracy. One example of this is how the state of Arizona has chosen to interpret the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. Miriam Jordan's article, "Arizona Grades Teachers on Fluency: State Pushes School Districts to Reassign Instructors With Heavy Accents or Other Shortcomings in Their English" (2010) in *The Wall Street Journal*, explains "[t]hat law states that for a school to receive federal funds, students learning English must be instructed by teachers fluent in the language. Defining fluency is left to each state [explained] a spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Education" (par. 10). Jordan goes on to state that the "education department has dispatched evaluators to audit teachers across the state on things such as comprehensible pronunciation, correct grammar and good writing" (par. 12). This issue is taken up by Jeff Neuman in his April 30, 2010 blog entry titled "Arizona Department of Education Hates Accents" posted on *Gawker*. In this entry he writes, "The state is cracking down on school teachers with accents in an effort to secure Anglo dominance in the southwest, because Arizona is a state where *we speak English*" (emphasis in original par. 1). Neuman goes on to add, "[t]o the state's department of education, the enemy is not sexting or drugs, it's accented English among its Hispanic school teachers, who can spread their non-white sounding gibberish to young students" (par. 2). It is often hard to convey sarcasm through the written word; however, Neuman does an admirable job through the use of italics, word choice ("gibberish"), and punctuation.⁷ Neuman's tone is often mirrored throughout the over 200 replies (all posted on April 30, 2010) to his initial post. This sarcasm functions as a way for Neuman and those who replied to offer criticism of the initial event; however, it is also a form of narrative distancing that works to separate his identity from that of those playing with politics much in the

⁷ Neuman later asks "So how did this all come about? Politics!" (par. 3). The use of the exclamation point presents a sense of exasperation at the influence of politics on the educational situation in Arizona.

way that Eliza eventually worked to separate herself from Henry. The narrative distancing utilized by Neuman creates a context for the construction of individual identity in relation to the dominant culture's expected identity.

Taking this concept of identity construction further, Mary Soliday deals more directly with the literacy narratives constructed around real-life events. The top layer of her argument deals with student literacy narratives; however, she also makes connections between the literacy narratives of scholars and historic figures (such as Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundaries* (1989) and Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845)) and the students' narratives. Soliday explains:

Because literacy narratives so often focus on the meeting and clashing of identities, languages, and cultures, writing literacy stories allows our basic writing or nontraditional students—those “others” of the academic landscape hitherto largely represented by teachers speaking on their behalf—themselves to enter into and influence the contemporary debates surrounding multicultural education.

(512-513)

Soliday is working to make literacy relevant to students in a way that connects them with concepts, beliefs, and actions outside of their immediate perceptions. This method demonstrates how a literate identity forms while giving them the chance to explore their own understanding of their identity as a student and citizen. Soliday goes on to say, “If writers construct their interpretation of past events from the vantage point of a particular present, then the life story becomes a dialogical account of one's experience rather than a chronological report of verifiable events” (514). This concept of dialogue continues to be important to the development of the student's socially constructed literate identities as the influences of other discourse communities

and cultural groups are introduced to her or him. Soliday presents the importance of reflection and interpretation demonstrated in the dialogues created by the literacy narratives. In addition, Soliday's explanation points to the special importance that these narratives have for marginalized individuals, because the narratives work as a tool that inserts their voices into a dialogue with the dominant system.

Another important element of using literacy narratives to bring the private sphere into the public realm is the effect this action has on power relationships. Kristin M. Langellier and Eric E. Peterson (2006) discuss how performance narratives allow for a shift in power structures; as private narratives confront public audiences and existing dominant norms, they prompt audiences to reconsider their own experiences and positions in relation to the dominant ideologies (164). In connection to shifting power, Langellier and Peterson look at how performed narratives are considered framed, reflexive, and emergent (155). When a narrative is framed it is placed in a particular context that emphasizes the importance of what occurred around the narrative, as well as the function of the narrative itself. As the narrative is performed, the performer is also part of the audience; this allows the performer to reflect on his or her past experience and see events in a new light. This constitutes a re-doing of the past event, which creates the possible emergence of "new text structures, event structures, and social structures, that is, to new stories, new storytelling events, and new identities" (155). In the performed narratives, Langellier and Peterson's three concepts are important to the reflective role the narrative plays in the life of the performer and the audience; this is also the case with literacy narratives. Students who write literacy narratives frame those narratives in the context in which events originally occurred, as well as the events that are currently unfolding. This framing influences both the way they reflect on a literacy event as well as how they might redo an event in the present and in the future.

According to Langellier and Peterson, performance narratives, and by association, literacy narratives can upset power imbalances as they bring private struggles into the public domain. Therefore, these narratives work as a way for individuals to become active citizens as they delve into their own literate and culturally literate lives.

The process of becoming a citizen who actively participates in the formation and understanding of cultural literacy is made easier by the use of blogs like *Gawker*. Returning to Neuman's blog concerning accented educators in Arizona, a number of individuals posted thoughts on the initial blog post, and some of those responses turned into conversations (see Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 for excerpts) that became a part of the ongoing narrative dialogue surrounding the issue. A number of commenters employ Neuman's use of sarcasm in their posts, which also results in narrative distancing. One commenter, screen name calmly (see Figure 1), makes a comment regarding the implication that Arizona's ruling has on anybody with an accent

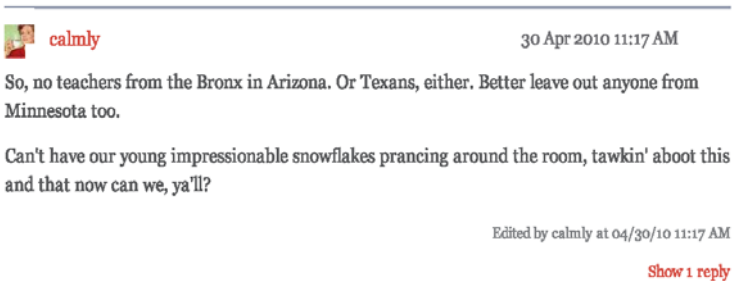


Figure 1: Comment by calmly in response to Neuman's blog post titled "Arizona Department of Education Hates Accents" on *Gawker*

working in the Arizona school system. The narrative distancing in this case puts distance between calmly (and others who employ this strategy) and the initial narrative presented in the news article. This

distance allows commenters to shift the direction of the narrative and present the imbedded narratives that Abbot discussed. Additionally, the replies to the initial narrative demonstrate each writers attempt to use narrative to reflect on their reactions to the initial story. Calmy's response points out a perceived flaw in Arizona's approach—that there is really no such thing as being accentless in the United States. Calmly sarcastically suggests that the nation's youth are like

unique snowflakes (the color reference strongly implicit considering the focus on Spanish accents in Arizona's stand on education). Here, a connection is made to the general society's desire for an insular identity formed in students by accentless educators as opposed to facilitating an individual identity that accepts and acknowledges external differences.

The education of impressionable youth is the focus for a number of the discussion threads posted to Neuman's original post. One of the primary concerns of the Arizona Department of Education, which is presented in the initial article by Jordan, is the quality of the education obtained from educators who possess an accent. Figures 2, 3 and 4 present examples of narrative dialogues held between posters throughout the day. Figure 2 is a conversation that was begun by the user Scrubbles. Their comment draws a comparison between Arizona's stand on accented educators and the treatment that Japanese-Americans received during WWII in America. This initial comment, which prompted the development of a narrative discussion thread, is an ethical judgment on the part of Scrubbles as they reflect on the implications of the plot path that these events could follow. As Phelan explains, the ethical judgment considers "the motives and the actions" behind the plot of the narrative (212). Scrubbles does not confuse the author of the blog post on *Gawker* with the author of the initial act and casts their ethical judgment accordingly. In this case, Scrubbles' ethical judgment brings into focus the potential this situation has for "destroying any sort of cultural heritage" that Spanish-speaking immigrants may have. In this judgment, Scrubbles (and other responders) accept Neuman as another character with which to interact and do not cast their judgment on him, nor do they attempt to distance themselves from his role in the narrative.

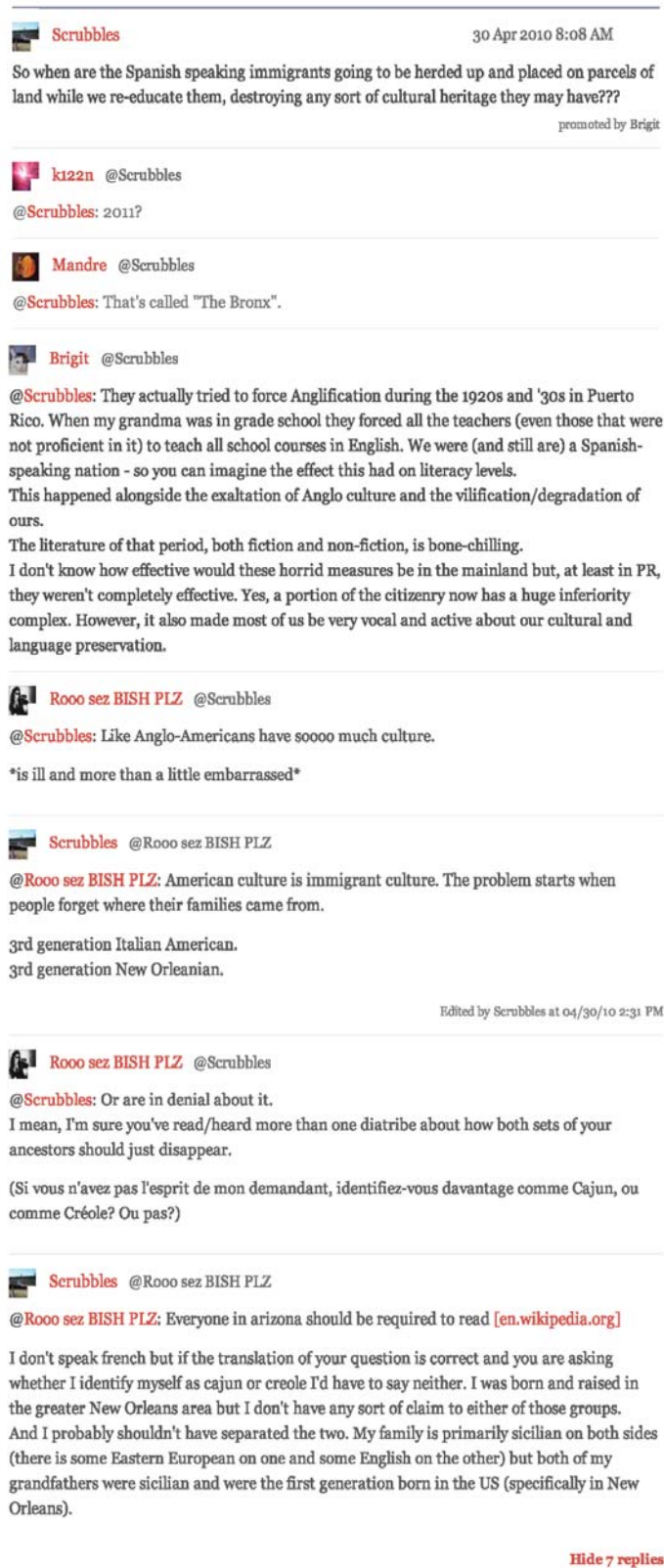


Figure 2: Dialogue begun by Scrubbles in response to Neuman’s blog post titled “Arizona Department of Education Hates Accents” on *Gawker*


Participants such as Scrubbles and Neuman attempt to distance themselves from the main narrative and value system presented by Arizona even as they are admitting a connection to the society from which that narrative and value system stem. This is seen through the use of the plural pronoun “we” (“herded up and placed on parcels of land while *we* re-educate them” (emphasis added Scrubbles)). This one sentence, and the subsequent discussion, presents a working through of Lu’s critical affirmation. Later in the thread, Scrubbles states that they are third generation Italian-American and third generation New Orleanian which implies a connection to the dominant group. As such, Scrubbles is dealing with the first three goals of critical

affirmation. Scrubbles is trying to take power away from the dominant culture even as they acknowledge their own privileges through the narrative dialogue. Although several others contribute to the conversation in minor ways (K122N, Mondre, and Brigit), Roo sez BISH PLZ engages Scrubbles in fairly active dialogue that narrates their unknown engagement with critical affirmation as they offer representations of members of a dominant group attempting to moderate their own culture. In fact, it appears that they are trying to understand how their supposedly dominant culture could take the stand on accents that Arizona is taking.

The commenters inability to connect with the logic of their own culture demonstrates their cultural empathy. Roo sez BISH PLZ remarks that “[l]ike Anglo-Americans have soooo much culture. *is ill and more than a little embarrassed*.” This prompts Scrubbles to retort that “American culture is immigrant culture. The problem starts when people forget where their families came from.” Lu’s third goal of critical affirmation deals with individuals being respectful of and responsible with the histories of those different than them. By pointing out the lack of cultural memory on the part of the dominant group, Scrubbles connects these groups back to Parkinson and Saunders’s definition of cultural literacy, which calls for an understanding of one’s own culture before one can begin to understand and respect the culture of another. Thus the inability of these individuals to develop cultural literacy is deeper than their lack of cultural empathy. It begins with the disconnection between them and their own cultural heritage. The dominant group, under scrutiny by Scrubbles and those who responded to Scrubbles’s comment, needs to engage in the moderation of their own culture and the acceptance of their cultural heritage before they can begin to gain cultural empathy. Scrubbles and Roo sez BISH PLZ are already displaying this ability and their potential cultural literacy. By offering such a representation, these individuals are using their narrative to present a narrative dialogue that can


be used to reinterpret the identity of the majority/dominant group. These individuals (and many of the individuals who commented on the blog) are representations of a minority within the dominant cultural group. Instead of being the dominant ideology shared by the population, it becomes the ideology enforcing prejudice and undermining the progression of cultural growth within the United States. This infringement on the educational and cultural development of society, and specifically children, is discussed further as more comments are posted to Neuman's blog entry.


The educational development of students is at the center of the post by redqueenmeg (Figure 3) who is very concerned with how accents did or did not affect the development of her son. Redqueenmeg explains that her son was taught by a number of teachers who had accents in


 **redqueenmeg** 30 Apr 2010 9:19 AM
My kid is and has been taught by several people who have accents (primarily Puerto Rican, as we're in Florida) and I think it's great because he's getting used to understanding people who don't speak the language the same way he does.
It hasn't given HIM a different accent. This is foolish.

 **redqueenmeg** @redqueenmeg
@redqueenmeg: I should say, primarily Puerto Rican, because we're in *Central* Florida.

 **Lysergic Asset** @redqueenmeg
@redqueenmeg: Great attitude. Your son is very lucky.

 **Brigit** @redqueenmeg
@redqueenmeg: LOL, and in Puerto Rico I had professors that spoke English (and sometimes Spanish) with German, Chinese, Arabic, and French accents. And, indeed, although you need a few weeks to get familiarized with each new accent you are able to understand it clearly afterward.

 **redqueenmeg** @Lysergic Asset
@Lysergic Asset: Thank you! I am glad he is learning some Spanish at school as well. Expanding all the ways he can communicate can only help him.

 **redqueenmeg** @Brigit
@Brigit: So true. And I did actually want to turn the subtitles on in Gosford Park, where everyone's FROM ENGLAND, ffs! :)

[Hide 5 replies](#)

Figure 3: Dialogue begun by redqueenmeg in response to Neuman's blog post titled "Arizona Department of Education Hates Accents" on *Gawker*

their home state of Florida and that she believes he benefited from the experience. This post was made at 9:19 am (an hour and eleven minutes after Scrubbles post). Redqueenmeg's post prompts a response by Brigit who agrees with redqueenmeg and adds to the narrative by presenting her own experience with educators who had accents. This exchange provides an example of Phelan's mimetic response: both redqueenmeg and

Brigit look at redqueenmeg's son as a representation of other characters or players in the narrative who are experiencing an education delivered by teachers with accents. In addition, they are considering the educators themselves and judging the education provided. Even though their comments do not illustrate specific examples, they are narrating these characters/individuals into existence. They offer a connection between their mimetic response and the influence that the distance of using blog responses and potential anonymity offers. Redqueenmeg and Brigit are able to offer a sense of expectation and hope in the mimetic connection while acquiring distance through the internet to be safely involved in the action. Kearney's point about a "double attitude of empathy and detachment" is illustrated here as the internet allows them to connect and empathize through cyberspace while also remaining detached through the same medium. Beyond the mimetic response, there are other judgments being made in this thread through the smaller comments and/or reading between the lines.

In her initial comment, redqueenmeg states, "It hasn't given HIM a different accent. This is foolish." The implication is that the individuals responsible for this problem, rather than just the situation, are irrational. Redqueenmeg is using narrative as a tool to distance herself from those individuals who are either behind or supporting the stand on teachers of English having or not having accents. This allows her to work through her understanding of the issue with a shared reflection offered by the narrative dialogue found within the discussion thread. Prior to the introduction of the topic by Neuman, redqueenmeg might not have considered why the education of her son was different and/or potentially better than that of other children. She makes a connection between her son's experience and "all the ways he can communicate" and declared how this will "only help him." This narrative dialogue turns each contributor in the thread into a character in the ongoing narrative surrounding Arizona's Department of Education's decision. In

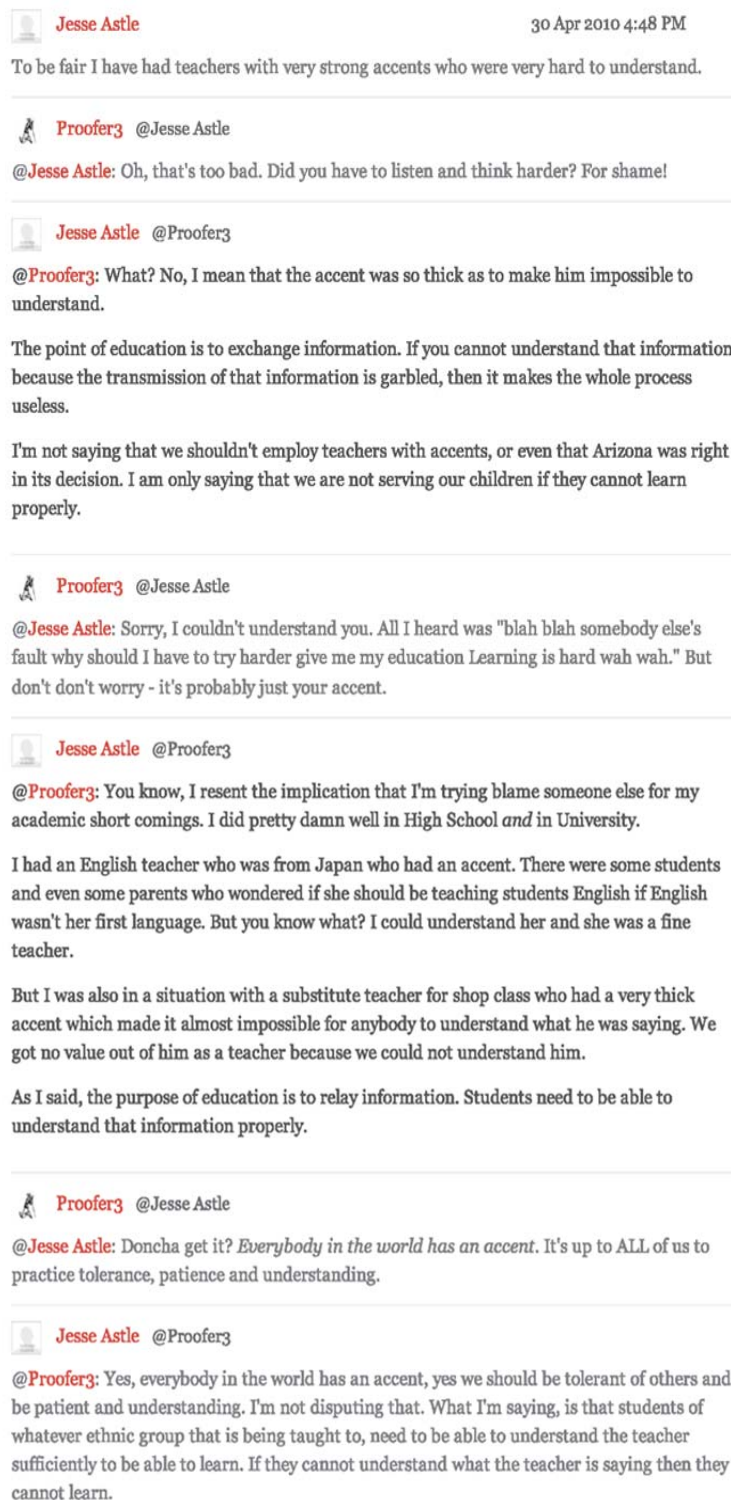


Figure 4: Dialogue begun by Jesse Astle in response to Neuman's blog post titled "Arizona Department of Education Hates Accents" on *Gawker*

turn, each individual is using the narrative dialogue as a tool to reflect on the issue as well as a means to define an identity that separates them from the ideology of the dominant group (represented by Arizona's Department of Education). Almost every participant in the discussion attached to the initial blog entry is reflectively and consciously interpreting themselves through their words. In the two examples thus far examined, they are even trying to reinterpret their role in the current narrative involving Arizona's decision as represented in Neuman's initial post. As Kearney explained, they are looking for "temporal structure (...) seek[ing] some kind of significance in terms of referrals back to [their] past (memory) and

forward to [their] future (projection)” (129). Each part of this narrative dialogue refers back to what has occurred according to their interpretation, and they offer representations and projections for what may occur. The narrative dialogue between these parties is an example of cultural empathy and offers a critique of those who do not possess empathy.

Those perceived as lacking cultural empathy do not fare well as commenters within the narrative dialogue of the discussion thread. In the fourth example (Figure 4), originally posted by Jesse Astle at 4:48 pm, Jesse Astle simply states that they have had teachers with accents who were hard to understand. Their brief comment receives a response by Proofer3 who asks, in a mocking tone, “Did you have to listen and think harder?” These two brief comments prompt a lengthy exchange between the two individuals where Jesse Astle articulately explains their initial comment and Proofer3 refuses to accept what they believe are excuses. The core of Jesse Astle’s argument is that learning is not being achieved if a student cannot understand their teacher. To this, Proofer3 argues that if learning is not taking place when the teacher has a strong accent, then the student is not trying hard enough. (For the sake of this argument, I am assuming a certain level of competence on the part of the teacher regardless of their accent.) Jesse Astle works hard with lengthy narrative responses to Proofer3, while Proofer3 is able to goad Jesse Astle with short potent statements. As Jesse Astle works through the issue, via the dialogue created with Proofer3, they provide the ammunition necessary to shoot holes in their position even if Proofer3 does not take full advantage of the opportunity. Jesse Astle presents two examples to illustrate their stand on the issue:

I had an English teacher who was from Japan who had an accent. There were some students and even some parents who wondered if she should be

teaching students English if English wasn't her first language. But you know what? I could understand her and she was a fine teacher.

But I was also in a situation with a substitute teacher for shop class who had a very thick accent which made it almost impossible for anybody to understand what he was saying. We got no value out of him as a teacher because we could not understand him.

The first example outlines a long running course where the teacher teaching English was from Japan. Part of the issue that the parents and students had was the fact that English was not her first language. The focus, however, of the initial issue is that of accents. There is mention of an accent; however, the strength of that accent is only implied through the students and parents who questioned her ability to teach. This example is followed by another that involves a substitute teacher with a thick accent of unknown origin. With this second example, there is no indication of how long the individual substituted for the class. Typically, class periods in junior high or high school are an hour long. If Astle only had this teacher as a substitute for one day then students may not have had a chance to acclimate to the nuances of an accent; in addition, as the teacher was as substitute, shop may not have been his area of expertise, and the student might not have learned anything regardless of the teacher's accent. If Astle has used the opportunity to reflect on their own narrative, they may have seen the gaps in their argument. As it stands, Proofer3 responded "Doncha get it? Everybody in the world has an accent. It's up to ALL of us to practice tolerance, patience and understanding." This comment directly connects to Lu's fourth goal of critical affirmation; Proofer3 illustrates the fact that as individual representatives of cultural equality, we must acknowledge the agency of those from different situations as we struggle with the other three goals: working toward understanding, equality, and respect. These

three examples from Neuman's post on *Gawker*, are narrative dialogues that form part of a larger cultural literacy narrative.

This blog entry and the discussion thread follow Eldred and Mortensen's concept of the narrative of socialization as the contributors negotiate the cultural world expressed in the original article by Jordon, which is then interpreted by Neuman's blog entry. In this cultural literacy narrative of socialization, the actual cultural literacy of the individual(s) is not the focal point of the discussion; however, the formation of cultural empathy is a central theme that challenges existing concepts about cultural acceptance. Cultural literacy narratives such as this blog entry are not the only narratives that demonstrate America's struggle with cultural empathy.

Cultural literacy narratives are found in a variety of forms that add to the depth of reflection available. Narratives that present interesting views on literacy development and also present moments of cultural literacy and illiteracy can be found in the text of literacy scholars such as Mike Rose, *Lives on the Boundary* (1990) and Morris Young, *Minor Re/Visions: Asian American Literacy Narratives as a Rhetoric of Citizenship* (2004). The documentary dramas of Anna Deavere Smith also function as American cultural literacy narratives. Each of these narratives offers different levels of self and societal analysis that helps to emphasize both how cultural literacy is apparent and how it is overlooked as it stands in the shadow of other scholarly pursuits. Even though each text presents numerous points worth exploring, there is one interaction in each text that offers a particular social context that emphasizes different elements of cultural literacy (or illiteracy) in society.

Smith's documentary drama, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, presents a narrative dialogue between characters that speak to the overarching social conflicts surrounding the Rodney King

incident.⁸ In turn, each conflict represents the atmosphere of the cultural tensions felt throughout the United States, often in a more concentrated form. In *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, Smith sets up an additional layer of narrative dialogue as she presents a scene where the characters are seated around a dinner table. Each piece spoken by the characters presented in the play (and portrayed by Smith in the initial production) comes from interviews conducted by Smith and works to construct a narrative dialogue reflecting on the racial tensions following the trial of the police officers involved in the beating of Rodney King. This narrative dialogue is framed by two pieces taken from Alice Waters, the Chef of Chez Panisse Restaurant in Berkeley, CA, and is similar to the conversation presented through the discussion threads for blog entries. The pieces by Waters (and every character present in the documentary drama) respond to the initial event in the same manner as the individuals who post responses to the initial blog entry. The characters' statements work together to create a narrative that offers the contributing individual (blogger or interview subject) and the audience an opportunity to reflect and respond to the narrative. In "A Civilizing Place" and "Marching Orders," Smith uses Waters' pieces to contextualize the dinner party setting within the larger script of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. Waters begins by stating:

I just feel like like food
is a way
that that
people can come together.

Everybody has to eat. (136)

Similar to the discussion following Neuman's blog post, there is a sense that acceptance should be universal; everybody has an accent and everybody needs to eat. It is our ability to engage in dialogue that can bring people together through reflection. Even as the words from her interview

⁸ A more detailed discussion of Smith's methods and documentary dramas will occur in chapter three.

are pieced into the constructed narrative dialogue of Smith's documentary drama, Waters emphasizes the importance of relationships through dialogue, "Everybody has to eat," but in reality, they do not have to eat together. She feels, however, that they should eat together at the same table, as everybody should talk to each other. Without first engaging in dialogue: it appears that a basis for a relationship and the development of cultural empathy will not be established. Waters presents an example of a relationship between customer and business owner:

When you go buy your bread,
you talk to the baker,
you exchange,
and you feel loyalty,
and you go back,
and if something happened to him,
You'd support him
and if something happened to you
he'd help you out. (136)

Waters suggests this relationship, once began, can go beyond the mere exchange of goods into one of support and assistance. Waters's use of a baker implies an initial barrier between the business owner and the customer that goes beyond goods and services; professional groups qualify as discourse communities per Gee's definition, which presents us with cultural differences between those who are bakers and those who are not. By establishing a dialogue between the two groups (baker and customer, a member of a minority group and a member of a majority group), a relationship is formed that can cultivate cultural empathy. Presenting this information through Waters's words, Smith, as Kearney explains, "suspend[s] our normal

protective reflexes (which guard us from pain)... [and] amplifies the range of those we might empathise with—reaching beyond family, friends and familiars to all kinds of foreigners” (138).

For, as Waters/Smith goes on to say:

it's just
the table
is really a civilizing place.
It's where a group comes,
and they,
they hear points of view,
they they
they uh
learn about
courtesy and kindness,
uh
they they
learn about what it is to live in a community.
I think
live in a family first
but live in a bigger community
That's where it comes
Don't you think? (137-138)

The table, where we as a society can indulge in the type of narrative dialogue that allows for the suspension of protective reflexives, allows for individual and group reflection on what is being

consumed (be it food for the body or food for the mind). Both Smith/Waters and Kearney agree that we need to expand who we count as members of our community. This sense of community is also found in the public sphere of the internet where we are able to engage in conversation through, for example, the blogosphere. The discussions considered earlier in my analysis include a group of individuals who are working to come together as a community where ideas, points of view, and experiences are narrated and reflected upon. Each topic presented, be it through a blog post or Smith's documentary drama, is a cultural literacy event in American society.

Shirley Brice Heath (2001) defines a literacy event as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive process” (350). Heath focuses on individual pieces of writing in order to establish the importance that all writing has on the development of written literacy. This points to the importance of the contribution of individual pieces to the development of the whole, which ultimately connects to the manner in which individual blog responses and the segments of Smith's documentary dramas function as parts of the development of America's cultural literacy. These pieces offer narrative representations of moments where an individual's “interactions and their interpretive [processes],” or the moments in which they contribute to a collective narrative, have an impact on an individual's life. The literacy events that I have discussed here are directly connected to events that occurred in American society. The interactions between individuals in the blogosphere and the interactions discussed in Waters'/Smith's narrative are the result of events in society that require a narrative working through. Kearney's concept of “working through” states, “Only those who have done the narrative ‘working through’ of the past are really in a position to let go of it—to forgive and forget justly. Narrative memory cannot afford to be naïve, for stories are never innocent. Each retelling of history is part of a continuing conflict of

interpretations” (82-83). By composing literacy events that form a larger narrative, individuals are able to start the process of “letting go.” It is important that Kearney states that this is the ability to “forgive and forget justly.” Working through is not a matter of just pretending that a tragedy never occurred; it is a matter of presenting a narrative that allows for reflection at an individual and societal level to allow for the chance of cultural empathy to form. The decision of Arizona Department of Education and the events surrounding Rodney King are, especially, problems that resulted in social upheaval. These events qualify as what Victor Turner terms social dramas, and social dramas (to be discussed in the next chapter) are composed of a myriad of narratives that offer opportunities for reflection as they unfold and reach their conclusion. This process of utilizing narrative to begin the process of working through conflict can be connected to the final phase of Victor Turner’s concept of the social drama: the redressive action.

Chapter 2: Social Drama and Reflection

At the end of Chapter one, I discussed how narratives make up elements of social dramas. Social dramas form when there is a breakdown in the relationships that make up society and/or any of its subsections. In the narratives presented by Neuman, Smith, and Polis, we not only see conflicts that are representational of the Other in strained social situations, but also conflicts that fit the parameters of what Victor Turner refers to as a social drama. Victor Turner was an anthropologist who firmly believed in permeable boundaries between disciplines. This makes applying his theory of social drama to situations of cultural literacy especially appropriate, because as we considered in Chapter one, the capacity to be culturally literate is an ability to navigate successfully the boundaries between cultures other than one's own. As we look closely at the incidents that are represented by Neuman's blog entry and Smith's documentary dramas we see narrative representations of occurrences that go undocumented by major news sources or prominent figures in society: incidents of backlash that occur following large-scale cultural events. One such large-scale cultural event is the tragedy of 9/11. This was a social drama of national, as well as individual, proportions.

According to Turner (1957), social dramas are "situations of crisis ... [that] make visible both contradictions between crucial principles governing village structures, and conflicts between persons and groups in a set of social relations governed by a single principle" (*Schism and Continuity in an African Society* xvii). Studying social dramas makes the contradictions and conflicts within a culture apparent, which is pertinent to the study of cultural literacy, because it brings nuances within the contradictions and conflicts of subgroups to the forefront. Turner

developed the theory of the social drama by looking at a Ndembu village in the Mwinilunga District in the northwestern Province of Northern Rhodesia where the population (in the early 1950s) was about seventeen thousand. His theory is also applicable to more industrialized societies, however. Turner expands his definition by stating that social dramas are:

Eruptions of conflict [where] the quarrelling parties might comprise some but not all of [a society's] members; or disputes [that] might be merely interpersonal in character. Disturbance in short had a variable range of social inclusiveness.

[Where there was] a pattern [to] these eruptions of conflict: (...) [that followed] a more or less regular sequence [that has a] "processional form" (...) [that is divided] into four major phases: (...) (1) breach; (2) crisis; (3) redressive action; and (4) re-integration of recognition of schism. (*Schism and Continuity in an African Society* 91-92)

Therefore, even though Turner focuses on feudal tribal society, the modern industrial society still presents times and events that cover a "range of social inclusiveness" and eruptions within and between the cultural groups that make up the society. Within a social drama, it is the disruption of a shared principle that often constitutes the initial breach. Turner, looking at the tribal society of the Ndembu, states that the shared principle is disrupted by other members of that tribal society; however, in an industrialized global society, the disruption that results in a breach can come from a member or members of another culture within the global society. These less localized disruptions also cover a wide range of social inclusiveness that extends to an array of cultural inclusiveness as well. Within a given society or social hierarchy, such as the United States, there are often multiple cultures that create that society. We have the potential for a disruption within the society of the United States, or within the cultures that exist under the

umbrella of the United States such as Native Americans or Asian-Americans (to name but two large cultural categories). Even within these cultural groups, there are distinctions of a social and cultural nature (for example, the Cherokee and Sioux societies/cultures within the larger grouping of Native Americans). Disruptions to inclusiveness can, therefore, occur at social or cultural levels. By providing a structured sequence, Turner's social drama framework not only emphasizes the contradictions and conflicts within a society or societies and subsequent cultural groups, but also provides a structure for analyzing social interactions. Turner's theory with its emphasis on redressive action and reintegration, is especially relevant to the discussion of cultural literacy because it presents a connection back to Min Zhan Lu's concept of critical affirmation discussed in Chapter one. Lu's third and fourth goals, dealing with "respectfully and responsibly" approaching the experiences of others and a desire for "individual agency" that crosses social boundaries (173), complements Turner's theory of social drama. This can be seen when Turner explains:

As society complexifies, as the division of labor produces more specialized and professionalized modalities of sociocultural action, so do the modes of assigning meaning to social dramas multiply—but the drama remains to the last simple and ineradicable, a fact of everyone's social experience and a significant node in the developmental cycle of all groups that aspire to continuance. The social drama remains humankind's thorny problem, its undying worm, its Achilles' heel—one can only use clichés for such an obvious and familiar pattern of sequentiality. At the same time it is our native way of manifesting ourselves to ourselves and of declaring where power and meaning lie and how they are distributed. (*Schism and Continuity in an African Society* 154)

In an industrialized society, where individuality and difference are as important as belonging to a cultural group, Turner and Lu's theories suggest how individuals deal with personal strife even as they are a part of a larger social drama. Using narrative to reflect on how individuals manifest themselves to themselves, throughout the course of social dramas and the process of critical affirmation, creates opportunities for analysis concerning cultural literacy in society. In the comments on Neuman's blog entry, the narrative dialogue present outlined the social drama surrounding Arizona's Department of Education's decision regarding English teachers with accents. This narrative is presented through the narrative discourse evident in the direction of the various commenters. Abbot makes a distinction between narrative ("the representation of events"), story ("an event,") and narrative discourse ("those events as represented") (19). He goes on to add:

One important point that the distinction between story and discourse brings out is that we never see a story directly, but instead always pick it up through the narrative discourse. The story is always mediated—by a voice, a style or writing, camera angles, actors' interpretations—so that what we call the story is really something we construct. We put it together from what we read or see, often by inference. (20)

Through the use of narrative discourse, the events of the social drama are turned into a story with a number of narrators who are able to take a *perceived* active role in the occurrence. This perception of involvement enhances a sense of rhetorical agency in the participants throughout the progression of the social drama.

The four phases of social drama, identified by Turner, allow for an analytical breakdown of social dramas. In the first phase, breach, Turner stresses that there is a breakdown

Of regular, norm-governed social relations (...) between persons or groups within the same system of social relations, be it a village, chiefdom, office, factory, (...) university department, or any other perduring system or set or field of social interaction. Such a breach is signaled by the public, overt breach or deliberate nonfulfillment of some crucial norm regulating the intercourse of the parties. (*Schism and Continuity in an African Society* 37)

This phase is followed by the crisis where

There is a tendency for the breach to widen and extend until it becomes coextensive with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the conflicting or antagonistic parties belong. (...) This second stage, *crisis*, is always one of those turning points or moments of danger and suspense, when a true state of affairs is revealed, when it is least easy to don masks or pretend that there is nothing rotten in the village. Each public crisis has (...) liminal characteristics, since it is a threshold between more or less stable phases of the social process (...). (*Schism and Continuity in an African Society* 38)

Once the crisis has commenced it leads to redressive action:

In order to limit the spread of crisis, certain adjustive and redressive “mechanisms” (...) informal or formal, institutionalized or ad hoc, are swiftly brought into operation by leading or structurally representative members of the disturbed social system. (...) The final phase (...) consists either of the *reintegration* of the disturbed social group or of the social recognition and legitimization of irreparable schism between the contesting parties (...). (*Schism and Continuity in an African Society* 37-41)

By identifying these elements within a social drama, it is possible to analyze the initial breakdown within the society and the path that the drama takes on its way to resolution, whether it is reintegration or schism. There is no set time frame within which the social drama will occur. In fact, some social dramas never appear to make it past the third (let alone the final) phase, because the participants within the social drama are unable to come to terms with any workable redressive action. The process of going through elements within the phases of the social drama can still influence changes amongst participants and their identity when narrative reflection is employed, even if those changes do not develop into reintegration or schism. There are two aspects of social dramas closely tied to reflection that affect the potential for reintegration or schism: ritual and liminality.

Ritual and Liminality in Social Dramas

During times of ritual and liminality, individuals and society are offered an opportunity for reflection. Utilizing Turner's theory of social drama, Barbara Myerhoff (1977), in "We Don't Wrap Herring in a Printed Page: Fusions, Fiction and Continuity in Secular Ritual," defines ritual as "an act or actions intentionally conducted by a group of people employing one or more symbols in a repetitive, formal, precise, highly stylized fashion" (199). Myerhoff's definition is pertinent to this discussion, because she considers ritual in more secular terms, as opposed to the religious slant offered by Turner. Turner (1974) defines liminality, or the liminal state, as a

Period or phase (...) betwixt and between the categories of ordinary social life. I then tried to extend the concept of liminality to refer to any condition outside, or on the peripheries of, everyday life, arguing that there was an affinity between the middle in sacred time and the outside in sacred space. (...) The world over, millenarian and revivalistic movements, as I mentioned earlier, originate in periods when societies are in

liminal transition between major orderings of social structural relations. As noted above, liminality is frequently associated with the crisis phase of the social drama. (*Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* 53)

As with the element of ritual, it is often during the crisis phase that liminality is found. In fact, liminality is frequently created during ritual acts.

In her articles, “We Don’t Wrap Herring in a Printed Page: Fusions, Fiction and Continuity in Secular Ritual” and “‘Life Not Death in Venice’: Its Second Life” (1986), Myerhoff takes a close look at the role that ritual plays in the process of the social drama. Her studies focus on the social dramas that play out in the communities of elderly Jewish individuals. Myerhoff argues in both articles is that development and employment of ritual dramatizes collective actions allowing for “self-recognition [and] self-definitions” (“Life Not Death” 262). Myerhoff stresses that a minority population uses ritual not only to “show themselves to themselves” (“Life Not Death” 262), but also to make themselves visible to those outside of their communities. In the case presented in “‘Life Not Death in Venice’: Its Second Life,” the members of a Jewish senior citizens center in Venice, CA presented a ritual in the form of what Myerhoff terms a “definitional ceremony,” which is “likely to develop when within a group there is a crisis of invisibility and disdain by a more powerful outside society. (...) [They] deal with the problems of invisibility and marginality; they are strategies that provide opportunities for being seen and in one’s own terms, garnering witnesses to one’s worth, vitality, and being” (“Life Not Death” 266-267). In Myerhoff’s example, the social drama was set in motion when one of the center members was hit by a passing bicycle rider as she exited the senior citizen center (breach phase). In an effort to draw attention to the tragic event, as well as to get the area in front of the center declared off limits to wheeled traffic, the seniors organized a parade (crisis

phase). During this crisis phase, the seniors bring the “true state of affairs” (Turner, *Schism and Continuity in and African Society* 38) to the attention of society via the public nature of the parade and the inclusion of the media. Liminality is also present as the parade is a moment, that exists on the “threshold between more or less stable phases of the social process” (Turner, *Schism and Continuity in and African Society* 38). The parade is a moment between the continuation of the status quo that would maintain a dangerous atmosphere for the seniors (resulting in a schism between the seniors and the surrounding community) and the potential for a redressive action where the city assumes a role in the social drama, and makes a change that makes the area safer for the seniors (reintegration).

The ceremony holds all the elements of ritual. As part of the parade, the seniors utilized the object of a paper coffin to symbolize the death of a member of their community as well as the invisibility of current members. The seniors themselves were symbols who “exploited signs of their fragility—canes, walkers, blinders—but deliberately dressed well” (“Life Not Death” 272). The seniors symbolized vulnerability, made visible. The intention of the parade was to not only bring attention to the situation of the seniors but to also bring the community together. Through the ritualized definitional ceremony, the seniors moved through the breach and crisis phases, which brought them to the redressive and reintegration phases in which the city put up a set of barricades to keep the section in front of the senior center clear of wheeled traffic. Throughout this ritual process, the seniors constructed a narrative of events beginning with the death of one of the members of the center. By making their narrative public through the parade, the ritual became part of the narrative dialogue between the seniors and the community. As the seniors moved through the phases of the drama, the ability to reflect on each phase allowed for

redressive action and potential reintegration. When reflection is unilateral or ignored, a schism is more likely to occur.

In the second case presented by Myerhoff in “We Don’t Wrap Herring in a Printed Page: Fusions, Fiction and Continuity in Secular Ritual,” she looks at how rituals create an artificial frame where “a bit of behavior or interaction, an aspect of social life, a moment in time is selected, stopped, remarked upon...where meaning is discovered rather than made-up” (200). In this case, the moment that comes under analysis is a graduation ceremony for the Jewish senior citizens from the previously mentioned senior citizen center as they completed a Yiddish history class. The graduation-siyum,⁹ according to Myerhoff, was a ritual that allowed the seniors to make a statement “against those who neglect them. To address to their children and their better off fellow Jews the overt statement ‘You are treating us badly’ would embarrass and alienate them. By making their self-definition and protest indirect and ceremonial, the old people arouse guilt without having to state openly the humiliating facts of their condition” (“We Don’t Wrap Herring in a Printed Page” 217). The seniors took the ritual of the ceremony and instilled it with deep meaning through the use of “axiomatic symbols” that “operate, unifying and condensing a vast array of referents” (“We Don’t Wrap Herring in a Printed Page” 210). This ceremony is an attempt at a redressive action that creates a temporary reintegration for the span of the event. Therefore, even a ritual that is only performed once still has the impact of a ritual that has been performed over a period of time. In addition, the ritual brought a sense of community (if only during the ritual) to participants (those officiating, those graduating, and those observing) that they previously lacked. This sense of community is important because it creates a temporary bridge between the neglected status of the seniors and their families: a liminal moment. The

⁹ Myerhoff defines a *siyum* “(Hebrew, ‘completion’) as referring to the ceremonial recognition of the completion of a course of self-assigned study of a Jewish sacred text” (“We Don’t Wrap Herring in a Printed Page” 203).

importance of liminal moments in social changes and narrative comes from its location between actions, allowing for greater reflection of what has happened and how it may affect what will happen.

The rituals that Myerhoff discusses have a beneficial unifying effect on the communities that perform them. In both of the cases she analyzes a sense of how community spreads from the primary to the secondary (and even tertiary) communities through the inclusion of both an immediate audience and, as seen during the parade, the audience presented through the media's coverage of the event. In the case of baseball discussed by Michael L. Butterworth in "Ritual in the 'Church of Baseball': Suppressing the Discourse of Democracy after 9/11" (2005), both types of audience are also present. In Myerhoff's analysis, ritual helps to establish a sense of community that moves toward potential reintegration following the crisis phase of the social drama; in Butterworth's example, however, the community created through the ritual of baseball following 9/11 moves toward a schism. In addition, the narrative formed within Butterworth's illustration does not benefit the society in the same way. This narrative is less a dialogue with an exchange that presents competing and imbedded narratives and more a joining of narrative discourses that share the same rituals and ideology. Butterworth explains:

More than any other sport, baseball embodies the mythology and ideology of American culture. (...) It is a myth that privileges American hegemony and further defines outside threats to America. (...) American exceptionalism takes its form in the traditions and character of the game of baseball, and in the ballpark itself, which provides a pastoral sanctuary from the world outside. (112)

Baseball and its fans encompass a discourse community with its own language, behaviors, customs, and rituals. Those who are literate in the culture of baseball see themselves as

representations of what it means to be American. Butterworth discusses the fact that following the attacks of 9/11, the ritual of singing “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” was replaced by singing “God Bless America.” This change in one of the ritual elements of baseball created a “them” vs. “us” mentality where the fans are seen as being a patriotic “us” against all of “them.” However, “them” did not equal non-baseball fans but those perceived as terrorists—if you were not a baseball fan your behavior became suspect. Butterworth turns to Chantal Mouffe’s argument in *The Democratic Paradox* (2000) to explain that “the production of an absolute antagonist creates a misguided belief that we can achieve a unity that preserves the hierarchical order” (110).

Butterworth takes this further by stating:

Bush’s initial words [following 9/11] did much to frame subsequent discussions and reactions to the attacks. Immediately, he framed the issue in terms of good and evil, a theme he featured consistently thereafter. He also made clear the degree to which the American “way of life,” and therefore the social order, had been shaken. It became morally imperative, therefore, for an American response that could affirm the hierarchical order. (114)

No longer is the favorite American pastime a liminal moment that promotes healing; it is a moment that promotes the construction of a national identity that is segregated, not just by faith or ethnicity, but by one’s relationship to baseball and, therefore, one’s country. The role that ritual plays for the fans, creating the sense of liminality, becomes a connection to the crisis phase of the 9/11 social drama.

As patriots, fans did not question the actions of the government. Their sense of community, created through the ritual of baseball, was one that did not promote active participation in democracy, but the passive acceptance of the actions of the government. As seen

in the examples presented around the Polis case and Arizona's Department of Education, narrative dialogue is one way that a sense of community can be created through active participation in government (Arizona Department of Education) and society (Polis), both of which were missing in Butterworth's example. The liminality of these ritual moments was a factor that prompted the audience to passively accept the actions of the government. The act of listening to the national anthem, watching the officials and players move through standard motions, and responding at the appropriate times creates ritual/liminal moments, because the fans are between the everyday routines that they go through. This suspended moment outside of the reality of the aftereffects of 9/11 makes the power of patriotism even stronger for the fans held in the liminal state by the ritual of attending a baseball game. Prior to 9/11, liminal moments occurred during the ritual of baseball; however, the world outside was not in the same state of crisis present after 9/11, making the juxtaposition of the pastoral sanctuary and reality more shocking. This difference altered the audience's response to and interaction with the narrative constructed between them and the ritual of baseball. They were brought together for the ritual of baseball, and the sanctuary created through this experience made them less inclined to offer competing narratives; they used narrative discourse to present instead a story of patriotism that further segregated society. Each act within the ritual becomes a narrative and a piece of the larger story being told. Kearney discusses the impact of a story that draws parallels to the role that baseball and narrative dialogue play:

Far from being ethically neutral, each story seeks to persuade us one way or another about the evaluative character of its actors and their actions. And regardless of whether we embrace these rhetorical and moral situations, we cannot pretend that they are not at work in the text's effect upon us. Stories alter our lives

as we return from text to action. Every story is loaded. And while it is true to say that a story is neither good nor bad but thinking makes it so, this is so only up to a point. Granted, we deploy our own ethical presuppositions each time we respond to a story, but we always have something to respond to. The story is not confined to the mind of its author alone (the romantic fallacy regarding the primacy of the author's original intentions). Nor is it confined to the mind of its reader. Nor indeed to the action of its narrated actors. The story exists in the interplay between all these. Every story is a play of at least three persons (author/actor/addressee) whose outcome is never final. That is why narrative is an open-ended invitation to ethical and poetic responsiveness. Storytelling invites us to become not just agents of our own lives, but narrators and readers as well. It shows us that the untold life is not worth living. (155-156)

Those who participate in active narrative dialogue offer evaluation of the story even as they become characters within it. Kearney points out that these stories "alter our lives as we return from text to action." Thus, stories function as a liminal space between moments; they are liminal because they are "neither good nor bad" but neutral and remain so until the reader engages the text. Furthering the liminal power of the story and thus the narrative, Kearney explains that the story is not confined to the mind of the author or the reader, nor is it confined to the action that takes place: it exists amongst all of these aspects. It is through the liminality of story and narrative that cultural empathy may develop as individuals obtain rhetorical agency and interact through narrative dialogue. The liminal state offered through baseball hindered the process of democracy by advocating a sense of insularity in the participants. In opposition to this, the public sphere of the internet becomes a liminal space that promotes the democratic process by granting

access to anyone and allowing anyone moments suspended outside of everyday life to pursue reflection and rhetorical agency.

Media, Ritual, and the Liminal Space

Similar to the uspension of everyday life mentioned during the liminal moments of ritualized baseball and the internet, mediatized rituals also present an opportunity for liminality and moments of solidarity. In an industrialized society, the media has a connection to just about every aspect of our daily lives—ritual and social drama are no exception. In order to understand the way social dramas function in an industrialized society, we must also analyze the effect media has on them. Simon Cottle (2006), in “Mediatized Rituals,” states:

The types of media events that can be described as “mediatized rituals” are “exceptional;” that is, they are salient or obtrude in terms of high-level media exposure and collective media performativity across different media outlets in space and time. (...) While, the everyday is, without doubt, a terrain for the enactment of power, we cannot afford to lose sight of these exceptional “rituals,” both scripted and unscripted, that periodically crash through routine media conventions and seemingly galvanize sentiments and solidarities, and which speak to collective life beyond the mundane world of everyday consumption practices. (416)

These rituals can be spontaneous or planned; regardless, they are always concerned with major events that often cross cultural boundaries. In addition to reaching a wide audience, media events “like all rituals, tell a story. The narrative upon which they are based encapsulates the worldview propagated and disseminated by those who manage the ritual/event and shape it—hence the unavoidable power/conflict aspect of every ritual, as unifying and integrative as it may be (Elliot, 1980)” (“Mediatized Rituals” 220). Thus, mediatized rituals are able to construct a narrative

throughout the course of a social event as they work within the framework of the social drama. Within the crisis phase, these rituals work to present both the stories of participants within the social dramas as well as act as part of the social drama itself.

On September 11, 2001, images and video of the World Trade Center towers collapse, emergency responders, and injured or dying people permeated the media. In each case, these images constructed a narrative for the United States that contained elements of catastrophe and heroism. These images constituted a narrative that coincided with the 9/11 social drama. Initially, that narrative focused on the tragedy that occurred on 9/11; however, the media eventually contested this narrative with the Abu Ghraib photographs depicting scenes of people being dehumanized. Wendy Hesford, in “Staging Terror” (2006), explains:

The visual repetition of the 2001 burning, collapse, and ruins of the World Trade Center on 9/11 on television screens across the world had codified perceptions of the terrorist threat and U.S. vulnerability. The Abu Ghraib photographs reclaimed dominance by transferring that visibility, fear, and terror onto the geopolitical body of “unlawful combatants,” who, within the visual imagery of the photographs, “exist not geographically within national, social, cultural, or economic boundaries but only within the spatial terrain of the Occupation itself” (Kozol 2005). (30)



Figure 5: Rescue Workers on 9/11 ("New York Injured Workers' Alliance")



Figure 6: An American soldier and a prisoner at Abu Ghraib ("Disturbing New Photos from Abu Ghraib")



Figure 7: An American soldier and a prisoner at Abu Ghraib ("Disturbing New Photos from Abu Ghraib")

After this shift in the narrative, the United States was no longer a mere victim who was attacked and needed to defend what itself and the memory of those who died. In Figure 5, we see an example that follows the initial narrative. In this image, rescue workers carry an unconscious man out of the wreckage to safety. This image is an example of the combination of the victim/hero dichotomy that developed during the initial phase of the 9/11 social drama. In Figures 6 and 7 the narratives changes as American soldiers are seen with prisoners at Abu Ghraib. In Figure 6, a prisoner is standing on a cardboard box, barely covered by a poncho with a hood over his head; he has wires attached to his hands that disappear up into some conduits indicating that electrocution is involved. There is an American soldier standing nonchalantly on the periphery while the prisoner is either poised for electric current or experiencing it. In

Figure 7, an American soldier is posing for a photograph with a large smile on her face as she stands next to the dead, discolored body of a prisoner.¹⁰

The righteousness and indifference represented in these images (in light of the torture of the prisoners and the conditions in which the prisoners were being held) causes the narrative of the 9/11 social drama to take a drastic turn as the humanity of Americans and their response to the 9/11 tragedy is brought into question. In respect to representations of conflict, as seen in the images from Abu Ghraib, Abbot states:

One very plausible possibility is that the representation of conflict in narrative provides a way for a culture to talk to itself, about, and possibly resolve, conflicts that threaten to fracture it (or at least make living difficult). In this view of narrative, its conflicts are not solely about particular characters (or entities). Also in conflict, and riding on top of the conflict of narrative entities, are conflicts regarding values, ideas, feelings, and ways of seeing the world. There is, of course, no culture without many such conflicts. Narrative may, then, play an important social role as a vehicle for making the case for one side or another in a conflict, or for negotiating the claims of the opposing sides, or simply for providing a way for people to live with a conflict that is irreconcilable (as, for example, the conflict between the desire to live and the knowledge that we have to die). (55)

The images from Abu Ghraib are demonstrative of American society talking to itself through a media mediator. In addition, conflicts on a number of levels are presented, each of which offers contesting and embedded narratives surrounding the altered perceptions of the United States.

¹⁰ For an extended analysis of images from Abu Ghraib see Judith Butler's *Frames of War* (2009) and W. J. T. Mitchell's *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* (2011).

These narratives are mainly comprised of the narrative discourse of the major players (the media and the government) being offered as an object for reflection. This is not to say that blogged narratives were not added to the overall discourse; however, much like the liminal moments offered by baseball, the immediate context surrounding the release of the photos presented a media the chance to set the tone for the narrative that would serve as a vehicle for negotiating the conflict. Hesford goes on to state, “The mass circulation of the torture photographs undercut the Bush administration’s highly controlled visual strategies, which were used to sell the Iraq war to the American people as an act that would liberate and ‘civilize’ Iraqi people” (“Staging Terror” 30). By altering the narratives that protagonists are attempting to create, the media does not present their own plot, path but they do force detours on the plot paths of the other protagonists. In the case of the United States, the media altered the plot path and representation that President Bush initially sought: that of the avenging victim. Even though the media set the tone for how individuals and society would reflect on the unifying narrative, they also provided alternative narrative discourses upon which United States citizens could base their own narrative dialogues.

In order to understand the role of narrative in social drama we need to look at how narrative functions. Personal narrative, as discussed in Chapter one, can offer a framework for reflecting on past events. However, in the case of these social dramas, we are not getting personal narrative written by an individual, we are getting a narrative written by multiple subjects with multiple points of view and multiple narrative discourses. In addition, these narratives are not necessarily being written down on paper; they are being “written” through the broadcasts of the media, in the speeches given by participants and observers, as well as the reactions of the audience through blog posts.

Scholars such as Edward Bruner, Frederick Turner, and Barbara Myerhoff discuss how ritual, as well as the entire process of the social drama, creates for the participants of the social drama (as well as those observing the social drama) a chance to reflect upon the actions that created the breach, occurred during the breach, and those that follow (possibly to reintegration or schism). In his article “Ethnography as Narrative,” Edward M. Bruner (1986) explains:

Narrative structure has an advantage over such related concepts as metaphor or paradigm in that narrative emphasizes order and sequence, in a formal sense, and is more appropriate for the study of change, the life cycle, or any developmental process. Story as model has a remarkable dual aspect—it is both linear and instantaneous. On the one hand, a story is experienced as a sequence, as it is being told or enacted; on the other hand, it is comprehended all at once—before, during, and after the telling. A story is static and dynamic at the same time. (...)

Stories give meaning to the present and enable us to see that present as part of a set of relationships involving a constituted past and a future. (153)

So, even as there is a shape within a narrative, the significance of the narrative for different participants and observers is not static; it changes from person to person and from moment to moment. Bruner discusses the effect that narrative has on our ability to interpret the past and future in terms of the present, we can thus see the reflexive nature narrative offers. In social dramas, narratives can begin with the breach phase and continue through to the final phase of reintegration or schism. At any point in this process, participants and observers are able to use reflection to alter the path that the social drama might take. Looking at how these participants construct a narrative dialogue throughout the entirety of a social drama allow us to see how reflection has the chance to alter the course of events as they unfold. As Americans reflected on

the narrative presented through the images from Abu Ghraib, they changed the manner in which events unfolded by undermining and challenging President Bush's endeavor to make the United States appear heroic. In addition, this reflection demonstrates the role that identity plays in social drama as there is a shift from a valiant identity to an identity lacking in honor.

Social Drama: Applications

The framework of Turner's concept of social drama, or elements thereof, are often applied to conflicts concerning localized communities. Specifically, we looked at how Myerhoff and Butterworth examined the interactions between individuals who identify as members of the same social groupings (elderly Jewish, baseball fans). Even Turner's focus was narrowed to that of a village within a larger society. However, the framework of the social drama can also be applied to individuals who identify with a broader social grouping—that of a national industrialized society. The rigidity of these identities is a concern that factors into the ongoing social dramas.

In a study of the Moro murder, *The Moro Morality Play: Terrorism as Social Drama* (1986), Robin Erica Wagner-Pacific uses Turner's framework to analyze the kidnapping (March 16, 1978) and eventual murder (May 9, 1978) of Aldo Moro, the Italian Prime-Minister.¹¹ In addition to utilizing the more standard elements of ritual, liminality, and the four phases of social drama in her analysis, Wagner-Pacific emphasizes other elements. She states the importance of identifying the root paradigms to which a society adheres, the protagonists involved in the social drama, the plot paths desired by the protagonists, and the manner in which the audience views

¹¹ Aldo Moro, the Italian Prime-Minister, was kidnapped by a terrorist group known as the Red Brigades on Sunday, March 16, 1978. The Red Brigades killed all five of Moro's bodyguards when they kidnapped him and then held him for 55 days before they shot and murdered him. During the course of his imprisonment, the Red Brigades had Moro write letters to facilitate the release of political prisoners in exchange for his return.

and participates in the social drama. By considering who the protagonists are and the plots that they are striving toward, the potential paths to reintegration or schism become apparent.

Through reflecting on shared identities and principles, society is able to create a narrative of events that lays out future paths of reintegration or schism. A breach of a shared principle is generally what begins a social drama and the rigidity of identity is what sustains the conflicts. As we see with the discussion of Wagner-Pacifici and Eyerman, social dramas function at the national level at which a country has what Turner called a “set of social relations governed by a single principle” (*Schism and Continuity in an African Society* xvii). Because we find ourselves in a global society, social dramas are not just limited to national boundaries, however. In his article “A Global Society?” (1992), Anthony McGrew states:

The primary institutions of western modernity—industrialization, capitalism, and the nation-state—have acquired, throughout the twentieth century, a truly global reach. (...) While early phases of globalization brought about the physical unification of the world, more recent phases have remade the world into a single global system in which previously distinct historical societies or civilizations have been thrust together. This should not be taken to imply that globalization involves global cultural homogenization or global political integration. Rather, it defines a far more complex condition, one in which patterns of human interaction, interconnectedness, and awareness are reconstituting the world as a single social space. (469)

Years of permanent and temporary emigration across borders has led to interaction between cultures and prompted the physical unification, interconnectedness, and awareness of which McGrew speaks. This has resulted in the shared principles mentioned by Turner that have been demonstrated by the construction of organizations such as the United Nations, World Trade

Organization, and World Health Organization, to name a few. Given these shared principles, social dramas are not relegated to a single nation or cultural group. Social dramas can occur on a global scale, which is exactly what happened on September 11, 2001.¹² Few scholars have fully approached the events of 9/11 as a social drama, presenting the sort of in-depth analysis that Wagner-Pacifici and Eyerman gave to the Moro and van Gogh incidents, and to do so would take more than a chapter; however, considering the racial, cultural, and political elements present in the circumstances of 9/11 (and the manner in which it mirrors the issues that Anna Deavere Smith often works with within the documentary dramas), it makes for an excellent subject that will transition into a discussion of the documentary dramas of Smith as cultural literacy narratives.

The narratives surrounding the events of 9/11 are both static and fluid. There are certain aspects that we know for fact. According to the narrative presented by the “National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States,” on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, at 8:46 am the first of four airliners crashed in the United States within a ninety minute window. The first plane, American Airlines Flight 11, carrying eleven crew members, seventy-six passengers, and one Egyptian and four Saudi hijackers (Abdul Aziz al Omari, Mohamed Atta, Wail al Shehri, Waleed al Shehri, Satam al Suqami) crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City at 8:46 am. Seventeen minutes later, at 9:03 am. United Airlines Flight 175, carrying a crew of nine, fifty-one passengers, and two Emirati and three Saudi hijackers (Ahmed al Ghamdi, Fayez Banihammad, Hamza al Ghamdi, Marwan al Shehhi, Mohand al Shehri), crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. At 9:37 am American

¹² The crashing of the planes for American Airlines Flight 11, United Airlines Flight 175, American Airlines Flight 77, and United Airlines Flight 93 constituted the initial breach on September 11, 2001. The ensuing response by the United States (and other countries) is the transition into crisis phase that lasted for nearly a decade until a redressive action occurred in the death of Osama Bin Laden.

Airlines Flight 77, carrying six crew members, fifty-three passengers, and five Saudi hijackers (Hani Hanjour, Khalid al Mihdhar, Majed Moqed, Nawaf al Hazmi, Salem al Hazmi), crashed into the Pentagon. The final plane, its intended target assumed to be White House, United Airlines Flight 93, carrying seven crew members, thirty-three passengers, and one Lebanese and four Saudi hijackers (Ziad Jarrah, Saeed al Ghamdi, Ziad Jarrah, Ahmad al Haznawi, Ahmed al Nami), crashed into an empty field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania after the passengers thwarted the efforts of the hijackers.

The actions of these nineteen men, and the network with which they worked, caused nearly an entire nation, possibly most of the world, to pause and take notice. These events then proceeded to influence global society for at least a decade during which the social drama evolved; some may say it finally entered the redressive stage of Turner's social drama in May, 2011, when Osama Bin Laden was killed in Pakistan. Exemplifying this sense of finally entering a potential redressive phase, *The New York Times* (2011) states, "Maureen Hasson, 22, a recent college graduate working for the Justice Department, came down to Lafayette Square in a fuchsia party dress and flip-flops. 'This is full circle for our generation,' she said. 'Just look around at the average age here. We were all in middle school when the terrorists struck. We all vividly remember 9/11 and this is the close of that chapter'" (Baker et al par. 20). A vast majority of people probably share Hasson's sentiments—that the death of Bin Laden closed a decade long social drama; the death of Bin Laden, however, is only another part of a larger narrative that represents the end of the redressive phase, which will allow not just the United States, but also the world, to see if there will be a reintegration or schism within this global community.

Completing an analysis of 9/11 as a social drama allows us to demonstrate further the applicability of Turner's framework and to explore elements of cultural literacy within the narrated events. The first thing to establish is the "crucial principle governing [the] structure" of the social drama of 9/11. The Preamble from the Charter of the United Nations speaks to several global principles that will help us consider the tragedy on a broader (global) level. The Preamble states:

WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED

- To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and
- To reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and
- To establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and
- To promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

AND FOR THESE ENDS

- To practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and
- To unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and
- To ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and
- To employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples (...). (Preamble - United Nations)

More than one of these declarations was violated on 9/11. The hijackers blatantly disregarded the rights of the individuals on the planes as well as those in the buildings into which the planes crashed. The hijackers' acts directly opposed the concept of practicing tolerance and living in this global society in peace. In addition, they used force in a manner that was not in the common interest of all members of the United Nations. The hijackers, and those who are thought or known to have assisted them, are from countries that are part of the United Nations ("United Nations - Member States").¹³ The hijackers perpetrated a heinous breach of the principles stated in the Charter of the United Nations. This breach is made more stark by the vast outpouring of support from other members of the United Nations in the aftermath of tragedy. Many (especially those countries from which the hijackers were from) tried to distance themselves from the attackers. On the other hand, the attack on the United States also demonstrated a global vulnerability that prompted other countries to distance themselves from the United States, even as they attempted to form a sort of global solidarity against terrorism. Even considering the global nature of the responses and the role of the United Nations, there were a limited number of protagonists in the 9/11 social drama.

At the onset of the social drama, the breach allows us to identify the protagonists involved in the action. Understanding who the protagonists are gives us an insight into the roles that they play throughout the course of the social drama and the outcomes toward which they strive. In this instance, there are several categories represented: the political figures, the terrorist groups, and the media. Within the social drama of 9/11, we see the government of the United States (headed by President George W. Bush (2001-2009) and President Barack Obama (2009-

¹³ Lebanon signed: 10/24/1945, Egypt signed: 10/24/1945, Saudi Arabia signed: 10/24/1945, Afghanistan signed: 11/19/1946, Yemen signed: 1/30/1947, Pakistan signed: 09/30/1947, Jordan signed: 12/14/1955, Sudan signed: 11/12/1956, United Arab Emirates signed: 12/09/1971 ("United Nations - Member States").

present)), the terrorist organization al Qaeda (headed by Osama Bin Laden), and various media groups (print, internet, television, radio).

Now that the protagonists have been identified, we can consider the roles that the protagonists play and the outcomes that each desired in respect to the shared principles held by the groups involved. The United States assumes the role of victim/defender. This odd pairing is the result of the manner in which President Bush rhetorically framed his responses. During his address to the nation on the evening of September 11, 2001, President Bush stated:

Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes or in their offices: secretaries, business men and women, military and federal workers, moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror. (...) A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. (“Text of Bush's Address”)

President Bush’s speech on 9/11 immediately sets up a sense of American solidarity with the repeated use of “our.” Initially, it is “our” fellow citizens who were attacked and those of us not at ground zero are just sympathizers, supporters. However, Bush immediately goes on to state that “our way of life, our very freedom came under attack.” Now we are not just bystanders to the event, we are all victims; the freedom of every citizen of the United States was attacked when those planes crashed. President Bush again distances the entire United States from the victims when the second sentence starts with “The victims.” He is rhetorically creating two distinct sets of victims: those who are affected physically and those who are affected psychologically. Those who are affected psychologically are also expected to fulfill the additional role of the defender. It then becomes not *a* someone coming to the defense of the victims, but *the* psychological victims

immediately jumping up after a near crippling blow and defending themselves and their country. Toward the middle of the speech, President Bush goes on to say, “Our military is powerful, and it's prepared. (...) The functions of our government continue without interruption. Federal agencies in Washington which had to be evacuated today are reopening for essential personnel tonight and will be open for business tomorrow. Our financial institutions remain strong, and the American economy will be open for business as well” (“Text of Bush's Address”). By stressing the strength of the economy, and finances of the United States, it suggests (from the point of view of President Bush) that the government believes that one of the biggest psychological blows was not against the general freedom of United States citizens, but against the freedom and wellbeing of United States financial institutions, which nearly gives those institutions the appearance of protagonists in the ongoing social drama. Granted, this section does not appear at the beginning or at the end of the speech, which would have given the extra emphasis of being the first and last things the audience hears; however, the fact President Bush chose to include it at all speaks to the freedoms with which the government was concerned. President Bush mirrors the senior citizens that Myerhoff discusses; the United States becomes a symbol of both fragility and strength that gathers support even as it sends a warning to potential enemies. This symbolic effort so lays the ground work for the United States government’s desired plot of restoring the perceived status quo.

President Bush’s speech works to lay out a plot path for 9/11, and through his narrative he attempts to evoke an immediate response from the audience by shaping the representation of the existing conflict. His narrative does not appear to be constructed with a thought toward reflection but rather immediate, unthinking reaction. This act-first-and-think-later approach is one reason why narrative is, in and of itself, valuable as we can attempt to navigate future

courses based on past mistakes. In the case of social dramas, however, narrative dialogue becomes more valuable in terms of the development of new plot points as it allows for reflection as the social drama progresses and not after the crisis has continued to escalate.

In each case, the political groups had different plots that they wanted to bring into effect, and they also attempted to join the narrative without allowing much room for reflection. The obvious outcome desired by the United States was that of a return to pre-9/11 conditions where the closest United States soil had come to physical attack (since gaining independence) was the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The desired outcome was for a return to when the United States was a global power that defended others, not a country that needed others to defend it. The United States sought justice and retribution for the events of 9/11. In order for this to occur, the United States needed support for military actions it deemed necessary to bring its attackers to justice. Thus, its desired plot required support from those who sympathized with the position of the victim even as the United States prepared its military to play the part of defender of freedom.

As so-called “opponents of freedom,” the hijackers assume the role of the villain in the narrative. Even though there was a mixed national identity within the group of terrorists (several countries with al Qaeda affiliations were represented), there was only one desired course of action represented in narrative when Bin Laden stated: “As for the United States, I tell it and its people these few words: I swear by Almighty God who raised the heavens without pillars that neither the United States nor he who lives in the United States will enjoy security before we can see it as a reality in Palestine and before all the infidel armies leave the land of Mohammed, may God's peace and blessing be upon him” (“Bin Laden's warning: full text”). Here, Bin Laden shapes his role as a supporter of freedom, but he has no objection to his goal of freedom for Palestine coming at the expense of the freedom and life of other individuals. Even though he

calls attention to a military presence, the majority of casualties resulting from the crashes did not involve military personnel. This raises a question: were the events on 9/11 only a plot point with the ultimate goal being a massive breach that would not even result in a potential reintegration or schism, but rather a constant state of crisis? (In the case of the Moro social drama, the Red Brigade had two plots that they were following: legitimation; and the political trial of Moro by a “Tribunal of the People (...) [as they] mobilize the most vast and unified armed initiative toward the ultimate development of the CLASS WAR FOR COMMUNISM” (emphasis in original Wagner-Pacifici 304). Legitimation is an important aspect for both of the terrorist groups in question, because they look for “universal recognition as a political organization with a legitimate cause” (Wagner-Pacifici 154). The Red Brigade worked to establish this through the letters they wrote and the letters they made Moro write while al Qaeda sent out recorded messages. In each case, the villains in this narrative used their narrative discourse to imbed their stories in the larger narrative.

The third protagonist in the 9/11 social drama is the media. Rather than a desired plot, the mass media had a role that they wanted to play, which was, as explained by Wagner-Pacifici, to “provid[e] a stage for duels fought between other protagonists” (59). The media broadcast the speeches of both of the other protagonists. In addition, the media also ritualized 9/11 by presenting the plane crashes as well as memorial services for the physical victims (which also, of course functioned as a memorial service for the psychological trauma suffered by all United States citizens). The media attempted to play a larger role than merely being a protagonist in the narrated social drama; they worked to create a frame from which the entire narrative would be perceived. Considering the media’s role in creating a framing narrative, Abbot explains

As you move to the outer edges of narrative, you may find that it is embedded in another narrative. The containing narrative is what is called a framing narrative. (...) The framing narrative has its own conclusion (...) but it also works as a way of collecting together a multitude of quite different stories. (...) Yet such framing narratives can play critically important roles in the interpretation of the narratives they frame[;] (...) the important point is that framing narratives can, and often do, play a vital role in the narratives they frame. (28-29)

The media offers the audience a chance to reflect on ongoing events even as the media attempts to influence that reflection. In the social drama, part of achieving the desired outcome means dealing with the audience. In order to sway the audience and the outcome of the social drama, ritual is often employed, because ritual presents a smaller frame within the larger framing narrative offered by the medias representation of events. One example of the use of ritual, and the manner in which media plays a role in a social drama is the broadcasts of post-9/11 memorial services.

On September 14, 2001, there was a memorial service at the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. NBC televised the ceremony along with other events that occurred around the globe, including a ceremony attended by Queen Elizabeth II at St. Paul's Cathedral in London. This special broadcast broke into the regular programming and turned the television into a symbolic connection to not only the ritual of the ceremony, but the people physically attending the ceremony and other events: viewers became a passive part of the narrative. During this broadcast, NBC presented footage of the ceremony, candle-light vigils, and family members holding up signs with the names of loved ones lost in the collapse of the towers ("NBC News Special Report: Attack on America"). Cottle explains, "The media's performative use of resonant

symbols, dramatic visualization and embedding of emotions into some ritual forms of narrative can, for example, confront the strategic power of institutions and vested interests, and even lend moral gravitas to the projects of challenger groups within society” (“Mediatized Rituals” 412). NBC’s presentation of the events focused more on the responses of United States political figures (such as President Bush, Joint Chief of Staff Chairman Henry Shelton, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott), relatives of those lost, and the emergency response personnel; NBC did not offer up a narrative that spoke to tolerance; they framed the liminal moment created through the ritualized media event in such a way as to create a potentially dangerous patriotic backlash. Therefore, NBC created not only a ritual with their special coverage, but also a potentially volatile frame for the ongoing narrative.

Now that we have discussed the entire event of 9/11 as a social drama, or meta-social drama, we can look at the smaller social dramas that occurred under the cloud of this meta-social drama. Almost immediately following the events of 9/11, there were incidents of hate crimes in which Americans turned against each other. Given the history of the United States (we will look at this more in chapter three), the backlash against Muslim- and Arab- Americans should not have come as a surprise; in fact, it appears to have been expected, as speeches given by President Bush on September 20, 2001 indicate. During the State of the Union address, President Bush stated, “The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself. The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends. It is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them” (“Transcript of President Bush's address”). President Bush clearly states that all Muslims and Arabs are not to be considered terrorists or threats to the safety of the United States. However, this is immediately

followed by an assertion of who the enemies of the United States are—the terrorists and any government that supports them.

Even though individual Muslim-Americans do not qualify as a government, culturally illiterate people still look at Muslim-Americans and those who may resemble them as individuals who could potentially harbor terrorists or be terrorists. The potential for backlash was great enough that President Bush included a second statement in the same speech: “We're in a fight for our principles, and our first responsibility is to live by them. No one should be singled out for unfair treatment or unkind words because of their ethnic background or religious faith” (“Transcript of President Bush's address”). President Bush indicates that it should be against the principles of United States citizens to participate in hate crimes; however, statements like this are surrounded by rhetoric that demands United States citizens stand up for the freedoms that have been threatened and to stand against the terrorists who attacked those freedoms. As mentioned in the discussion of the patriotic atmosphere created through the ritual of baseball, people’s ability to question rationally the validity of democracy, let alone acts they perceive as patriotic, is reduced when they believe they are supporting their country. Therefore, even though President Bush warns against potential hate crimes, the focus of his speech furthers the plot path of the United States to return to a pre-9/11 status quo during the redressive phase of the 9/11 social drama rather than curbing potential backlash. In other words, President Bush’s narrative discourse frames the story in such a way as to discourage the reflection that could result in cultural empathy and minimize or eliminate potential backlash.¹⁴

Even the smallest amount of backlash demonstrates a lack of cultural empathy. This deficiency of cultural empathy shows that not only can some Americans not distinguish between

¹⁴ As was discussed in the Introduction, cultural empathy occurs when individuals have a broader view of society and not just empathy/understanding for the aspects that fall only within the scope of their immediate cultural group.

a fundamentalist Muslim terrorist and Sikhs, let alone a Muslim or Arab American, but they do not necessarily want to do so.¹⁵ They choose cultural illiteracy over cultural literacy. For cultural literacy to be more than a trendy façade, there needs to be an understanding of the practices and habits that make us culturally different as well: cultural empathy. In a study of the backlash that occurred following 9/11, Lori Peek states in her book *Behind the Backlash: Muslim Americans After 9/11* (2010):

The attribution of blame and the subsequent scapegoating that followed 9/11 left those who shared a common ethnic or religious identity with the hijackers—who, it would quickly be discovered, were all Arab Muslim men—feeling fearful and isolated. As a consequence of the terrorist attacks, Arab and Muslim Americans become the targets of hate crimes, harassment, and government surveillance. Thus, although the events of 9/11 brought together many Americans and led to increased feelings of patriotism and national unity, the public and political response that followed the attacks alienated and further marginalized millions of others. In fact, we were really not “all Americans” on that day.

(22)

However, it was not just those that shared a common ethnic or religious identity who felt the backlash. A South Asian man narrates that, “Once I had picked up my sister, I was walking my sister back home. This man said, ‘Get out of here, you f—ing Arabs.’ I’m like, ‘That’s funny, because nobody here is an Arab. Who’s an Arab?’ It’s just ignorance” (Peek 65). The cultural illiteracy of United States citizens does not just concern minor visible differences; it includes differences that cannot be seen at all. In terms of cultural illiteracy, too much focus might be

¹⁵ This is not to say that there was not backlash for Muslims across the globe; however, the focus of this dissertation is on American cultural literacy and not cultural literacy on a global scale.

placed on being able to recognize visual cues; however, being culturally literate needs to go below the surface.

The outcomes of cultural illiteracy could be as minor as the verbal attack that the above individual of South Asian descent experienced, or it could be as severe as what occurred in Arizona on September 15, 2001. On September 15th, Frank Silva Roque shot and killed Balbir Singh Sodhi, an Indian immigrant, and “then fired shots at another petrol station, where a man of Lebanese descent was working, and at a house inhabited by an Afghan family” (“US 9/11 Revenge Killer Convicted” par. 6). In this instance, the backlash following 9/11 proved fatal. Roque was quoted as having yelled, “I stand for America all the way” as he was handcuffed upon capture (“Sikh Owner Of Gas Station Is Fatally Shot In Rampage” par. 3). In a warped sense of patriotism, Roque attacked and killed innocent people, committing the ultimate act of cultural illiteracy. Regardless of the preemptive rhetoric invoked in President Bush’s speeches, the cultural illiteracy present in the United States, paired with the ramped-up sense of patriotic duty, led to smaller-scale social dramas following 9/11. The events of 9/11 still qualified, however, as the initial breach; it resulted in smaller cracks during the crisis phase, each qualifying as independent breaches compounding the crisis and adding layers to the reflection and actions required during the redressive phase.

These fissures still exist in 2012 and, in some cases, continue to grow even as years have passed following the initial breach. The death of Osama bin Laden may have given the appearance of a redressive action; however, as each smaller social drama assumed its own path, they also required different methods of resolution. In 2011, for example, the television network TLC became a protagonist and contributor to the narrative surrounding the ongoing social drama when it aired a show called *All-American Muslim*, which was described as:

What is it like to be Muslim in America? TLC answers that question with *All-American Muslim*, a powerful series that goes inside the rarely seen world of American Muslims to uncover a unique community struggling to balance faith and nationality in a post 9/11 world.

All-American Muslim follows the daily lives of five American Muslim families in Dearborn, Michigan, one of the most established and largest concentrations of American Muslims in the country. Each episode offers an intimate look at customs and celebrations, as well as misconceptions, conflicts, and differences these families face outside and within their own community.

From the challenges of marriage to juggling busy careers while raising a family, the families featured in *All-American Muslim* share their biggest celebrations and their unexpected challenges. The show reveals how these individuals negotiate universal family issues while remaining faithful to the traditions and beliefs of their faith. (“All-American Muslim”)

This show ran from November 2011 to January 2012 and, as of this writing, only had one season. It was an attempt to bring the lives of Muslim-Americans to the American people through the genre of reality television. Based on the description, it seems that TLC was trying to dispel, in an attempt at reintegration, misconceptions that non-Muslim-Americans may have had following the events of 9/11; once the show aired, however, cultural illiteracy surged to the forefront. Lowes pulled its advertising during *All-American Muslim* due to pressure from an outside source (the American Family Association).¹⁶ Lowes issued a statement on its Facebook page following its decision:

¹⁶ By way of understanding the standpoint of The American Family Association, their mission statement is “to inform, equip, and activate individuals to strengthen the moral foundations of American culture, and give aid to the

It appears that we managed to step into a hotly contested debate with strong views from virtually every angle and perspective—social, political and otherwise—and we've managed to make some people very unhappy. We are sincerely sorry. We have a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, across our workforce and our customers, and we're proud of that longstanding commitment. (Stewart)

Following this addition to the narrative, Lowes received thousands of comments both in favor of and against its action. After the onslaught of comments, Lowes took down the initial Facebook post (including all related comments) and offered another statement admonishing commenters for their lack of respect concerning its responses. The initial Facebook post prompted Stewart to post a blog entry on *Jezebel* titled “Lowe’s Facebook Page Explodes With Bigoted Hate Speech” on December 14, 2011 at 12:25 pm.

Similar to Neuman’s post, this blog entry received hundreds of comments, many of which resulted in narrative dialogues reflecting on the social drama that evolved out of the breach committed by Lowes. A fair number of comments on Stewart’s blog entry are in direct response to posts left on Lowe’s Facebook page (which is no longer available); however, there are also a number of comments that focus on how this situation both reflects and effects American society. In Figure 8, ZuzusPetals admits to not knowing anything about the show and asks if other readers of the blog are familiar with it. In her comment, ZuzusPetals specifically asks, “Does it really all boil down to people can’t deal with the notion of Muslim people being presented as....humans?” The insight on the part of ZuzusPetals implies that TLC is taking a step toward a redressive action that would shape the ongoing social dramas of Muslim-Americans

church here and abroad in its task of fulfilling the Great Commission.” Their philosophical statement is “that God has communicated absolute truth to mankind, and that all people are subject to the authority of God’s Word at all times. Therefore AFA believes that a culture based on biblical truth best serves the well-being of our nation and our families, in accordance with the vision of our founding documents; and that personal transformation through the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest agent of biblical change in any culture” (“Who is AFA?”).




Figure 8: Dialogue begun by ZuzuPetals in response to Stewart's blog post titled "Lowe's Facebook Page Explodes With Bigoted Hate Speech" on *Jezebel*

for redressive and reintegrative effects. One commenter on Stewart's blog stated, "How very strange. I posted an 'I'm not going to buy my remodelling supplies at your store because of this' letter. It was down within seconds. Hours later four 'We hate them terryrist Moozlims' posts were still there. It tells you where Lowe's [sic] thinks its money is" (Tsathoggua). By moderating comments in such a fashion, Lowes attempts to direct the narrative dialogue of participants and alter the narrative discourse. This type of interference is not employed in the discussion thread attached to Stewart's blog post, which allows contributors to reflect on all aspects of the unfolding drama. Returning to the narrative dialogue prompted by ZuzusPetals, archaeo_girl adds to the conversation by writing, "the uproar the watchgroup raised was because the show portrayed Muslim people as normal, everyday Americans and not some kind of boogiemen." Advertisers, like news reports and television shows, are also protagonists within the context of a

within the United States. TLC's action could have promoted additional narrative dialogue within society that might have helped to avoid a schism. However, the actions of Lowes's subsequent response and the dialogue that accrued on its Facebook page were both instances where individuals expressed a lack of cultural empathy, undermines any potential

social drama. In this case, Lowes was pressured by the American Family Association to withdraw their advertising, imbedding additional narratives in the one offered by TCL.

I have discussed the manner in which the media is able to frame society's interaction with ongoing events. Figure 9 presents a brief discussion on Stewart's blog entry between Janet Snakehole and StuckOnRepeat-Bell that references the role of the media in current views on Muslims and Muslim-Americans. Specifically, Janet Snakehole states, "Our media has brainwashed us to believe that Islam means terrorism. Especially after 9/11. (...) I would know some of it. Being a Serb and constantly demonized in Western Media and Hollywood films, ive [sic] seen my share of blatant ignorance against myself and my Serbian people." Within a social drama, the media has the dual role of being a protagonist following a plot path as well as medium through which other protagonists are heard. The double obligation to society comes with


 **Janet Snakehole** 14 Dec 2011 12:51 PM

Our media has brainwashed us to believe that Islam means terrorism. Especially after 9/11. Billions of Muslims practice in peace every day and yet the select few are chosen to be the ringleaders for so many cultures, painting them as evil and dark. I would know some of it. Being a Serb and constantly demonized in Western Media and Hollywood films, ive seen my share of blatant ignorance against myself and my Serbian people.

Why arent these ignorant fucktards RIOTING in Vatican against Catholic Church for all those rapes? Do we judge EVERY catholic in the world because the select few abused their power and committed HEINOUS crimes?

These comments are discouraging. As a Christian woman, I find it hard to "hate" or judge anyone because the notion itself is very anti-Christian, and I bet 90 percent of those ignorant comment come from good ol' Christians. Social liberals, progressives and logical people everywhere would facepalm at all this bullshit.

Shame on Lowes. They should know better. What the fuck is their concern who practices what? Worry about profits you assholes. Thats your job. promoted by StuckOnRepeat-Bell

 **StuckOnRepeat-Bell** @Janet Snakehole

Over here in Ireland, the super Catholic country, our prime minister attacked the Vatican for covering the paedophile scandals and not punishing the priests who were sexually abusive, but rather moving them to another parish.


[Hide 1 reply](#)

a great deal of power and it should come with a great deal of responsibility, because they have the ability to represent a variety of individuals as the narrative surrounding the social drama develops. As Janet Snakehole observes, however, they often produce representations that cloud society's ability to critically reflect back on the narrative.

Figure 9: Dialogue begun by Janet Snakehole in response to Stewart's blog post titled "Lowe's Facebook Page Explodes With Bigoted Hate Speech" on *Jezebel*

The role that the media plays in framing a social drama is emphasized in a piece that Smith included in her book *Talk to Me: Travels in Media and Politics* (2000). Smith interviewed Ben Bradlee, the former editor of *The Washington Post*. In the piece that she constructs out of that interview, Bradlee discusses the position that those who report the news hold as they investigate events and then report upon those events. One of the initial comments that he makes is that “it got so that what they said was less important than how they said it and the authority that they could, uh, force the public to believe they had” (114). This statement demonstrates that the representatives of the media become powerful protagonists within a social drama; their position allows them to frame the narrative events even as they are expected to report the facts of the ongoing narrative. As a paid advertiser, Lowes becomes a media representative through its advertisement placement. These protagonists can present competing narratives that become imbedded in the larger narrative surrounding the social drama. The subjective aspect of reporting can influence the direction that reflection takes and the plot paths that the protagonists and the audience set. It makes the frames offered by the media further suspect in their motives. By withdrawing its advertising, Lowes stops being merely a corporation bent on selling home improvement supplies and becomes a representation of the ideology promoted by the AFA. It is seen as using its power as a large business to become a minor player in the social drama. By posting statements to its corporate Facebook page it is also contributing to the construction of a national cultural literacy narrative that illustrates a lack of cultural empathy and the illiteracy events that surround the television show *All-American Muslim*. In addition, it demonstrated an inability to accept criticism when it pulled its initial post due to unfriendly comments.

This failure to critically reflect on narrative and society also keeps individuals from offering constructive criticism on the representations constructed through attempted narrative dialogues. Lowes prompted unhealthy generalizations that hinder the growth of cultural empathy and the potential for redressive action by first pulling its advertising and second by taking down


 **Silverwane** 14 Dec 2011 10:56 PM

There are appropriate ways to criticize a culture that is not your own.


AND THEN THERE ARE VASTLY INAPPROPRIATE ONES.

It doesn't seem so hard to realize that if you ever state that "all (insert group of people) are (some sort of negative term, usually something dramatic)," then that makes you a bigot.

promoted by Tsathoggua


 **Tsathoggua** @Silverwane

Oh, I don't know about that. "All members of the FFA are hateful bigots" is probably accurate at the 95% confidence level.


 **ashleypants** @Tsathoggua

95% ≠ "all."
Some people are just really misguided and have never met a Muslim person and lack the cognitive skills to realize they're wrong, but are honestly trying their best.

Edited by ashleypants at 12/15/11 3:38 AM

 **Tsathoggua** @ashleypants

Some of Fred Phelps' people are honestly trying their best. Same thing. Same mentality. What confidence interval level would satisfy you?

 **ashleypants** @Tsathoggua

All generalizations are dangerous. Yeah, the Fred Phelps' folks are brainwashed. There is that one women who left the group a few years back and has done interviews. She didn't magically become a decent person the day she left. She always had an inkling, but stayed because she was scared or brainwashed. So, no, I'm not okay with calling all of them shitty people, but I'm okay with calling them hateful since, uh, they use the term. We are also talking about a group of 60 or so with the Westboro Church, as opposed to, say, much larger and abstract groups like "Muslims."

EDIT: Whyyyy is the link to the Westboro video showing a Squidbillies episode? WHY? That is for sure not the video I just linked. I have no idea.

Here:
[\[www.youtube.com\]](http://www.youtube.com)

Edited by ashleypants at 12/15/11 2:15 PM

Hide 4 replies

Figure 10: Dialogue begun by Silverwane in response to Stewart's blog post titled "Lowe's Facebook Page Explodes With Bigoted Hate Speech" on *Jezebel*

the comments made by the public. Figure 10 presents a narrative dialogue that outlines the danger that generalizations hold in respect to the facilitation of the ongoing social drama. In another comment to Stewart's entry, user Silverwane states, "There are appropriate ways to criticize a culture that is not your own. AND THEN THERE ARE VASTLY INAPPROPRIATE ONES. It doesn't seem so hard to realize that if you ever state that 'all (insert group of people) are (some sort of negative term, usually something dramatic),' then that makes you a bigot." Silverwane is distinguishing between

constructive criticism that would promote narrative dialogue (as is found in the discussion threads to the blog entries that are being analyzed and amongst the characters presented in Smith's documentary dramas) and criticism that shuts down paths of communication even as it opens up a path for blind statements that begin and end with their utterance. This becomes apparent as the narrative dialogue continues and the participants discuss the danger of generalizing. Making a blanket statement that all X are Y does not allow room for discussion or a narrative working through dealing with the difference of those who do not fit into expected or familiar dimensions. The peril of overgeneralizing is often an underlying current in Smith's documentary dramas because generalizing undercuts individual identities and the fluidity of those identities. We are almost never all one thing but a composition of the many cultures we belong to and with which we interact. The navigation that occurs between an individual and a group, private and social identities, as they are narrated, created, and changed is present within the framework of social dramas and Smith's documentary dramas.

Chapter 3: Narrative, Reflection, and Anna Deavere Smith's Documentary Drama

In Chapter two I presented a discussion of how the social drama of 9/11 is an example of the type of situation about which Anna Deavere Smith creates documentary dramas.¹⁷ These documentary dramas function simultaneously as both ongoing social dramas in and of themselves and transitional narratives between the crisis and redressive phases in the social drama process (associated with the larger events Smith documents). This can be seen, for example, in a comparison between how Smith's documentary dramas function and the parade Myerhoff discusses. The parade performed by the Jewish seniors was a bridging action between the crisis and the redressive action phases that brought the crisis to the attention of the media in order to begin a redressive process that would lead to reintegration. Smith's documentary dramas, however, are more firmly established in the redressive phase than the crisis phase, where they present a narrative of events that creates a dialogue that functions as an attempt at reintegration. Both the narrative and the dialogue are layers in the reflexive process that moves through the crisis phase, the redressive action phase, and into a phase of reintegration or schism. Narrative and dialogue, by functioning as a layer that moves through so many parts of the social drama, connect the participants and audience members and increase their stake in the outcomes of the social drama.

¹⁷Anna Deavere Smith has been commissioned to create documentary dramas for groups such as: Eureka Theatre, San Francisco (*From the Outside Looking In*); the Rockefeller Conference Center, Bellagio, Italy (*Fragments: On the Intercultural Performance*); Crossroads Theatre (*Black Identity and Black Theatre*); Princeton University, New Jersey (*Gender Bending*).

Anna Deavere Smith and Cultural Literacy

Anna Deavere Smith is a solo documentary dramatist and performer who employs a unique method of constructing and performing her art; she works to capture not only a critical point or period in America's history but also to perform in the character of the individual she interviews. Smith discusses her process in the introduction to *Fires in the Mirror* (1992); she explains that "Mimicry is *not* character. Character lives in the obvious gap between the real person and my *attempt* to seem like them. I try to close the gap between us, but I applaud the gap between us. I am willing to display my own *unlikeness*" (emphasis in original xxxvii-xxxviii). In her attempt to seem like the people she interviews, Smith demonstrates an ability to create a site for considering difference; this places her in an excellent position to work as an agent for understanding the need for cultural empathy and cultural literacy. As I will discuss in more depth below, Smith's talent for conveying both external and internal differences through performance exemplifies her acknowledgement and respect for difference as she confronts the audience with the chance to do the same.

Each of the pieces Smith has constructed presents the audience with the option to acknowledge and respect difference or to ignore the potential for cultural empathy. Only three of Smith's documentary dramas have been published: *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights Brooklyn and Other Identities* (1993), *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (1994), and *House Arrest* (1997). Each of these documentary dramas deals with underlying issues (race, ethnicity, socioeconomic standing) that are present throughout American society. *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights Brooklyn and Other Identities* (hereafter referred to as *Fires*) and *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (hereafter referred to as *Twilight*) have more localized events at their centers, whereas *House Arrest* deals with the broader scope of Washington D.C. and American politics. In this chapter I

will primarily analyze *Fires* and *Twilight*,¹⁸ because they were initially staged as solo performed documentary dramas while *House Arrest* was written for a multi-actor cast.

Documentary drama (particularly solo performed documentary drama) can facilitate the process of negotiating and encouraging cultural empathy. Jonathan Kalb, in “Documentary Solo Performance: The Politics of the Mirrored Self” (2001), argues that “group documentary plays are almost always disposable, their full power dependent on the ephemeral newsworthiness of their topics. This danger is much less with solo pieces” (22). Kalb goes on to qualify his comment: “[s]olo artists turn the mirror into a political tool. (...) They provide the audience with opportunities to identify with the other through a transformed single individual and this brings the power of the mirror to the representation of otherness” (23). The only way that the Other can exist is if there is difference, and it is this difference that the solo artists both present and embody through their performance. Solo artists navigating through a number of characters during the performance highlight the gaps that exists between those involved in the event depicted in the documentary drama. In order to stay true to the event they are documenting, and to give an accurate representation of each individual, solo artists cannot shy away from any difference. Kalb discusses Anna Deavere Smith’s process, explaining that “[i]n several interviews Smith has spoken of her process of inhabiting characters who are plainly repellent or guilty of disgraceful deeds, and she unfashionably explains that ‘love’ not ‘judgment,’ must be the essence of her task

¹⁸ *Fires in the Mirror* had its world premiere on May 1, 1992 at the New York Shakespeare Festival less than 10 months after the death of Gavin Cato, which was the catalyst for the rioting that occurred in Crown Heights. On August 19, 1991 one of the vehicles in Lubavitcher Grand Rebbe Menachem Schneerson’s processional ran into Gavin Cato and his cousin Angela while the children were on the corner at an intersection. Gavin was killed and Angela’s leg was broken. This incident prompted a violent response; Yankel Rosenbaum was stabbed three hours later, in assumed retribution for the death of Gavin. August 20, 1991 marked the beginning of a tense hostile atmosphere that included riots and demonstrations and did not calm until December of 1993 (*Fires in the Mirror* xviii-lx). In May of 1992, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* was commissioned by Gordon Davidson, artistic director/producer of the Mark Taper in Los Angeles, CA, in response to the riots and demonstrations resulting from the beating and arrest of Rodney King and the subsequent trials of the police officers involved in the incident (*Twilight: Los Angeles*).

if she is to make such behavior real enough to be submitted to fair criticism” (18). This lack of judgment works as a form of respect for the differences of the characters as representations of reality.

Responsibility also comes into play as solo documentary dramas act as “conduits for testimony that might otherwise never be heard” (Kalb 19). Smith takes on the responsibility for giving a public voice to these individuals and offers fair representation of the differences that often act as catalysts for the traumatic events depicted through her performance. For example, when Smith undertakes the role of Young Soon Han (a Korean-American and former liquor store owner) in *Twilight*, she captures Han’s soft spoken accent and mannerisms without over exaggeration, which would have pushed the portrayal into that of caricature. By respectfully engaging both those affected by the event along with her audience, Smith provides an example of cultural literacy in action. Parkinson and Saunders state that “[c]ultural literacy is concerned with perspectives—an appreciation of alternative realities” (4). The dialogue created by Smith’s documentary dramas connects her, her subject, and her audience with perspectives and realities that may have gone unexplored if she had not held up the mirror of mimesis for reflection.

Returning to Kearney’s discussion of mimesis, he suggests:

[An] act of mimesis which enables us to pass from life to life-story introduces a “gap” (however minimal) between living and recounting. (...) Because the recounted life prises open perspectives inaccessible to ordinary perception. It marks a poetic extrapolation of possible worlds which supplement and refashion our referential relations to the life-world existing prior to the act of recounting. Our exposure to new possibilities of being refigures our everyday being-in-the world. So that when we return from the story-world to the real world, our

sensibility is enriched and amplified in important respects. In that sense we may say that mimesis involves both a free-play of fiction and a responsibility to real life. (132-133)

Smith acknowledges the importance of the gap between who she is and the individual she portrays. This gap serves to make visible the narrative constructed through her recounting even as it creates a liminal space where the audience exists between reality and the story-world. Both of these aspects of the gap offer an opportunity for immediate reflection by of the audience as they are made aware of the difference between the story-world narrated by Smith and the real events and individuals from whence she draws her material. In addition, the audience is made aware of the difference between their reality and the reality of the individual Smith represents.

Like the social dramas Smith represents and recreates, her form of documentary drama is a complex procedure. Investigating the relationship between this difference and cultural literacy through the levels of dialogue and Smith's method is not a clear-cut procedure; the relationship is not linear and nearly every element touches and works with another. However, Smith's interview process is a good place to start. In *Talk to Me: Listening Between the Lines*, Smith explains why and how her definition of character is so important in her work:

Character, then, seemed to me to be an improvisation on given rhythms. The more successful you were at improvising on language, the more jazz you have, the more likely you could be found in your language, that is, if you wanted to be found in your language. Some people use language as a mask. And some want to create designed language that appears to reveal them but does not. Yet, from time to time we are betrayed by language, if not in the words themselves, in the rhythm with which we deliver our words. Over time, I would learn to listen for those wonderful

moments when people spoke a kind of personal music, which left a rhythmic architecture of who they were. I would be much more interested in those rhythmic architectures than in the information they might or might not reveal. (36)

Each of Smith's character pieces has that special rhythm. Each rhythm is unique to a given person and constitutes another difference that does not appear on the surface as race, gender, and age. Smith's ability to respect each individual that she interviews and her aptitude for close listening gives her the necessary material to compose her style of documentary drama. In a way, *compose* is an accurate description for her process, because she is taking the natural, unfiltered rhythms of individuals and weaving them together to create a song of solidarity performed through difference. Smith states that the rhythmic architectures are more important than the information that they may provide, and it is when individuals are speaking about tragedy or extremely personal matters that they reveal those brief moments of true character. Smith's process "[foils] invisibility and stigmatization (...). By speaking the unspeakable, making the seemingly unremarkable remarkable, or simply leaving the impression of having been 'on location' (the defining notion of documentary), [she destroys] the simplistic scaffolding that prevents fuller truths being recognized" (Kalb 20).

Reflexive Nature of Narrative and Dialogue

Through the placement of each individual piece, within the overall context of the documentary drama, Smith creates a narrative dialogue that also functions as an American cultural literacy narrative. One example of this narrative dialogue from *Fires* is the placement of the pieces "Seven Verses" (Minister Conrad Mohammed) and "Isaac" (Letty Cottin Pogrebin). In "Seven Verses," Mohammed sits at a table in a restaurant, wearing an expensive suit with expensive accessories as he is being interviewed by Smith, who is sitting across from him. In

“Isaac,” Pogrebin is portrayed as talking to Smith over the telephone. Pogrebin is sitting at a desk in her home office wearing comfortable clothing. “Seven Versus” focuses on how Mohammed views “[t]he condition of the Black man in America” (*Fires* 52), while “Isaac” is a discussion of the effect of Holocaust stories on audiences (*Fires* 59). In each of these pieces there is an obvious gap in the mimesis as Smith (an African-American woman) embodies each individual (first an African-American man and second a Jewish-American woman). She treats each character with respect that places their parts in the narrative dialogue on equal ground despite the differences between each individual (Mohammed to Pogrebin and then Mohammed/Pogrebin to Smith) and herself. Gregory Jay, in his article “Other People’s Holocausts: Trauma, Empathy, and Justice in Anna Deavere Smith’s *Fires in the Mirror*” (2007), states that the “dialogue between [Mohammed and Pogrebin] dramatizes the problem of mutual accountability that lies at the heart of how *Fires in the Mirror* approaches the subject of black-Jewish relations” (132). It is the construction of this narrative dialogue that is important to our discussion of cultural empathy. Throughout their narrative dialogue (created by Smith) they reflect on the history of their respective cultural groups and perceived deficits in cultural empathy.

The focus of Jay’s analysis is the use of holocaust discourse and rhetoric in *Fires* and how the performance “mirrors back to us the way our history and feelings inform our judgments, sometimes to the benefit of truth, but sometimes at its expense” (148). Even though I am not focusing on holocaust discourse, Jay’s analysis of Smith’s work makes an important point about performative empathy that demonstrates how the audience’s feelings about a performance are beneficial to their construction and development of cultural literacy. Jay explains:

Performative empathy [is] an “acting out” that includes the cognitive dimension inherent to all emotions, but it is also a “working through” that challenges us to

understand the ‘other’ through a radical crossing of identity boundaries. [In addition p]erformative empathy helps us see the gaps between our own understanding and the perceptions of the subject whom we reenact. (125)

Specifically, in respect to the Mohammed-Pogrebin dialogue, Jay explains that Smith:

Exposes the arrested emotions of both sides by articulating their competing claims side by side. Smith’s performance holds up a mirror in which each side is asked to witness the holocaust of the other; more importantly, that witnessing prompts us to question the uses of holocaust rhetoric that preclude rather than enable empathy. (129)

In the above quote, we could substitute our focus on culture for Jay’s focus on holocaust, therefore stating that Smith’s work asks us to “witness the [culture] of the other; more importantly, that witnessing prompts us to question the uses of [cultural] rhetoric that precludes rather than enable empathy” (129). Mohammed and Pogrebin’s pieces both deal with a highly contentious topic: the suffering of each cultural group’s ancestors. By employing cultural rhetoric (per Jay’s understanding of holocaust rhetoric), Mohammed presents a sense of oneness when compared to Pogrebin; Smith lessens that sense, however, by choosing to place his piece before Pogrebin. Mohammed expounds on the history of the Black man and his belief that, in respect to slavery:

no crime in the history of humanity
has before or since
equaled that crime.
The Holocaust did not equal it
Oh, absolutely not.

First of all,
that was a horrible crime
and that is something that is a disgrace in the eyes of civilized
people.

(...)

But it in no way compares with the slavery of our people
because we lost over a hundred
and some say two hundred and fifty,
million

(...).

We didn't just lose six million.

We didn't just

endure this

for, for

five or six years

or from '38 to '45 or '39 to—

We endured this for over three hundred years—

the total subjugation of the Black man. (54-55)

If Smith had placed this piece after Pogrebin's piece, Mohammed would have seemed to be attempting to take the focus off of the emotional tale presented by Pogrebin by comparing the number of people who suffered and died due to slavery to those who died during the Holocaust. The movements of Smith's body and the fluctuation of her voice as she performs Mohammed creates the impression that his presence is very theatrical in nature, which would add to the

impression of an attempt to overshadow Pogrebin. In the PBS performance, as the character of Mohammed speaks the above lines, Smith places emphasis on a number of the words in order to heighten the comparison. When the word “way” is spoken, the “a” is drawn out, instilling in that word a sense of distance and quantity that is reinforced by the number of deaths mentioned in the following lines. Mohammed repeats the phrase “We didn’t just” that, in the printed text, Smith places as the beginnings of two separate lines. Smith, in her shaping of the written text, demonstrates the poetic nature of the repetition within the context of the narrative as well as emphasizing Mohammed’s own stress on identifying with all Blacks over all Jews. The use and repetition of the term “just” stresses the impression that Blacks did not only or merely lose six million people, therefore Mohammed downplays the length and deaths of the Jews during the Holocaust. This is reinforced by the stress that Mohammed places on the words “six” and both times he says “to” in the following lines. This piece emphasizes the fact that slavery was not over in a short period of time as was the Holocaust. Smith uses subtle shifts in body language that connect to Mohammed’s language during this section of the piece. When she speaks the line, “But it in no way compares with the slavery of our people,” Smith places her elbow on the table, and leans her cheek against her fist. This creates a confidential tone that is later emphasized when Smith/Mohammed states that the crimes of slavery are issues that “nobody wants to talk about.” However, the dramatic patterns in this narrative create the impression that Mohammed is willing to speak about the subject at great length and with great passion.

In marked contrast to Mohammed and Smith’s mimicry of him, Pogrebin is represented as soft voiced with her eyes downcast as she reads from her book *Deborah, Golda and Me* (1991). She reads a section that recounts the emotional tale of her uncle Isaac:

Isaac is my connection to dozens of other family members who

were murdered in the concentration camps.

Because he was blond and blue-eyed he had been

chosen as the designated survivor of his town.

That is the Jewish councils had instructed him to do anything

to stay alive and tell the story. (61)

Smith interviewed Pogrebin over the phone and during the performance this fact is recreated as Smith sits at a desk with a phone cradled against her ear. In addition, there appears to be a softness to the lighting that is missing from Mohammed's piece. There is a quiver in Pogrebin's voice as she reads from the text, which gives the impression that she is suppressing tears. This part of the narrative dialogue is poignant, and if Smith had placed it before Mohammed's piece, that poignancy may have overshadowed Mohammed's message that slaves were strong enough to recover from all that was done to them. Alternately, the subtle nature of the emotion might have been over-shadowed by Mohammed's theatrical personality. As they are positioned by Smith in *Fires*, however, the audience is presented with an opportunity to reflect on a conversation that speaks to the suffering of both sides. Smith creates a contrast that suggests that each side needs to see the common ground upon which the groups stand in relation to their differences, a common ground built on suffering that does not attempt to quantify it.

In the PBS video of *Fires in the Mirror* (2003), the organization and character pieces are different from the printed version (see Appendix A). Smith's choices demonstrate how meaning making and our perception of cultural truths can be altered. She works through performative empathy. Appendix A organizes (from the Mohammed and Pogrebin pieces) the elements of the printed text that did not make it into the PBS movie as well as the organizational differences. One of the edits occurs around the Mohammed/Pogrebin dialogue. In the printed text, Pogrebin

has an additional piece that is positioned before Mohammed's (entitled "Near Enough to Reach"). In this piece, Pogrebin makes the argument that:

Only *Jews* listen,
only *Jews* take Blacks seriously,
only *Jews* view Blacks as full human beings that you
should *address*
in their rage
and, um,
people don't seem to notice that. (emphasis in original 50-51)

By removing this piece for the PBS movie, Smith alters the narrative flow of the performance, and the dialogue between the two pieces changes. Including both of Pogrebin's pieces frames the dialogue and Mohammed, because it constrains the expansion that Mohammed attempts when he tries to place the suffering of Blacks in an unending context. "Near Enough to Reach" states that:

...Jews and Blacks
that's manageable,
because we're near,
we're still near enough to each other to reach!

Pogrebin not only states that Jews pay attention to the situation that Blacks are in, but they are also close to that situation themselves. Furthermore, Pogrebin suggests that suffering does not have to be competitive or mutually exclusive. Mohammed's piece appears to argue against this belief; he emphasizes a large gap between their situations. Smith's structuring of the pieces places the conflict between the Jews and the Blacks in (and outside) the neighborhood in open dialogue (or opening that which may not exist elsewhere). This dialogue works through the

similarities and differences of the experiences of the racial groups. In the PBS version that omits “Near Enough to Reach,” Mohammed is less constrained, and the focus is less on how the two cultural groups are in a similar situation in respect to cultural identity and more on the horrors that the groups went through.

Smith creates a narrative dialogue that contains a sense of identification that in turn allows for reflection on the part of the audience. This identification comes through empathy that Smith evokes with her performance of each individual. Hall defines identification as:

A process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption. There is always “too much” or “too little”—an over-determination or lack, but never a proper fit, a totality. Like all signifying practices, it is subject to the “play,” of difference. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of “frontier-effects.” It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process. (2-3)

When we acknowledge the difference between those we identify with and those we do not, we construct an identity based upon existing boundaries. However, the boundaries also give us points for reflection, because we can see where our cultural groups brush up against other groups. We have an opportunity for cultural empathy to lead into cultural literacy through the acknowledgement of reflexive and reflective boundaries. The narrative constructed by both versions, as well as the dialogue between the two, is productive in that the characters are reflecting on their situations and cultural groups while, at the same time, offering the audience the opportunity to reflect on the dialogue between the two. This reflection then creates an

opportunity for a reinterpretation of identity that is based on previous and new understandings of cultural relationships.

The flexibility of Smith's scripts also speaks to the collapse of a fixed cultural identity. Moving from the documentary drama *Fires* to Smith's TED performance, where she included a character piece from *Twilight: Los Angeles*—that of Young Soon Han—we see that Han is searching for an understanding of American justice in respect to minorities. There are marked differences between the sample transcription from the TED performance and the script distributed by Dramatists Play Service, Inc. (2002). In the big picture of racial conflicts, the changes do not cloud the meaning of what Han is saying; there is, however, a subtle difference in the focus of the pieces. In the TED performance, Smith connects Han's piece to Studs Terkel's; she explains that both pieces deal with the idea of "this notion of the official truth, to question the official truth" ("Talks"), whereas the excerpt from the Dramatists Play Service, Inc. *Twilight: Los Angeles* focuses on the concept of understanding and working with difference. This notion of difference is present in the TED piece, but the slight differences in the script keep the focus more on suffering than on understanding. The dialogue orchestrated by Smith in *Twilight* demonstrates the need for understanding by and for the individuals represented, which makes the noted shift between the two scripts significant to their purposes.

One important difference between the Dramatists Play Service, Inc. script and the TED performance deals with the pathos of the piece. Placing the two pieces side by side (see Figure 11) allows for a direct comparison of the different versions. In the Dramatists Play Service, Inc. version of *Twilight*, the wording is more tolerant and accepting of the differences between the ethnic groups. This is present in the line "I have a lot of sympathy and understanding for them," which is in the Dramatists Play Service, Inc. version but not in the TED performance. There is

<p>They have fought for their rights over two centuries and I have a lot of sympathy and understanding for them. Because of their effort, and sacrificing, other minorities like And Hispanic or Asians maybe we have to suffer more by mainstream, you know? (<i>Twilight: Los Angeles</i> 169)</p>	<p>They fought for their rights for over two centuries And maybe because they sacrifice, other minorities Hispanic, Asian We would suffer more in the mainstream. (“Talks”)</p>
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Figure 11: Comparison of excerpt from *Twilight* and Smith’s TED performance

also a level of acceptance in respect to other minorities needing “to suffer more” in the areas outside their places designated by mainstream society. Also, the “effort” that African Americans went through is not mentioned in the TED piece. In feats of memorization, dropped lines are always a possibility; in this case, however, the loss of a meaningful word or phrase changes the impact of the narrative. The level of emotion in the Dramatists Play Service, Inc. version speaks more to the danger of merely tolerating the Other and differences, whereas the TED piece and its questioning of official truth stand in a place of empathetic knowledge and acceptance.

In “Anna Deavere Smith: Acting as Incorporation” (1993), Richard Schechner attributes Smith’s successful method of interviewing to how she “looks and listens with uncanny empathy. Empathy [that] goes beyond sympathy. Empathy is the ability to allow the other in, to feel what the other is feeling” (64). Schechner offers an opportunity for connecting back to Gregory’s description of performative empathy as each piece presents a “‘working through’ [that] allows the subject to attain some degree of understanding and control, find[ing] a just account of the past, and thus move forward into the future (thus the past, and acting out, are incorporated rather than denied or left behind)” (122). In both versions of the narrative, Young Soon Han is shown to be “working through” her understanding of race relations, which offers the audience with a

chance to undertake the same journey. Both versions speak to a level of respect for the suffering of others; by presenting slight alterations, however, Smith shifts the “working through” that the audience experiences without undermining Han’s individual experience.

The respect and “deep listening” that Smith utilizes in her interview process is clear as the character piece unfolds. Without this respect, Han might not have opened up enough to give Smith the opportunity to capture those personal rhythmic moments of pure character, through which “Smith [absorbs] the gestures, the tone of voice, the look, the intensity, the moment-by-moment details of a conversation” (Schechner 64). Smith’s ability to listen and to represent the conversations she has with others reveals a level of personal contingency because no one performance is identical to another performance. The underlying trauma or issue is generally the same, but the uniqueness of the performance speaks to the uniqueness of the individuals involved. In addition, even though Smith claims that the information provided through the interview process is not as important as the rhythm, she is able to unite the information and those unique moments of rhythm into a narrative that presents the underlying differences that allow for reflection. Smith takes those moments of pure individual character and puts them into a narrative dialogue with each other as she creates a character piece that will ultimately be performed with other character pieces.

Smith works through a complicated narrative that transmits knowledge through open dialogue that takes place on multiple levels. The first level occurs as Smith interviews individuals on the topic at hand, for example the Crown Heights tragedy, the riots in Los Angeles, or American politics. Once this step is complete, she forms a flexible script that acts as a second layer and puts individuals affected by the tragedy together in conversation and a new context—often these are individuals who would not normally be in open dialogue with each

other. This new context lets the audience see connections between the characters that are frequently obscured by the frames created by the media. The act of narrative dialogue, which is more intimate and less flashy than a news broadcast, is seen through each play as a whole, as well as in individual scenes where characters transition from one to another (sometimes with a scene change and sometimes with a step taken by Smith). David Richards' review of *Twilight: Los Angeles* from *The New York Times* points out that "Ms. Smith backs off from no one, even if it means assuming the majesty of the mezzo-soprano Jessye Norman and the oratorical pomp of Senator Bill Bradley, delivering some of her monologues in Korean and Spanish or plunging into the frazzled minds of inarticulate street people who desperately want to be heard" (par. 10). By giving each voice equal weight and attention in her performance, Smith prepares for the success of a third layer. The third layer brings the audience into the conversation; the narrative dialogue is no longer just between Smith and the interviewees or amongst the characters themselves but between the viewing audience and Smith and, more importantly, between the audience and the characters.

Even as Smith creates this multi-layered dialogue she tells a narrative. Smith constructs a narrative dialogue that presents the events that occurred in Crown Heights (as well as Los Angeles) as she "connects the 'I' and the 'we.' [Which] is why we trust her even as she makes us uncomfortable. In moments when speech fails, she locates our 'I' within a multivocal 'we'" (Guinier 178). Smith creates a narrative dialogue that offers the audience a chance to reflect on their own positions within their cultures and how those cultures overlap with the cultures of others. Kearney explains:

Narrative thus assumes the double role of *mimesis-mythos* to offer us a newly imagined way of being in the world. And it is precisely by inviting us to see the

world *otherwise* that we in turn experience *catharsis*: purgation of the emotions of pity and fear. For while narrative imagination enables us to empathise with those characters in the story who act and suffer, it also provides us with a certain aesthetic distance from which to view the events unfolding, thereby discerning “the hidden cause of things.” It is this curious conflation of empathy and detachment which produces in us (...) the double vision necessary for a journey beyond the closed ego towards other possibilities of being. (emphasis in original 12-13)

Kearney is using Aristotle’s definition of *mimesis* as the “imitation of an action;” however, in *Mimesis: Culture, Art Society* (1996), Gunter Gebauer explains that “Rhetoric eventually resolves into a mimetic verbal self-production, as becomes evident in the mutual relations among object, person, and situation. Words have a mimetic power; they point the way so that the actor will follow them. Imitative confirmation and prior imagination coincides in mimesis” (81). This double meaning of *mimesis* adds depth to our understanding of Smith’s representations of the individuals that she interviews and subsequently uses to create her narrative by layering her imagining of the individual with the imitation that she presents. Her dialogue, made up of the voices of numerous individuals, becomes an American cultural literacy narrative as it demonstrates, through the narratives presented by Smith, how culturally illiterate most of America is. At the same time, she demonstrates how imagined dialogues create a potential for catharsis. The dialogue that Smith creates between Mohammed and Pogrebin speaks to this potential for catharsis as the traumas experienced by African-Americans and Jews are brought forth through Smith’s empathetic imitations. The audience is invited “to see the world *otherwise*”

through the eyes of multiple Others who are both real people as well as characters within Smith's documentary dramas.

Social Drama to Documentary Drama

Smith's Crown Heights documentary drama offers representations of those directly (and indirectly) involved in the events and was commissioned near the end of the crisis phase of the social drama. In the case of the Los Angeles riots, Smith was invited to begin her interviewing process in May of 1992 (directly following the premier of *Fires* in New York), during both the time at which a federal grand jury was convened to investigate criminal indictments against the four police officers involved in the Rodney King incident and at which the trials began for individuals involved in the riots. With Los Angeles still in a state of unrest, Smith began the process of acquiring material for *Twilight*. She interviewed 280 people (Smith, *Talk to Me* 98) and selected 37 pieces to compose a documentary drama. *Twilight* is integrated into the crisis phase, because it occurs while the city is facing a "turning [point or moment] of danger and suspense, when a true state of affairs is revealed, when it is least easy to don masks or pretend that there is nothing rotten in the village" (Turner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors* 36). When the officers were indicted at a federal level and those involved in the riots were placed on trial, some citizens (especially government officials) attempted to place a mask over the event, placating the ruffled cultural feathers that developed over the course of the event. The unknown outcome of the trials creates a liminal phase, because "it is a threshold between more or less stable phases of the social process" (Turner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors* 36). During the time that Smith conducted her interviews, she and her documentary drama became a part of the third phase (the redressive action) as she worked to represent the story of each individual involved. This phase was made apparent when the federal government stepped into the fray with the indictment and

even had the National Guard make an appearance during the trials—events that follow Turner’s idea concerning actions that “are swiftly brought into operation by leading or structurally representative members of the disturbed social system” (Turner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors* 41). Even though Smith is not a direct representative member of Los Angeles or the cultures involved in the trauma and rioting, her position as an African American woman made her a member of the overarching social system of minority culture that was affected. As William A. Henry explains in “Lives Altered Forever” (1993):

She seeks to convey both the essence of the individuals and the collective character of their place and time. In a century when fiction and journalism have been filching each other’s virtues—the authenticity of truth, the order and purposefulness of storytelling—Smith has found a technique that does not diminish either. It also serves political aims. “By changing from one person to another, I show that change is possible,” she explains. “And the fact that I am a black woman speaking for other ethnicities and for men raises the question of who is entitled to speak about what.” (par. 2)

It is Smith’s search for the essence of a situation that integrates her and her work into the redressive phase of the social drama. In addition, the narrative and dialogue she constructs not only show that “change is possible,” but they also offer a space in which such change can begin to take place. Her documentary dramas function as a potential transition into a phase of reintegration. This reintegration is not limited to the localized social drama (such as the turmoil of Los Angeles), but also applies to the overarching social drama of the cultural illiteracy of America.

As was mentioned in the discussion of Wagner-Pacific's use of Turner's social drama framework, the protagonists and plot paths are important to the overarching social dramas that follow the breach phase. Smith and her documentary dramas bring the focus onto less influential, but no less important, protagonists. The manner in which Smith ends *Fires* and *Twilight* presents two such apparently minor protagonists and offers points of analysis for the layers of transition, dialogue, and narrative within the social dramas covered by Smith. In each documentary drama, Smith ends the performance with emotional pieces that work as thought-provoking moments about not only the documentary drama, but also the events on which the dramas were based. In *Fires*, Smith concludes with the words of Carmel Cato in a piece entitled "Lingering." In this piece, Cato stands on the corner where his son was murdered and recounts not only the incident of his son's death, but also the time leading up to and away from the event. In Barbara Lewis's "The Circle of Confusion: A Conversation with Anna Deavere Smith" (1993), Smith states about Carmel Cato's piece:

I interviewed six hundred people, and Mr. Cato was the first person I interviewed who crossed so many worlds in the span of an hour. (...) "Something coming, but I didn't want to see. All the time, I deny, deny, deny." Sonny Carson said earlier in the piece that it always amazes him how the city fathers, the power brokers, continue to deny what's happening, and a black minister said, "It's going to happen again." So I believe that Mr. Cato is seeing for us all. And ultimately he talks about the extraordinary circumstances of his birth. He was born feet first. "I am a special person," he said. "They cannot overpower me." He structures his speech the way classical drama is structured. It crosses different worlds, different

feelings, and articulates his view of his existence in a really short span of time.

There's something mystical about that and something wonderful. (63-64)

As an ending piece to *Fires*, Cato's description of his son's death offers words about his experiences in order to open the eyes of the audience to what happened and what continues to happen in the neighborhood and society as a whole. This allows the final part of the narrative presented in *Fires* to transition into the ongoing narrative that the audience, in addition to Smith and the individuals she presented, will continue once the curtain has come down.

This same effect is present through the closing piece in *Twilight*: Twilight Bey's "Limbo." Naomi Matsuoka's article, "Murakami Haruki and Anna Deavere Smith: Truth by Interview" (2002), presents an opportunity, with her brief study of Smith's portrayal of Twilight Bey, to enter into a conversation about how a discussion of difference (within the parameters of Smith's documentary drama) enhances the redressive phase of the social drama while also presenting the audience with the opportunity for reflection through the narrative process. Matsuoka states, "[Twilight] comments on his name and his situation, saying that he chooses to be in twilight, between day and night 'in limbo.' He cannot stay in the darkness with which he identifies, and he cannot be always surrounded by his own people. He knows he needs to come out into the daylight in order to understand others (*Twilight: Los Angeles 225*)" (311). Matsuoka does not push past a surface reading of what Smith is presenting in *Twilight*'s character piece, because it is not so much a matter of Twilight needing or wanting to come out into the light as it is about the necessity for others to find their way into twilight—into moments of liminality where they can reflect on what has come before and what may come after. Through Smith, Twilight says:

So to me, it's like I'm stuck in limbo,
like the sun is stuck between night and day,
in the twilight hours,
You know?

I'm in an area not many people exist. (170)

Through these lines, the audience finds that Twilight lives in a place where there is an even distribution of dark and light, which are (as Twilight explains) representations of “what was first” and the “knowledge and the wisdom of the world and understanding others” respectively (Smith, *Twilight* 171). This presents a concept of an idea that must come first (first we must admit that we should all exist in state of twilight where the difference between night and day, one race and another, is not as important), which is followed by a knowledge and wisdom that connects back to the beginning of the character piece as Twilight says:

So a lot of times when I've brought up ideas to my homeboys,
They say
“Twilight
that's before your time
that's something you can't do now.”
When I talked about the truce back in 1988,
that was something they considered before its time.
Yet
in 1992,
We made it
realistic. (170)

Twilight makes a distinction concerning an acknowledgement and respect of differences between what was then, what is now, and what will be in the future. Twilight, as a resident of limbo, sees his responsibility to the differences of society over time—not just in the here and now—but from past to future generations. For Twilight, it becomes a matter of moving beyond “[dwelling] in the idea, / just identifying with people like me, and understanding me and mine” (171). Existence, for Twilight, becomes about bringing others together through difference. Thus, the piece becomes part of a narrative dialogue that emphasizes the importance of first accepting our own difference so we can later accept the differences of others. Jacqueline O’Connor, in “‘A One-Woman Riot’: Brooklyn 1991 & Los Angeles 1992” (2007), takes this further by explaining that “Smith’s performance urges us to experience fully a series of borderland moments of recognition of the connections and differences between the self and the other” (155). This is accomplished not only through the narrative dialogue (presented by the documentary drama) but also through the dialogue that Smith constructs between the individual pieces. We must individually follow the path of solidarity if there is to be the possibility of cultural empathy and ultimately a culturally literate society.

Critical Affirmation and Cultural Literacy

Because cultural empathy can result from the process of engaging in dialogue with both the people and artifacts of another culture, Smith’s documentary dramas are valuable tools for the development of individual and group cultural literacy. In respect to the goals of critical affirmation presented by Lu, Smith’s work offers an invitation into the process of seeking critical affirmation; the documentary dramas call for individuals (both those interviewed for the documentary dramas as well as those who act as an audience to the performances) to reflect on their immediate understanding of not only themselves, but also the situations in which they find

themselves. The situations in *Fires*, which resulted from the incidents in Crown Heights and Los Angeles, were traumatic on a cultural and social level; however, these wide-sweeping situations were not the only social issues present within Smith's documentary dramas.

In *Fires*, Smith also creates a narrative dialogue between the Reverend Al Sharpton's piece, "Me and James's Thing," and Rivkah Siegal's piece, "Wigs." By placing Siegal's piece directly after Sharpton's piece in the play, Smith creates the sense that Siegal is responding reciprocally to Sharpton's revelation about his choice of hair style. Between these pieces there is an obvious connection of hair, specifically hair styles worn by each of the subjects. Sharpton identifies with James Brown, fashioning his hair as Brown does, claiming:

James Brown took me to the beauty parlor one day
and made my hair like his.
And made me promise
to wear it like that
'til I die. (19)

For Sharpton, wearing his hair in such a manner is a connection to the man he considered to be a father figure. This connection is made by not only the similarity in appearance, but also through the fact that James Brown created a paternal bond when he took Sharpton to get his hair done in the first place. This bond was confirmed by Brown when he elicited a promise from Sharpton that he retain the look. In addition to this personal connection, Sharpton makes several statements through the retention of this hairstyle. Further, Sharpton is making a statement to society:

And I really don't give a damn
who doesn't understand it.

Oh, I know not you, not you.
The press and everybody do
their thing on that.
It's a personal thing between me and James Brown.
And just like
in other communities
people do their cultural thing
with who they wanna look like,
uh,
there's nothing wrong with me doing
that with James. (21-22)

Regardless of criticism, Sharpton maintains his commitment to a hairstyle that is unpopular (due to its dated appearance and the fact that some feel he is imitating a typically white man's hairstyle). In the script version of *Fires*, Smith emphasizes Sharpton's view of how communities are based on cultural artifacts and interactions. This turns Sharpton's hairstyle into more than just a fashion statement; his hairstyle becomes a cultural artifact that identifies a small family cultural group. The lack of understanding intimated by Sharpton's piece demonstrates that cultural literacy does not just apply to larger cultural groups (race, ethnicity, gender). This underscores Lu's point that "attention to shared experiences of exclusion and yearning for individual agency is seldom accompanied by investigation into the different circumstances shaping such a yearning and the different circumstances in which each of us must struggle to enact it" (176). Sharpton is struggling to enact and sustain a form of individual agency through his hairstyle while Smith, as the interviewer, is offering an investigation into the circumstances surrounding Sharpton's

struggle. On the surface, one's choice of hairstyle may appear a shallow representation of agency; Sharpton's need to defend his choice demonstrates, however, the cultural illiteracy of others.

Following Sharpton's piece is that of Rivkah Siegal—"Wigs." Siegal's piece outlines the significance of short hair for women of the Lubavitch tradition and the purpose for their wearing of wigs. Throughout the piece, Siegal struggles with how her identity is influenced the wigs.

Siegal explains:

But now that I'm wearing the wig,

you see,

with my hair I can keep it very simple

and I can change it all the time.

So with a wig you have to have like five wigs if you want to do that.

But I, uh,

I feel somehow like it's fake,

I feel like it's not me.

I try to be as much myself as I can,

and it just

bothers me

that I'm kind of fooling the world. (25)

This segment offers conflicting views from Siegal on the subject of the Lubavitch tradition concerning the manner in which women wear their hair. Wearing a wig to cover the short hair presents the women with the opportunity to change their appearance by merely donning a different wig. However, in order to change one's hairstyle, one needs to own multiple wigs.

Siegal feels that wearing a wig alters her identity—an identity perceived by those around her, but, to an extent, also the identity that she herself perceives. Although they treat the subject of hair differently, both pieces deal with the way that each individual perceives him or herself while dealing with the judgments of those around them.

By placing these two pieces in narrative dialogue with each other, Smith demonstrates how something that appears to be as simple as a choice in hairstyle creates a common ground that works through individual privilege and exclusion. This process offers a small view into the histories and experiences of two individuals who act as representatives of the cultural groups to which they belong. Smith performs this process with a skillful hand and allows the audience to enter into the conversation through the role of observer. The audience may not have a direct part in the dialogue as they witness the way the pieces speak to each other. They do, however, become a sounding board off which the pieces are bounced to create reflexive moments, moments that will begin during the performance and hopefully continue after the performance has been completed. Smith suggests that difference, be it hairstyle or language, should not just be tolerated, but should be understood and embraced. Even a glimpse into the world of the Other offers us knowledge with which to gain understanding.

In respect to the role that knowledge plays in this process, Matsuoka argues that Smith works as an agent for cultural empathy and reflection. Matsuoka comments on how audiences “find that the line dividing ‘us’ from ‘them’ in extremely confrontational situations begins to disappear [through the works of Haruki and Smith], and we are left facing our own inner darkness” (305). For Matsuoka, that darkness is a reference to the violence that each individual is capable of. Throughout her argument, however, Matsuoka suggests that darkness can also be seen as the differences that we all have but do not necessarily acknowledge. Admitting to the

differences that we all have is an initial step toward having the knowledge necessary to begin the actualization of cultural empathy. Within her discussion of Smith, Matsuoka uses two character pieces from her documentary dramas: from *Fires* she discusses Ntozake Shange and from *Twilight* she considers the character of Twilight. For Matsuoka, these two character pieces work as exemplars of the issue that she believes Smith is ultimately working through: “that we must cross those borders and begin dialogues in order to understand each other, because otherwise the divisions will continue to invite violence” (312). Crossing borders is one way to establish equilibrium between individuals and groups, because it indicates an individual’s acknowledgement of the Other as an equal—if not based on similarities, then on the fact that difference exists on both sides of the border. This knowledge can then lead to acceptance and respect through narrative dialogue.

In order to gain knowledge of the Other, individuals must first have knowledge of their own identity. Shange’s opening character piece introduces the importance of identity, and Matsuoka claims that “Shange says that ‘identity’ means being an individual and a part of one’s surroundings at the same time (*Fires in the Mirror* 3-4)” (310). This sets up an important element regarding identity construction that is present throughout both *Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight: Los Angeles*. Matsuoka’s use of the term “surroundings” can encompass more than inanimate objects; the term, however, generally places a stronger emphasis on place and physical objects than on the people that actually surround us. Although the term “surroundings” does appear in Shange’s monologue, Smith’s construction of Shange’s characterization places importance on the term “differentiation” not “surroundings.” The first time that the term “differentiation” appears, it is in conjunction with the word “surroundings”:

I am part of my surroundings
and I become separate from them
and it's being able to make those differentiations clearly
that lets us have an identity and what's inside our identity
is everything that's ever happened to us. (*Fires* 3)

In this context, and at a glance, Matsuoka's understanding of Shange's intention appears to be that identity is a combination of being an individual and being a part of one's surroundings. However, it is the ability to differentiate between our surroundings and ourselves that allows for the formation of identity, because differentiation opens the way to an understanding of individual identity. Thus, identity is constructed, according to Shange, through the experiences in those surroundings, not by the surroundings themselves. Understanding the construction of individual identity in the beginning of the character piece, as well as the play, is essential, especially considering the tragic results that developed from differing forms of identity, for example the events on which *Fires* is based. This importance is stressed through the second use of differentiation in Shange's character piece as it deals with the differences between individuals:

It's an important differentiation to make because you don't know
what you're giving if you don't know what you have and you don't
know what you're taking if you don't know what's yours and what's
somebody else's. (*Fires* 4)

In this section, Shange moves beyond our surroundings into the relationships between individuals. On the surface, there is a discussion of being conscious of what we possess, be it tangible external materials or internal qualities; the discussion is also about the importance of difference, however, for without differences there would be no need to take stock of what we

have versus what others have. Difference is what allows the giving and taking that Shange is talking about, and it is not a matter of only being able to identify who belongs to what, but also to determine what we can give that others do not possess. O'Connor discusses the "individual and communal identity" as something that "emphasizes the formation of self while it also emphasizes the travel from self to other, thereby becoming a bridge that forms communities of connected but not necessarily homogenous selves" (155). Therefore, Shange's own words, as well as Smith's interpretation of them, demonstrate the bridge that difference can become between individual identity and communal identity and also indicates a level of cultural empathy. Therefore, an acceptance of difference works as a bridge between the gaps created by difference. Difference itself is no longer a tool for identifying an alienated Other, but a way of creating or acknowledging equality through difference. As knowledge and acceptance of difference increases, literacy becomes a viable option. Smith uses her mimetic ability to demonstrate how cultural empathy can transition into a display of the acceptance of difference and potential cultural literacy.

Smith's performance, her representation of the individuals that she includes in her documentary dramas, is not always considered on multiple levels as we have been doing here (that of the physical performance in connection to the dialogue constructed through that performance and the script). TED user Kyn the Mighty joined the narrative dialogue by posting "shockingly bad... Ted needs a check box for 'TERRIBLE' ... She would not have lasted 30 seconds on the Gong Show... Speaks volumes for the quality of TED." His user name may speak volumes about the quality of comments that might be expected from him, but Kyn the Mighty raises a valid point concerning the audience's understanding of Smith's acting ability when she takes on the persona of another individual. Scholars who have written about Smith's

documentary dramas also discuss the accuracy of her representation of the individuals that she interviews. According to her own method for performance, Smith desires to “inhabit the speech pattern of another, and walk in the speech of another, [in order to] find the individuality of the other and experience that individuality viscerally” (*Fires* xxvii). This leads to “[l]earning about the other by being the other [which] requires the use of all aspects of memory, the memory of the body, mind, and heart, as well as the words” (*Fires* xxvii). For Smith, her performance is about embodying the character of the individuals that she interviews, not wearing it like a mask. Throughout the performance, Smith’s personal identity is as important as the characters she portrays, because she is interacting and dealing with the importance of individual difference and identity. The dual importance of performer/character identity coincides with the majority of the scholars who share a similar opinion with Kalb, who explains:

Her impressions weren’t entirely convincing by the standards of fourth-wall realism, and they weren’t meant to be. She built the characterizations around penetrating enlargements of isolated traits and mannerism, but the fact that she was always visible beneath the intensely studied character surfaces was what gave the pieces their strangely persuasive texture. The ever-changing split in her persona assured spectators of the constant presence of a discerning editorial eye and selective framing hand. (18)

That Smith is present through each character strengthens the idea of affiliation through difference. Schechner considers Smith’s ability to remain present through her performance “doubling,” which is “the simultaneous presence of performer and performed. (...) [Through which] audiences—consciously perhaps unconsciously certainly—learn to ‘let the other in,’ to accomplish in their own way what Smith so masterfully achieves” (64). Smith respects

individuals by not turning them into stereotypes and by visually and verbally admitting through performance that she is not equal to their individuality.

Kyn the Mighty's attitude about Smith's inability to impersonate reality perfectly is characteristic of a minority of users who did not connect with the performance and/or material presented by Smith. The majority of the users found more than just enjoyment in her performance. Keeping the focus on Han, TED user Steven Bhardwaj commented:

What an amazing range and powerful voice. Smith's work "Swallowing the Bitterness," frames the shopkeeper's insights in a way that allows the audience to hear the message intimately.

There is no arguing with the shopkeeper's perceptions; we realize that her world is our world.

The shopkeeper wants to identify with her neighbors, to reach across her community's divide. But, her painful memories of loss leave her unable to ease her feelings of racial tension—a conflict that she longed to avoid in the first place!

This comment exemplifies the importance of the third layer of dialogue as it leads toward possible empathy. It is through Smith that the audience is able to speak to the individuals whose lives are directly (or indirectly) connected to these traumatic American events—all of which stem from difference. Granted, the audience is not in an open exchange of dialogue with the individuals, but they are able to identify with them and begin to reflect on their own identities. This is where knowledge begins; before we can understand others, we must first understand ourselves and our own differences. Smith has independently traversed the steps toward empathy; through her effort her audience is able to make their own progress down that path, progress toward cultural empathy that requires recognition of a definition of neighbor that is not limited to

an individual living on the same block or street, but includes those who share the same country. There are layers to cultural literacy just as there are layers to the narrative dialogue created and inspired by Smith's form of documentary drama. In order to locate the possibility of cultural literacy, cultural empathy must begin locally, even privately. Before taking responsibility for the differences of others, there needs to be respect for the differences we personally represent. In Smith's solo documentary drama, the audience watches her talk the talk as she walks the walk of difference, leading to cultural literacy and potential reintegration.

Conclusion: Imagined Communities, Cultural Literacy, and Pedagogy

Throughout this project, I have looked at cultural literacy as the ability to interact knowledgably and respectfully with the cultures of others during times of social conflict. The United States consists of a multitude of cultures (frequently engaged in social drama) thus, being culturally literate becomes a worthwhile asset to cultivate. By becoming culturally literate citizens, individuals attain membership in Benedict Anderson's (1992) concept of an imagined community. In Anderson's initial view on imagined communities, he focused on how print culture brought individuals together through the communal effort of reading—especially newspapers. Anderson's discussion tended to focus on the political nation-building opportunities that these imagined communities presented; the development of imagined communities is also relevant, however, to a pedagogical approach to cultural literacy (as cultural literacy has been discussed in previous chapters). According to Anderson, these imagined communities are imagined because “the members of even the smallest [community] will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). These groups then qualify as communities, because “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7).

This type of comradeship can form through the narrative dialogue created through the audience's interactions with and responses to blogs, media, and Smith's documentary dramas that create opportunities for this communion and for a growth of cultural empathy. The communities of culturally empathetic individuals that narrative dialogue and reflection can forge

have the opportunity to share their responses through the narrative that they create as individuals and as members of the imagined community to potential power imbalances, issues of privilege, and/or any other socially or culturally relevant issues. As each of these becomes a topic for narrative dialogue, individuals become members of a community that can work to develop cultural literacy and build a horizontal comradeship (acknowledging and accepting difference) that will move away from a vertical cultural hierarchy (that would uphold a dominant ideological discourse). Even if the comments presented on the blogosphere or Smith's documentary dramas appear vertical in a physical sense, the nature of the layered narrative dialogue—be it a written blog comment or face-to-face post production conversation—offers open reflection within the imagined community.

In 2003, the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education* ran a special issue that centered on imagined communities within the classroom. Most of the contributors to the issue were participants in the 2001 American Association for Applied Linguistic colloquium titled *Multilingualism and Language Education: Imagined Communities and Everyday Realities*. Much of the issue focuses on bilingual education in countries such as Pakistan, Canada, and Japan; the authors apply principles and draw conclusions that are also relevant to the cultivation of cultural empathy, because becoming culturally literate requires individuals to gain literacy skills that are similar to the process of acquiring a second language. Cultural empathy and cultural literacy—connecting back to Parkinson and Saunders' definition of cultural literacy—require a new vocabulary of behaviors, practices, beliefs, and ideals from unfamiliar cultures that are learned through the process of open narrative dialogue. This knowledge of the other's culture helps individuals become a form of what Hall, in *Representations: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), refers to as “cultural persons:”

This is what children learn, and how they become, not simply biological individuals but cultural subjects. They learn the system and conventions of representation, the codes of their language and culture, which equip them with cultural “know-how” enabling them to function as culturally competent subjects. Not because such knowledge is imprinted in their genes, but because they learn its conventions and so gradually become “cultured persons”—i.e. members of their culture. They unconsciously internalize the codes which allow them to express certain concepts and ideas through their representation—writing, speech, gesture, visualization, and so on—and to interpret ideas which are communicated to them using the same systems. (21-22)

In this explanation, Hall is referring to “cultural persons” as those who have become members of their own cultures. Developing cultural empathy through critical affirmation based on reflective narrative dialogue also creates a cultural person, albeit one who is able to respectfully and responsibly negotiate multiple cultures (even those to which the individual does not belong).

In the introduction to the issue, Yasuko Kanno and Bonny Norton explain about the ability to connect with other cultural groups:

That humans are capable of connecting with communities that lie beyond the local and immediate and that investment in such imagined communities strongly influences identity construction and engagement in learning. (...) [A] conception of imagined communities enable us to enhance our understanding of learning on both temporal and spatial dimensions. On a temporal dimension, the notion of imagined communities enables us to relate learners’ visions of the future to their prevailing actions and identities. It is a way of affirming that what has not yet


happened in the future can be a reason and motivation for what learners do in the present. On a spatial dimension, we can examine the interaction between national ideologies and individual learners' identities on the one hand, and the influence of globalization and transnationalism on language learning and identity construction on the other. (247-248)

The conversations created through the narrative responses to social dramas such as the Polis incident, Neuman's blog post on the ADoE, and Stewart's blog post on Lowes pulling its advertising from *All-American Muslim* show each individual interacting with the material on one level and connections between the individuals who participate in the dialogue on another level. Considering this—and returning to the responses posted to Stewart's blog post on *Gawker* (see Figure 11)—we can see the application of Kanno and Norton's understanding of the temporal and spatial dimensions as they relate to imagined communities. One commenter, kat.bee, states:

This reminds me a lot of how my Grandmother still talks about Japanese people because of WWII.


Don't worry, everyone. Once all the 50-somethings die off, this (hopefully?) won't happen much anymore. I don't think I saw anyone writing racist things on Lowe's page that looked younger than 45.

Even though kat.bee is speaking out against the way Lowes pulled its advertising and the anti-Muslim responses posted to the Facebook page, he or she proceeds to demonstrate a lack of cultural empathy for those of a different generation. This comment starts a narrative dialogue that gets rather antagonistic as missinaction states, "How lovely that those of us on here who are over 45 are being tolerated until we die off. Because obviously we all think the same." This response is characteristic of the comments posted by those who are from the "50-something"

 **kat.bee** @kat.bee 14 Dec 2011 3:22 PM


This reminds me a lot of how my Grandmother still talks about Japanese people because of WWII.

Don't worry, everyone. Once all the 50-somethings die off, this (hopefully?) won't happen much anymore. I don't think I saw anyone writing racist things on Lowe's page that looked younger than 45.


 **Dictator for Life** @kat.bee

I can't help but think there were a lot of folks in their late 20s and early 30s on that page. Rural folks of that age cohort seem to have a lot of rage towards Muslims, if my high school classmates* pages are anything to go by.


*Applies only to classmates who never moved out of rural hometown.

 **jiddaddy** @kat.bee


You're kidding yourself if you think that there isn't a significant number of people in their 20s-40s who espouse vile prejudices about Islam.

 **coneitoandarin** @kat.bee


This reminds me a lot of how my daughter still talks about 50-somethings because, well, she's 13 and we won't let her get a tattoo.

 **missinaction** @kat.bee


How lovely that those of us on here who are over 45 are being tolerated until we die off. Because obviously we all think the same.

 **Digit-Aria** @jiddaddy


There certainly are prejudiced people of our generation and the next, but our society is quickly making it socially unacceptable and "uncool" to have such a mentality. The older generation mostly interacts with people their own age, so they don't care. People are age have to deal with others who won't put up with that kind of crap.

 **conductress** @Dictator for Life

Not just rural. I've lived in two major southern cities and encountered many people ages 13-21 with some serious hatred and fear of Islam. Many of these people are otherwise intelligent college students, so I'm not surprised to see the nasty comments on the Lowe's page.


 **Tsathoggua** @kat.bee

Lemme know if you think the same way 30 years from now.


 **NoFrank** @kat.bee

Uh, I'm a 50-something and I'm not on the bandwagon. And I know a lot of other people around my age who aren't hateful bigoted assholes, too. On the other hand, my son's 20-something friends who play football and go deer hunting are generally "MUSLINS IS TERRORISTS!" types. So, you know, stereotyping is not always a good thing. Also, it's kind of jarring to think there are people just waiting for us to die off, like dinosaurs, so the world can be a brighter place. My parents were in the generation that marched to end Vietnam and further civil rights, do you really think everyone my age was raised to be a hateful bigot?


Edited by NoFrank at 12/15/11 11:46 AM

 **kat.bee** @missinaction


When did I ever say all middle aged adults are bigots? My parents and 50 and 60 respectively but don't have these views. I was referring to the fact that many of the people who spout religious hate speech these days are older, probably as a result of their generation/upbringing.

 **kat.bee** @NoFrank

When did I say ALL middle aged adults are bigots? I didn't; was trying to make a point that it seems a lot of people who are quick to hate someone for being Muslim or Gay or a woman etc tend to be older because younger generations have been shown to be increasingly tolerant over the past 10 years or so.

 **NoFrank** @kat.bee

"Once ALL the 50-somethings die off, this (hopefully?) won't happen much anymore."
Emphasis mine.

 **missinaction** @NoFrank

I'm hearting you because we oldies need to stick together! Sometimes I feel under attack on here.

[Hide 12 replies](#)

Figure 12: Dialogue begun by kat.bee in response to Stewart's blog post titled "Lowe's Facebook Page Explodes With Bigoted Hate Speech" on *Jezebel*

generation. Even though kat.bee demonstrates a lack of understanding through her assumptions about a different generation, he or she inadvertently creates a path that leads to a narrative dialogue that reflects on how oppressive generalizing is. This narrative dialogue digs deeper into generalization than the conversation begun by Silverwane (Chapter two). Silverwane's discussion thread focused on generalization overall, whereas the thread of dialogue that stems from kat.bee's comment specifically addresses focused preconceptions that individuals hold as they consider how different members of different generations or geographic locations are perceived. The commenters discuss responses to

Islam- and Muslim-Americans by individuals who are “50-something,” “folks in their late 20s and early 30s,” “rural,” or people who live in “major southern cities.” Each comment contributes to the sense that there should not be an easy way to label a particular individual based on their response to the situation created by Lowes, or any social drama. This sense is negotiated through the give and take of explanations throughout the dialogue; as an example, Dictator for Life makes a generalization about “rural folks” and their rage toward Muslims that is countered by conductress who says that this attitude is also seen in large cities. The reality that there is difference even within a particular group is an undercurrent to this discussion; that difference is explorable on a temporal or spatial dimension where difference can be reflected on and allow for productive dialogues to arise.

The temporal and spatial dimensions demonstrated within the narrative discussion presented in Figure 11 also connect to kat.bee’s cultural identity as represented through his or her comment. Kat.bee has joined an imagined community created through the blogosphere with an identity that attempts to be culturally empathetic, yet the comment, meant to offer support to the show and what the show represents, alienates a different group of people by generalizing based on generation. In the temporal dimension, kat.bee presents a generational identity connected to a rather dire vision of the future—one in which another generation needs to “die off” in order for understanding and empathy to develop. Even though this comment, in and of itself, works against critical affirmation, it still allows for a dialogue that permits the audience to reflect in the here and now on why individuals like kat.bee identify with a particular mindset. This reflection, in turn, creates an opportunity to engage in a narrative dialogue that reflects on the audience’s understanding of the problem. NoFrank addresses this issue in his comment:

Uh, I'm a 50-something and I'm not on the bandwagon. And I know a lot of other people around my age who aren't hateful bigoted assholes, too. On the other hand, my son's 20-something friends who play football and go deer hunting are generally "MUSLINS IS TERRORISTS!" types. So, you know, stereotyping is not always a good thing. Also, it's kind of jarring to think there are people just waiting for us to die off, like dinosaurs, so the world can be a brighter place. My parents were in the generation that marched to end Vietnam and further civil rights, do you really think everyone my age was raised to be a hateful bigot?

In this comment, NoFrank presents an opposing view to kat.bee's initial comment by explaining that as a member of the "50-something" group he can attest to the fact that every "50-something" individual does not have an anti-Muslim attitude; his son's friends, however, who belongs to kat.bee's generation, do. This comment challenges kat.bee to reflect on their preconceptions concerning the attitudes of other generations. NoFrank also reminds the audience that stereotyping of any variety is hazardous. This interaction demonstrates the influence that individual ideologies can have on identity. NoFrank's identity was shaped by parents who were actively engaged in the civil rights movement, which positions him to contest kat.bee's generalization and offer the audience additional material upon which to reflect. In addition, this comment presents us with the idea that identity exists in a temporal and spatial dimension just as imagined communities do. Each individual who posts a comment has the opportunity to create an identity that may only exist within the public forum created by the blogosphere. This forum offers commenters the opportunity to recreate themselves, explore alternate forms of themselves, or to present aspects of themselves that they may not otherwise divulge or indulge. NoFrank comments, "My parents were in the generation that marched to end Vietnam and further civil

rights, do you really think everyone my age was raised to be a hateful bigot?” This is not a statement that offers an apparently private piece of information; it is, however, a statement that creates an immediate identity for NoFrank in the space created through and within the comment thread based on the experiences presented in the narrative dialogue.

Reflection through narrative dialogue, within the nebulous realm of the blogosphere, has the opportunity to affect the imagined communities that an individual joins as well as the identity that an individual may have. In a way, each individual is offered a liminal moment where they exist within an imagined community that is neither here nor there and where their identity is allowed to be in flux as they reflect on the issues presented within the narrative dialogue they engage. The members of the audience for Smith’s documentary dramas also have these opportunities. In her article “The Polemics and Potential of Theatre Studies and Performance” (2006), Jill Dolan states:

Theatrical performance offers a temporary and usefully ephemeral site at which to think through various important questions about the representation not only of individual identities but of social relations within, across and among identity categories and across communities and cultures. (...) Because performance demonstrates the ways in which any reading is always multiple, and illustrates the undecidability of visual as well as written meanings, it provides a way of seeing identity as complex, as crossed with difference, and never as the static, innate, unchangeable thing it’s described to be in other venues of social life. (510)

Thus, the audience is held in a liminal space that allows them to reflect on the “questions about representation” asked by Smith, and how these questions affect their understanding of identity. The members of these communities (Smith’s audience and commenters on the blogosphere) have

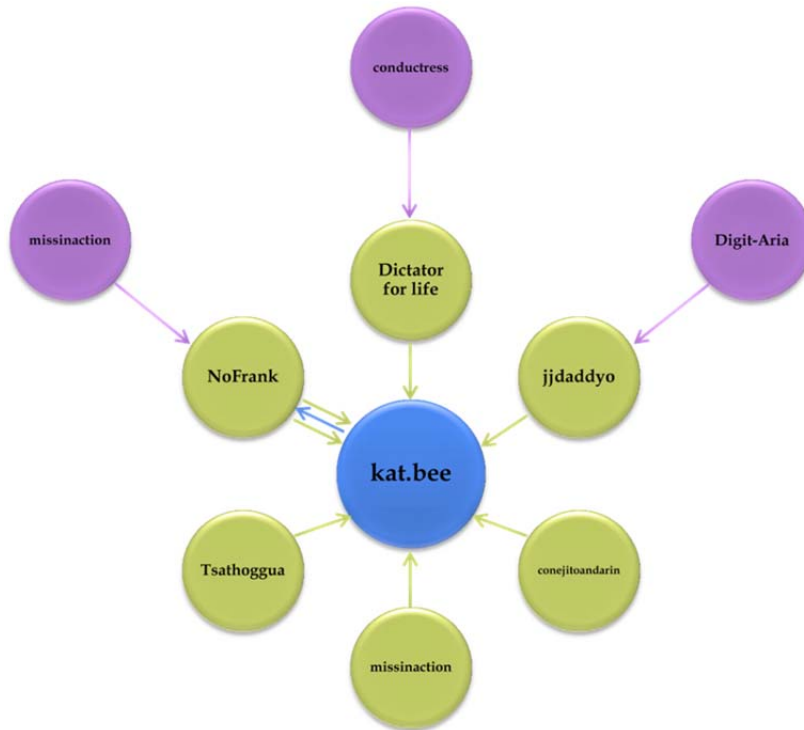


Figure 13: Diagram of the flow of dialogue between the participants of narrative dialogue thread on kat.bee's response to Stewart's blog post titled "Lowe's Facebook Page Explodes With Bigoted Hate Speech" on *Jezebel*

kat.bee—which takes place in such a venue of social life—there are crisscrossing conversations (see Figure 12) that reflect on the manner in which individuals fail to adhere to generalized representations and on how the sort of engaged learning offered through the blogosphere occurs on temporal and spatial dimensions. As individuals respond to kat.bee and each other, they form a mini-imagined community. As an example, missinaction offers a response of negation to kat.bee and then later offers a response of affirmation to NoFrank. The dialogue progresses beyond a one and done commenting situation to a point where individuals are able to disagree and agree with each other through narrative.

This crisscrossing discussion is similar to the layers of dialogue present in Smith's documentary dramas and discussed in Chapter three. In addition, each of these types of narrative dialogue (blog comments, audience responses to Smith's documentary dramas, the dialogue

an opportunity to participate in a narrative dialogue concerning the development of an identity based on cultural empathy as each individual deals with the concept of "identity as complex, as crossed with difference, and never as the static, innate, unchangeable thing it's described to be in other venues of social life." In the discussion begun by

created throughout Smith's documentary dramas) influence the temporal and spatial dimensions of the imagined communities that connect to the identities individuals have and may develop through reflection. In the introduction to *Fires*, Smith describes the importance of post-production discussions for each documentary piece connected to her project:

It is part of the idea behind *On the Road* to 1) bring people together into the same room (the theater) who would normally not be together, and 2) attract people to the theater who don't usually come to the theater. It was important, then, to hear what people said about the experience and important to have them know more about each other than they could gather from responses. On various occasions there were Black people in the audience who gave verbal feedback during the show, saying things like, "Yes," "All right," "Teach," et cetera. Once I heard a woman saying throughout the show, "Oy." I wish her "Oy" had been in the same audience as a "Teach." When the audience talks, they are talking as much to each other as to me. (xxxviii)

Smith desires to create a large, diverse audience that engages in discussion during and after the performance. Throughout the performance, the exclamations that are spontaneously uttered by the audience represent their initial contribution to the narrative dialogue begun by Smith. This dialogue is furthered by post-play discussions where the audience is able to participate more fully in an open conversation with the community (both immediate and imagined) comprised of Smith and other audience members. Even though Smith's work is initially performed in the high culture arena of the theater, the imagined community of the theater—going audience is expanded through the availability of printed scripts, PBS recordings, and programs such as TED. It is hoped that each individual (joining the imagined community by interacting with Smith's work in

one form or another), with a facilitation of cultural empathy, will begin to look beyond their immediate cultural communities to see the manner in which their potentially limited identities have developed as a result of restricted cultural reflection. The consideration of imagined communities—and the formation of relationships that span temporal and spatial lines with them—can influence the manner in which individuals reflect on developing narrative dialogues and the development of cultural empathy. The use of narrative dialogue and reflection, coupled with critical dialogue, can then bring past interactions to bear on the present situations, which might then affect the direction of cultural literacy in the future. In order to form a pedagogy that connects students, social drama, and narrative dialogue to the development of cultural empathy, we must consider employing imagined communities.

Pedagogical Approaches

Over the course of the last several years, I have worked to develop courses that attempt to use individual and large-scale social dramas as center pieces for educational activities in the hopes of creating imagined communities to promote reflection through narrative dialogue. This process influences individuals and society to move toward creating a community that may enjoy what Lu describes as being possessed of “hope and courage as well as vision and analysis for negotiating the crucial crossroad in the history of this nation” (173). Using imagined communities in this way removes some of the pressure on students as they experiment with what it means to be a culturally literate citizen in America regardless of their ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, and location (or any other dimension of difference). In designing educational activities that use narrative dialogue, I hoped to create “a site for reflecting on and revising one’s sense of self, one’s relations with others, and the conditions of one’s life” (Lu 173). In this instance, Lu is specifically referring to personal narrative; however, narratives created by others

also give students the opportunity to compose narrative dialogue with and around the narrative of others, which increases the material upon which they can reflect. With this type of reflection, students explore the formation of individual and group identity.

I taught a class for the Alabama Prison Arts and Education Program that asked students to engage in reflection of this nature with a theme of Literature and Identity Construction. This was my first time teaching with this program, and my first time teaching in a prison. Because my students were men at a medium security prison in rural Alabama, I felt that they represented one of the many minority groups often bereft of the cultural empathy of others. As such, this population holds a unique position in society in respect to their identity. In the introduction to *Questions of Cultural Identity* (1996), Hall states:

Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render “outside,” abjected. Every identity has at its “margin,” an excess, something more. The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as the foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other that which it “lacks.”

(5)

My students in this class each had a personal identity that was present in their white uniforms, location, and past actions. These elements create a current representation to society of who my students appear to be; this representation may not accurately express who they are or what they may become. They have been “rendered ‘outside’” of society, and society’s understanding of my students is reflected in the poorly ventilated, metal roofed dormitories with no air-conditioning to alleviate the heat of an Alabama summer in which they live. I hoped to give my students the

chance to explore the margins of identity with narrative dialogue and reflection so they could have the opportunity to investigate their potential to create an identity as they attempt to become more with “the development of ourselves, as civilized beings” and/or “To broaden ones horizons even when locked away as most of us will at some time in the future return to society perhaps a better person” (“APAEP Exit Questionnaire: Literature”). I selected texts that would have the class create a narrative dialogue that would move from a discussion of the formation of individual identity to a discussion of how cultural and group identity functions. Over the course of the summer we read:

1. Robert Louis Stevenson—“The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” (1886)
2. William Shakespeare—*Hamlet* (1600)
3. Tom Stoppard—*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1996)
4. Bharati Mukherjee—*Jasmine* (1989)
5. Marjane Satrapi—*Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2003)
6. Anna Deavere Smith—*Fires in the Mirror* (1992)

I began with *Jekyll and Hyde* in order to facilitate a discussion of how individual identity is not static and to suggest we must reflect on our own internal and external differences in terms of our identity. This base was necessary as we moved through discussions of how the perceptions of others affect our understanding of identity (*Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*) and how cultural identity is formed based on the individual and the society within which an individual resides (*Jasmine* and *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*). We moved on to a final conversation that reflected on how individual and group identity function in respect to clashing cultural ideals during times of social drama as seen in Smith’s *Fires*. I asked my students to

complete a brief oral presentation in order to facilitate this dialogue. With each of the previous texts, I asked students to write brief responses to questions concerning identity; however, for *Fires* I also asked them to think about a series of questions concerning a monologue performed by Smith as part of *Fires*—I presented the students with a list of the monologues in *Fires* and allowed to choose the piece with which they would work. In order to promote a worthwhile dialogue between the students and the text and between the students themselves, I told them that they did not need turn in a written response as they had with the previous texts, because their answers were meant to be contributions to the classes’ ongoing narrative dialogue concerning Smith’s method of creating a conversation involving the social drama depicted in *Fires*. The assignment sheet read:

For this text you will sign up to lead class discussion on one of the passages in the play. For this assignment you will:

- Explain:
 - Why you think the passage you signed up for was included in the play?
 - Why it was placed where it was in the play?
 - What it adds to the construction of the play’s plot?
- Select at least 6 lines from the passage that you signed up for and:
 - Read your selected lines aloud to the class
 - Explain why those lines stood out to you
 - Explain what those lines reveal about the character of the person who originally spoke them

This assignment asked the students to closely consider the organization of the dialogue Smith creates through the placement of each piece. It also asked students to look closely at the actual words—their order and their meaning—as presented in each piece.

In order to give my students the maximum amount of time to prepare for their presentations, we spent one class period watching the PBS recording of *Fires* (2003). As my students watched the screen, I watched them. At times, there were smiles and laughter at something Smith said or did; more often, however, there were nodding heads and/or a nudge to a neighbor with the exchange of a knowing look. Even though they were not sitting in a dark theater watching Smith moving on a stage, each student became a participant in the dialogue that Smith began with her first performance of *Fires* in 1992 at the New York Shakespeare Festival. When we began the presentations that would facilitate our discussion of the script and the movie, my students were able to engage Smith's representations in their reflections and discussions. Angela Davis's piece, entitled "Rope," promoted a particularly worthwhile discussion, because one student was able to reference a visit that Davis had once made to the prison more than two decades ago. When we began to discuss "Rope," the lines selected by a different student for discussion were:

I feel very anchored in
my various communities.
But I think that,
to use a metaphor, the rope
attached to that anchor should be long enough to allow us to move
into other communities,
to understand and learn. (31)

We discussed how the rope metaphor applies to society, what such a metaphor means to those across varying social and cultural groups (majority groups versus minority groups), and what it means to be anchored to one's communities. The student who remembered Davis's visit to the prison spoke to the fact that, even though she was interested in the conditions of the prisons, her affiliation with the Black Panther Party, at that time, kept him (a white male) from attending the talk that she gave. Based on the language presented in "Rope," this student, however, then remarked that he could see how her views of society appeared to have changed since her visit, as she now calls for an exchange of learning and understanding between communities. Moving forward from this, when considering the placement of "Rope" in the performance, the class referenced the text in front of them and the PBS performance that they had watched.

Based on the location of the Davis's piece within the performance (see Appendix A), the students appreciated the composed nature of Smith's representation of Davis when contrasted with the pieces placed directly following it in the PBS version. In the PBS version, Smith includes a piece titled "Stitches" that is comprised of several small sections from three larger pieces found in the written version published by Anchor in 1993. This piece stitches together a narrative of the events surrounding the death of Gavin Cato using details provided by Rabbi Joseph Spielman, the Reverend Canon Doctor Heron Sam, and an anonymous young man. Even though she is presenting information of a very serious nature, my students liked the fact that some of the severity of the incident is removed by Smith's method of breaking up the narration, because this approach allowed them to absorb the tragedy without a singular biased view that may have taken away their ability to form their own opinion. They also felt that by preceding the details of the incident with Smith's performance of Davis (with her discussion of acceptance, tolerance, and knowledge), the PBS version tempered the overall hostility between the groups by



Figure 14: Smith as Angela Davis (screen capture *Fires in the Mirror*, PBS)



Figure 15: Smith as Anonymous Young Man #1 (screen capture *Fires in the Mirror*, PBS)

having them enter into the conversation with a rope for guidance and a sense of reflective thought firmly attached. In addition, seeing the difference between Smith as Davis (see Figure 13), speaking with very precise language, and Smith as the anonymous young man (see Figure 14), speaking slang, prompted a discussion of how Smith demonstrates an equal level of respect in her representation of two very different individuals. The students admired the manner in which Smith negotiated the two representations and the communities to which these individuals belonged

without undermining the authority or identity of either individual.

At this point, as the conversation began to focus more on the meaning behind Davis's words and Smith's inclusion of them in the play, the students' discussion turned to the variety of communities that exist within the prison (prisoners to officers and amongst the prisoners themselves) and how they have to carefully negotiate each community while keeping a firm grip on their rope lest they get lost. Within our conversation, students who exist in the silence enforced by the prison system were able to find new or alternate concepts with which to view their world as they used narrative dialogue to step into the gap between their minority position and the controlling majority. One student explained that through "reading we develop our own

idea [sic], but when we listen to others sometimes we find better ideas” (“APAEP Exit Questionnaire: Literature”). Smith, in the introduction to *Fires*, discusses such a gap:

I think that there is a gap between those who are heard and those who speak.

Those who really speak in their own communities, to their own people, are not heard as frequently as those who speak on a regular basis with authority. (...) My sense is that American character lives not in one place or the other, but in the gaps between places, and in our struggle to be together in our difference. (xii)

The students in this class are examples of an American character with such a gap and members of a minority group that is frequently left out of the narrative dialogue concerning difference. I presented students with the chance to join an imagined community formed by performance audiences and embrace the gap where American character lives and develops. This type of discussion influenced the students’ responses during our conversation, and this influence was visible in the end-of-the-term questionnaire about their experience in the class (see Appendix B for a list of questions presented to the students). One student said he was “opened up [to] new venues of thinking about other cultures I have limited knowledge of” (“APAEP Exit Questionnaire: Literature”). He went on to explain that “The class assignments targeted aspects of identity and challenges [sic] one to think or see things as others may see and how it would relate to how one develops their identity.” These students—who are marginalized and often ignored—learned to participate in a narrative dialogue that explored individual and group identity in terms of difference. This demonstrates elements of Lu’s critical affirmation, because students dealt with their own experiences of exclusion and found a sense of agency through reflection. In fact, another student said that the class “brought me new worlds and perceptions and gave me an opportunity to reevaluate my own outlook on the subject” (“APAEP Exit

Questionnaire: Literature”). This comment connects to Abbot’s explanation that “*it is only through narrative that we know ourselves as active entities that operate through time*” (emphasis in original 130). It was through the narrative dialogue created within the class that these students were able to safely envision themselves as active entities operating with a sense of agency; they developed a sense of cultured self with cultural empathy and reevaluated their perceptions of other worlds and cultural groups in the texts. This sort of active engagement was beneficial to these students, because they participated in a previously unexplored imagined community. Even though this class presented them with an entry point into this imagined community, the community was more limited and potentially shorter lived as the students are on the outside of those who are “rendered ‘outside.’” However, my class gave them access to an imagined community that broadened their mental horizons and understanding of identity, or as students put it, “it afford[ed them] a chance to expand [their] knowledge and develop[e] [sic] [their] thought process” (“APAEP Exit Questionnaire: Literature”).

With the outcome of this class on my mind as I conducted research for this project, I recently developed a workshop designed to enhance reflection and participation in open dialogue within the blogosphere. Looking toward other opportunities to establish pathways to cultural empathy and cultural literacy, I proposed a workshop titled “Blogging for Public Consumption” to The Community Writing Center—a program recently developed in Auburn, AL. The focus of the workshop will be on presenting community members with a basic understanding of the opportunities for civic engagement that are available within cyberspace and how they can actively participate in a narrative dialogue via the blogosphere. This understanding will be fostered along two paths that will have participants: learning to offer productive responses to existing blog discussions and learning to create blog entries that will present views and opinions

of current events in a worthwhile manner. As previous discussion of blog comments has shown, commenters can become involved in a narrative dialogue that offers reflections that presents and possibly alters the poster's understanding of themselves and others. By offering a workshop that focuses on developing productive participation in the blogosphere, I hope attendees will learn strategies for contributing to a narrative dialogue on any number of social issues. Returning to the example presented through the blog entry concerning ADoE: the blog entry itself was posted by a member of the *Gawker* staff; the comments, however, were written by anyone who cared to create a free account and participate in the discussion. Hundreds of comments were left on the blog entry, and a number of those comments resulted in fruitful discussions between commenters. Individuals become members of an imagined community based around open narrative dialogue by writing for a public sphere, located in cyberspace. For this workshop I plan to have participants analyze existing blogs and blog comments, practice writing primary and follow-up comments to blogs, perform peer review, and revise their comments. I have planned each phase of the workshop to build toward an understanding of what makes a comment in the blogosphere a productive contribution to an ongoing narrative dialogue. This workshop will encourage community members to enhance their ability to communicate through writing and reflect through an open dialogue with individuals that are outside of their immediate community, which may result in their joining a more culturally empathetic community.

Inclusion in an imagined community, based on narrative dialogue and reflection, allows individuals an opportunity to explore their identity as it relates to their own cultural groups and the groups of others during times of social drama. Blog posts, Smith's documentary dramas, and literature depict—to one degree or another—a social drama in progress. In terms of cultural literacy, rarely will any social drama end in a complete reintegration of those groups involved in

the breach and crisis phase of the social drama. If these narrative dialogues are considered elements of a redressive phase, however, cultural empathy can develop as individuals work toward cultural literacy and an understanding of how difference shapes their perception of what it means to be an engaged citizen in American culture.

Appendix A

<i>Fires in the Mirror</i> , Anchor Books		<i>Fires in the Mirror</i> , PBS Broadcast	
Character	Title of Piece	Character	Title of Piece
Ntozake Shange	"The Desert"	Robert Sherman	"Lousy Language"
Anonymous Lubavitcher Woman	"Static"	Anonymous Lubavitcher Woman	"Static"
George C. Wolfe	"101 Dalmatins"	The Reverend Al Sharpton	"Me and Jame's Thing"
Aaron M. Bernstein	"Mirrors and Distortions"	Rivkah Siegal	"Wigs"
Anonymous Girl	"Look in the Mirror"	Minister Conrad Mohammad	"Seven Verses"
The Reverend Al Sharpton	"Me and Jame's Thing"	Letty Cottin Pogrebin	"Isaac"
Rivkah Siegal	"Wigs"	Angela Davis	"Rope"
Angela Davis	"Rope"	Rabbi Joseph Spielman	"No Blood in His Feet"
Monique "Big Mo" Matthews	"Rhythm and Poetry"	The Reverend Canon Doctor Heron Sam	"Mexican Standoff"
Leonard Jeffries	"Roots"	Anonymous Young Man #1	"Wa Wa Wa"
Letty Cottin Pogrebin	"Near Enough to Reach"	Henry Rice	"Knew How to Use Certain Words"
Minister Conrad Mohammad	"Seven Verses"	Michael S. Miller	"Heil Hitler"
Letty Cottin Pogrebin	"Isaac"	Richard Green	"Rage"
Robert Sherman	"Lousy Language"	Norman Rosenbaum	"My Brother's Blood"
Rabbi Joseph Spielman	"No Blood in His Feet"	Norman Rosenbaum	"Sixteen Hours Difference"
The Reverend Canon Doctor Heron Sam	"Mexican Standoff"	Anonymous Young Man #2	"Bad Boy"
Anonymous Young Man #1	"Wa Wa Wa"	Rabbi Joseph Spielman	"Two Way Street"
Michael S. Miller	"Heil Hitler"	Sonny Carson	"Chords"
Henry Rice	"Knew How to Use Certain Words"	Rabbi Shea Hecht	"Ovens"
Norman Rosenbaum	"My Brother's Blood"	The Reverend Al Sharpton	"Rain"
Norman Rosenbaum	"Sixteen Hours Difference"	Roslyn Malamud	"The Coupe"
Anonymous Young Man #2	"Bad Boy"	Reuven Ostrov	"Pogroms"
Sonny Carson	"Chords"	Carmel Cato	"Lingering"
Rabbi Shea Hecht	"Ovens"		
The Reverend Al Sharpton	"Rain"		
Richard Green	"Rage"		
Roslyn Malamud	"The Coupe"		
Reuven Ostrov	"Pogroms"		
Carmel Cato	"Lingering"		

In the PBS version, pieces of these three form "Stiches."

Not in the text of *Fires*.

Appendix B

Alabama Prison Arts & Education Project Exit Questionnaire: Literature¹⁹

1. Why did you sign up for this class?
2. Did this class meet your needs? Please explain your answer.
3. Did the class assignments make sense? Did you want more or less of them?
4. Was the instructor prepared and knowledgeable of the subject?
5. What was your favorite part of the class and why?
6. What was your least favorite part of the class and why?
7. What would have made the class stronger?
8. Why do you think it is important to study literature?
9. From the readings and discussion that took place in this class, how has your understanding of literature and reading changed?
10. What other classes would you be interested in taking?

¹⁹ The questions for this questionnaire were written by the Director of APAEP, Kyes Stevens.

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