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Chasing the albatross: Gendering theory and reading with dual-voiced journals

Mary E. Styslinger

A journal assignment provided insights on differing male and female responses to the same works.

I saw something in the sky
No bigger than my fist,
At first it seem'd a little speck
And then it seem'd a mist
It mov'd and mov'd and took at last
A certain shape, I wist
(Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, III)

Theory has always possessed an elusive, intangible, and almost ethereal quality. Comprising nothing but ideas compressed into words, it is supposed to guide our literacy interactions and transactions. Theory provides the "why" that underlies the "how to" of teaching. Yet I have often struggled with the effort of translating theory into practice. While I am comfortable implementing curriculum, I rarely ponder the great thoughts behind what I do. Such an admission hangs heavy around my neck. How is it possible, I have wondered, to better use theory to guide instruction in a secondary classroom?

When I taught 12th-grade English, my days began early. At 7:30, students with miscellaneous piercings and wild hair scrambled their way into seats, and we began our exploration of British authors. It was not an easy job, breathing life into literature written long ago, especially with a class

full of very cool teenagers. But I tried, encouraging personal response, exploring gender issues, and prompting self-reflection. However, our daily activities often seemed far removed from the theory that was supposed to be guiding our practice.

I wanted my teaching pedagogy to reflect a more coherent theoretical framework. A passion for reader response theory, commitment to gender theory, and burgeoning interest in poststructural theory, born and nurtured at local and national reading conferences, led me to question more deeply this relationship between theory and the language arts classroom. Wanting to free myself of this albatross once and for all, I read comprehensively and speculated carefully how I might design and use a method to support these three seemingly complementary theories.

Reading and gender theory

Reader response theory, often associated with the work of Fish (1980a, b, c), Iser (1980), Poulet (1980), and, most popularly, Rosenblatt (1968, 1978), encourages teachers to focus on how students make meaning from their experiences with texts. In such classrooms, subjective insights to literature are nurtured. Teachers offer activities to support personal and collaborative sharing among classmates. Activities such as response logs, personal triggers, suppositional readings,

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and associative recollections fill the mornings and afternoons. Attention is placed on the processes rather than the products of individual readers. It is the journey with and through literature, rather than the destination, that is important. Belief in any inherent textual meaning is dismissed; a literary work is embraced as unstable and variable, changing with every reader. With the reader-response approach, students explore how literature speaks to them and discover how teachers and peers value their responses.

But literature speaks, and teachers listen, to each reader differently. I was continually amazed, for example, by the array of reactions among my 12th graders to a character such as Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. (All student names are pseudonyms.) Whereas Calvin contended that Lady Macbeth was personally motivated in her desire for power and suggested she manipulated Macbeth for her own ends, LaMyra argued that Lady Macbeth wanted power only for the sake of her husband and proposed that she influenced Macbeth for his own best interests. Most of us are well aware of the differences inherent and made in a classroom as each student reacts to an array of texts (or elements within them, such as character), responds from a range of perspectives, reads for a wide variety of purposes, and employs a wide assortment of strategies.

A facet of reader response theory, cultural reader response, focuses on how such differences in roles, attitudes, and values, as well as larger societal and historical backgrounds, shape the responses of readers. "Just as all literature springs from some context, so every reader brings a social, economic, political, personal context" (Whaley & Dodge, 1999, p. 28). In my high school classroom, I often noticed how the context of gender, a factor of culture, influenced literacy transactions (Styslinger, 1999).

Gendered reader response, a feature of cultural reader response theory, recognizes that while reading is a sum of subjective responses, part of these subjective responses is tied to gender. As reading positions are "gendered," students

make sense of texts by adopting certain ways of thinking about gender. Calvin's reaction to Lady Macbeth differed greatly from LaMyra's defense of her. Our acquired gender roles and attitudes—culturally ingrained "masculine" versus "feminist" orientations or reading formations—influence responses to text (Beach, 1993). Reader response theorists such as Bleich (1986), Cixous (1984), Culler (1982), Gardiner (1981), Holland (1980), Kennard (1986), Kolodny (1982), and Schweikart (1986) have questioned gender-based reading differences, pondering in what ways female readers might structure interpretations that differ from male responses.

Another current realm of ideas that piqued my interest is poststructuralist theory, often associated with the work of Cherryholmes (1988) and Foucault (1970, 1972, 1973, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1986a, 1986b). This body of ideas complements gendered reader response theory in that it deconstructs and demystifies the conception of "the reader"—the very notion of "actual" readers—as autonomous, independent individuals. This theoretical framework critiques the idea of the unified self, thinking of readers instead as "divided" subjects whose identities and "even gender are constructed through participation in such signifying practices of culture as texts" (Ebert, 1988, p. 58).

In accordance with this theory, no reader in any classroom can interpret a text independently; a reading is instead determined by the larger cultural communities that govern behavior. Readers are constructed by these larger communities—by various institutional "discourses." These discourses may create an "illusion of regularity" (Spellmeyer, 1989, p. 719) or a "monologic" reading formation, and teachers might recognize patterns, for example, among male or female student response. Whereas many male students agreed with Calvin, many female students agreed with LaMyra. To better understand this process, poststructural theorists might observe readers responding within the context of a specific cultural institution (such as gender).

RESOURCES ON GENDER

Gender and language

Ammons, A.R. (1985). Working with tools. In A. Poulin (Ed.), *Contemporary American poetry* (4th ed., p. 3). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

August, E.R. (1990). Real men don't: Anti-male bias in English. In P. Eschholz, A. Rosa, & V. Clark (Eds.), *Language awareness* (5th ed., pp. 289–300). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Nilsen, A.P. (1990). Sexism in English: A 1990's update. In P. Eschholz, A. Rosa, & V. Clark (Eds.), *Language awareness* (5th ed., pp. 277–287). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Gender and media

Kilcher, J. (1998). Pretty. In J. Kilcher, *A night without armor* (p. 40). New York: HarperCollins.

Gender and body

Brooks, G. (1999). Bronzeville man with a belt in the back. In G. Brooks, *Selected poems* (p. 100). New York: Perennial Classics.

Clifton, L. (1985). Homage to my hips. In A. Poulin (Ed.), *Contemporary American poetry* (4th ed., p. 81). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Clifton, L. (1987). The kind of man he is. In L. Clifton, *Good woman: Poems and a memoir 1969–1980* (p. 87). Brockport, NY: BOA Editions.

Dove, R. (1995). Party dress for a first born. In R. Dove, *Mother love: Poems* (p. 8). New York: W.W. Norton.

Giovanni, N. (1997). Beautiful black men. In N. Giovanni, *Love poems* (pp. 34–35). New York: William Morrow.

Justice, D. (1985). The missing person. In A. Poulin (Ed.), *Contemporary American poetry* (4th ed., pp. 243–244). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Kilcher, J. (1998). I look at young girls now. In J. Kilcher, *A night without armor* (p. 10). New York: HarperCollins.

Snodgrass, W.D. (1985). Viewing the body. In A. Poulin (Ed.), *Contemporary American poetry* (4th ed., pp. 483–484). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

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From theory to practice

In order to determine how reader response, gender, and poststructural theories might guide instruction, I returned to a secondary classroom. With the help of a cooperating teacher and administrator, I embarked with 22 college preparatory, 12th-grade students on a study of gender through literature. We tossed the district-mandated curriculum aside for three weeks. Our new unit of study included the voices of A.R. Ammons, Maya Angelou, Eugene R. August, Judy Brady, Gwendolyn Brooks, Lucille Clifton, Rita Dove, Alan Dugan, Nikki Giovanni, Donald Justice, Jewel Kilcher, Doris Lessing, Alice Munro, Alleen Pace Nilsen, Marge Piercy, Theodore Roethke, W.D. Snodgrass, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Virginia Woolf. We immersed ourselves daily in poetry, essays, and stories that prompted the exploration of gender and its relationship to language, media, body, careers, family, and relationships (see Sidebar). Literary works were purposely selected to provide students with varied, gendered perspectives on these topics.

Through classroom personal response activities such as body traces, debates, and tableaux, students critically discussed the part gender plays in their lives. When exploring the connection between gender and the body, groups placed significant words from selected poems in the traced outline of a male or female body, revealing meaning through these aesthetic forms. Discussion of roles in the workplace became heated as students researched and debated issues related to salary and child care. In an effort to show the often tangled web gender weaves through relationships, groups arranged themselves into still pictures to illustrate underlying themes of literary works. All of these class activities engaged students' bodies and minds while encouraging greater understanding of what it means to be a gendered person in society.

I continued to struggle with how to translate theory into practice. How could I help

students represent their “processes” of reading (reader response theory)? How might I encourage subjective responses while simultaneously promoting the awareness that part of their subjective response is tied to gender (gendered reader response theory)? How could I examine student responses within the context of gender (poststructuralist theory)? And was there something I could do to integrate all three theories?

I devised a dual-voiced writing assignment. A dual-voiced journal requires responses to reading in two voices—in this case, one male and one female. If a reader is a female, she first responds to the text with her own voice, then adopts a male voice and responds to the same text. With such an approach students not only explore how the literature speaks to them but also project and predict how literature speaks to others. As responses are shared in what often turn out to be stimulating and lively classroom discussions, readers not only have the opportunity to explore how teachers and peers value the responses of “others” but also can seize the occasion to discover those cultural institutions that might have affected the choice and construction of voice used when responding.

The dual-voiced journal represents the integration of reader response, gender, and poststructural theories. Although a reader responds personally, he or she also engages in role, purposeful, textual, and contextual play. In reacting to an array of texts in a variety of voices, he or she might also respond from a range of perspectives, read for a variety of purposes, and employ a wide assortment of strategies. At the same time, the poststructural format of the dual-voiced journal encourages and makes evident the duality of readers and the division of subjects. While overall the journal responses of females and males might reflect a monologic or similar reading, the social act of deconstructing student responses in a collaborative and sharing classroom environment promotes awareness of and perhaps liberates readers from those very cultural institutions associated with the production and performance of gender.

RESOURCES ON GENDER (continued)

Gender and careers

Angelou, M. (1978). Woman work. In M. Angelou, *And still I rise* (pp. 31–32). New York: Random House.

Munro, A. (1998). Boys and girls. In A. Munro, *Dance of the happy shades and other stories* (pp. 111–127). New York: Random House.

Wollstonecraft, M. (1988). *A vindication of the rights of woman with strictures on political and moral subjects*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Woolf, V. (1986). Professions for women. In M.H. Abrams (Ed.), *Norton's anthology of English literature (Vol. 2)* (5th ed., pp. 2006–2010). New York: W.W. Norton.

Woolf, V. (1986). “Shakespeare’s sister” from *A Room of One’s Own*. In M.H. Abrams (Ed.), *Norton's anthology of English literature (Vol. 2)* (5th ed., pp. 1999–2006). New York: W.W. Norton.

Gender and family

Clifton, L. (1987). My daddy’s fingers move among the couplers. In L. Clifton, *Good woman: Poems and a memoir 1969–1980* (p. 17). Brockport, NY: BOA Editions.

Clifton, L. (1987). My mama moved among the days. In L. Clifton, *Good woman: Poems and a memoir 1969–1980* (p. 16). Brockport, NY: BOA Editions.

Clifton, L. (1987). Sisters. In L. Clifton, *Good woman: Poems and a memoir 1969–1980* (p. 112). Brockport, NY: BOA Editions.

Roethke, T. (1985). My papa’s waltz. In A. Poulin (Ed.), *Contemporary American poetry* (4th ed., p. 444). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Gender and relationships

Brady, J. (1999). I want a wife. In S. Barnet & H. Bedau (Eds.), *Current issues and enduring questions: A guide to critical thinking and arguments, with readings* (pp. 120–122). New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s.

(continued)

RESOURCES ON GENDER (continued)

Clifton, L. (1987). Salt. In L. Clifton, *Good woman: Poems and a memoir 1969–1980* (p. 115). Brockport, NY: BOA Editions.

Dugan, A. (1985). Love song, I and thou. In A. Poulin (Ed.), *Contemporary American poetry* (4th ed., p. 113). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Lessing, D. (1986). To room nineteen. In M.H. Abrams (Ed.), *Norton's anthology of English literature (Vol. 2)* (5th ed., pp. 2335–2360). New York: W.W. Norton.

Piercy, M. (1985). The friend. In A. Poulin (Ed.), *Contemporary American poetry* (4th ed., p. 408). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Piercy, M. (1985). A work of artifice. In A. Poulin (Ed.), *Contemporary American poetry* (4th ed., p. 407). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Gender and student response

While I believed that using dual-voiced journals would allow me to merge all three theories into practice, I wanted to reflect critically on the effects of such practice. Through careful readings of student journals I hoped to identify variations in male and female responses and to ponder the role of “discourse” evident, or not, therein. Defining gender differences in responses often serves to demonstrate that those responses may be affected by cultural socialization associated with “doing” gender. Understanding how students respond as members of a sex also may serve to explain their responses, and those responses that do not follow traditional patterns might suggest ways to help students move beyond their learning constructs (Bowman, 1992).

There is little in the literature on the relationship between gender and student response. Some attention has been placed on female interaction with the romance genre. Radway (1984, 1987) analyzed avid female readers’ responses,

while Christian-Smith (1990) considered “low-ability” adolescent responses. Bleich (1986) compared how males and females read prose literature and lyric poetry; Comley (1992) examined journal responses of male and female college students to a short story. As for specific studies conducted in elementary or secondary school settings, Bowman (1992) considered learning logs randomly selected from 16- and 17-year-old male and female students. Gormley, Hammer, and McDermott (1992) investigated sixth-grade student journals for differences between girls’ and boys’ writing and whether the teachers responded differently to journal writing based on gender or reading proficiency.

To both add to this research and answer personal lingering questions, I analyzed the responses of the 16 female and 6 male students in the class. Students responded twice to each reading assigned. A minimum of a one-page journal entry was written for each poem or story during class or for homework. Students had been instructed to first respond in their own voice, then to predict and project the voice of the opposite sex in a second response. I purposely allowed for some personal choice in the selection of poetry read. A variety of gendered poems relating to a single topic such as “body” or “family” (see Sidebar) was offered. While students were required to read four poems for homework, they could decide among the selections offered. As I wanted the students to experience multiple yet personal meaning making from their interactions with texts, I empowered both males and females with the ability to discover those poems that reverberated most powerfully with them. Students were free to select poetry about or by either sex, and such choices prompted further reflection on gendered experience.

I decided to analyze the journals using a constant comparative method. This meant reading and rereading the responses, looking for patterns across subsets (journals of males versus journals of females), and then looking for patterns across the two voices within both male and female

journals. Would their dual-voiced responses, as predicted for single-voiced responses, reveal similar interpretations among males and females? Did their projections of reverse-sex responses reflect traditional gendered stereotypes? Through the answering of these questions, I might more thoughtfully reflect upon this method of prompting student response, determining its potential as a practical approach for interweaving theories. The following discussion shares discoveries garnered from the close analysis of sex-typed journals.

Female journals

The responses of female students, when considered in terms of sex, are similar in formation. Taylor wrote in her own female voice in response to Jewel Kilcher's "I Look at Young Girls Now":

This poem is something all girls should read. It is truthful. When we are coming of age, we have to find ourselves and our sexuality. The only problem with finding ourselves is that we tend to get lost. All females coming of age need to be aware that they can lose their "secret" too.

Taylor values the reading as honest and "truthful," something "all girls should read." She relates to the feelings of sexuality relayed through the poem and literally interprets the poet's use of the word *secret* as "virginity." She apparently values this "secret" but admits at the same time to feeling "lost." Taylor's response is affective and personal, demonstrating concern for other females and their "secrets" as well. This response is similar to that of Trish, who wrote in her female voice:

I think this poem paints a very good picture of teenage girls. We're just coming into a newfound sexuality. It's new and exciting, but we don't know quite how to handle it. I can relate to it myself. There have been many times when I've been "showing off all my lanky leggy blossoming youth," and "parading (sexuality) in all its awkward charm." It's not something I'm ashamed of. I think it's part of growing up, but it doesn't make me happy either.

Like Taylor, Trish admires the poem and shares her personal feelings of burgeoning sexuality. It is a new sensation, sometimes embraced, sometimes feared, and one not always leading to happiness.

Both Trish and Taylor, when adopting a male persona, construct less personal, more insensitive, reactions to the same poem. Taylor writes in a male voice:

I've seen girls like this. They think that just because they are older they should start dressing like sluts. Yeah, they are something to look, no to get at, but the truth is that they won't get any respect from us guys by showing us everything. We'll just snatch that secret and run. No second thoughts or feelings or whether it was true when we said we loved you.

With this response Taylor reveals her understanding of males as possessing "no second thoughts or feelings," as those wanting to "get at" girls, as those who have the potential to "snatch that secret and run." Like Taylor, Trish paints a picture of a male taking pleasure in the images of female sexuality:

Well, what to say about this poem? No problems here. I like looking at women and their "newfound sexuality." What's the big deal? If a girl knows she looks good, why should she worry about showing it off? It's a girl's prerogative—doesn't make her a bad person.

An analysis of two other female students' responses to a poem similar in theme, Lucille Clifton's "Homage to My Hips," supports the personal, affective responses made by females. Catayah writes in her self-sexed voice:

I have huge hips, but they make me who I am, just like the author's hips make her who she is. My hips give me my sex appeal and even my "ghetto booty," but I like my hips. I can shake them and give myself a newfound sexuality. I eat, and they get bigger; I exercise, and they shrink. They are wonderful things.

Such a confident expression of individual sexuality is shared here. Carmen, too, thinks this poem

"pretty cool" and "empowering," only she admits to struggling with writing this journal entry, as "unfortunately, I wasn't given much in the way of hips, so this poem doesn't 'speak' to me." Because she can make no personal association with the topic of the poem, Carmen—failing to realize through her woeful admission of lack of hips that she is indeed relating to the poem—feels inadequate in making a response.

Catayah, however, has no difficulty in drafting a male response to the same poem. In her adopted persona, she criticizes women for their obsession with hips, implying that they spend too much time thinking about their bodies:

Homage to my hips???? Give me a break! They're hips for crying out loud! You women sure are strange sometimes. You'd never see a guy writing some homage to his pecs or something like that. What a waste of time. If you ladies like your hips, and you want to write about them, then more power to you, but don't expect us guys to be standing in line to read about them.

Carmen presents a voice belonging to a man who is "so driven by testosterone that when those hips go swinging by us, we have to turn and stare. Some yell and whistle; some stare idly and just dream about those hips for days. Guys like me just appreciate the moment." It is apparent that both of these student journal entries, like those of Trish and Taylor, reflect personal affinity with their own sex yet depict unsympathetic evaluation from the opposite sex.

Excerpts from the journals of these four students best represent the category of responses made by females in this class. Voices of the same gender are made personal; like-sexed characters in the poem promote reflection and empathy. Voices of the "other" are predicted as harsh, proffering physical appraisal and judgment.

Male journals

Like female students, male students' responses to Lucille Clifton's "The Kind of Man He Is" reveal personal affinity with same-sexed characters.

Cade writes first in his own voice, knowingly and adamantly: "Guys are a little edgier, a little darker, and a little more aggressive than girls. We are all a little aggressive, and that's the way it is." He admits to his "edgier," "darker," and "aggressive" self, his response reminiscent of the female students who confessed to their own "awkward charm." Paul also recognizes part of his male self in this same poem, writing, "the beauty of a man is in his style, in his comings and goings. Solitary, dark, passionate, a shadowy presence." Just as Trish and Taylor admit to feeling "lost" or "ashamed," this poem provokes Paul to be just as self-aware of his gendered identity and to acknowledge personal qualities.

It is interesting that, when Paul writes in his alternate voice, he presumes females are somehow frightened and puzzled by this same image:

Somehow this image is remotely threatening to me. It's really a very dark picture, and not the sort of man I'd care to keep company with. I envision almost an arch villain, a person locked away in himself. A darkling, never given breath, and so unexpressed as a shadow. I guess that's more the way of men; their true motives are, while often simple when compared to ours, very much secret and personal.

Paul's female response reflects his questioning of the stereotypical aggressive, yet silent, male. Seemingly in opposition, Cade's female projection suggests that "women just want a guy who is a little mysterious. Men have darker personalities. This is natural, and that darkness can be attractive, if it is controlled." Whereas Cade postulates that females are intrigued by the "tall, dark, and handsome" image of males, Paul admits that they might be frightened by this same figure. Paul uses the alternate voice to share a contradictory insight, but Cade does not.

The responses of another student, Eric, to Gwendolyn Brooks's "Bronzeville Man With a Belt in the Back" demonstrate an initial personal response in which he, like Paul and Cade, first relates to the characteristics relayed through the poem. Eric describes a man as wearing "armor"

and going about his journey "to tear down evil unafraid." This is all, he asserts, "just part of being a man." He continues: "The violent masculine armor is part of what being a man comes with. He must protect what is just, whether it be a woman, his country, or his home." Likewise, Obad, in his own voice, admits to having taken up that "honourous" armor: "It's a very good way at remaining humble in the face of overwhelming praise or motionless in the face of great oppression. I find it very truthful and very much a way of life for many men."

However, when Eric and Obad respond as females, they appear more willing to doubt the same male qualities. Like Paul, Eric questions the role of the hero in his female voice:

Oh yes, it's a very noble picture, but it's almost a bit too much bravado for me. I guess that chauvinist type will be around as long as men are. A bit of a loss, but well, you try and tell a knight to lay the armor down. He'd rather die than do that; it's his life.

And Obad similarly probes the role of emotion in his female response:

All men know is violence. They all have the ability to love, to be nice, to be soft, yet still strong and tough, but most choose not to. Men do not want to risk showing emotion. Why? Emotion is not a weakness. It is refreshing to see a man who has enough courage to express a very feminine emotion.

Paul, Eric, and Obad aptly represent the category of male responses in the class. Cade was the single exception. All same-sexed writings demonstrate personal affinity and empathy with masculine qualities and images; all but one male student's opposite-sexed writings question those very images and characteristics.

Gendering reading

As expected, the female and male responses of students to readings were quite similar between the sexes despite variation in textual, cultural,

social, ideological, and literary backgrounds of individual students. What might account for these similarities is the "gendered" positions of students influencing responses to texts. If readers are indeed constructed by various institutional discourses, then these discourses might have created this "illusion of regularity" (Spellmeyer, 1989, p. 719) predicted and displayed throughout students' responses.

However, I found that the dual-voiced experience did vary across sexes. Male student responses in their own voice (like their female counterparts) are honest and understanding with similar-sexed literary characters and attributes. Yet the journal writing method prompting the responses of gendered "others" seems to have led these male students not to share the stereotypical images of the "other" (as did the responses of female students) but to question those very images. Whereas female students created male voices that proffered physical assessment and derision, male students created female voices that prompted emotional inquiry and sensitivity. The adoption and exercise of an alternative female voice seems to have led male students to explore the more complex characteristics and social displays of gender. While the projected responses written by female students for male students reflected traditional gendered male stereotypes, the responses of male students in a female voice questioned the nature of those very images and qualities.

I believe that dual-voiced journals successfully represented theory translated into practice as they heightened awareness of reading processes with students and facilitated discussion of those factors affecting personal response—those "masculine" and "feminist" reading formations shaping and influencing our interactions and transactions with texts. While analyzing differences in response demonstrated current student understandings of gender performance, deconstructing responses in classroom discussions promoted awareness of gendered stereotypes (exemplified by female responses for males) supported through cultural institutions. At the same

time, attentiveness to the male student responses (which questioned traditional gendered roles) supports the use of dual-voiced journals as a means of helping students move beyond learning constructs.

In 1938, Louise Rosenblatt noted gender and reminded teachers that we have a responsibility not only to "help the student retain his living sense of the experiences through which he has just passed" but also to "reinforce the power of literature to develop social imagination" (1968, p. 187). Dual-voiced journals encourage gendered "imagining." Female students are prompted through this activity to reveal their understandings of males, while male students expose their understandings of females. Such a response activity provokes students to become cultural, gendered, "world" travelers (Lugones, 1997) as they embrace the possibility of dual selves. Such "travel logs" can encourage class discussions, leading to heightened self- and social awareness as opposite-sexed constructions of gender are deconstructed together.

Conversations in the class were indeed lively as female students shared their predicted male reactions to poems and as male students questioned their roles through female voices. Each day, after a literary work was reintroduced, male students shared their "female" voices, and female students reacted. This pattern was repeated as female students shared their "male" voices and male students reacted.

As I listened to these exchanges, however, I had to wonder. Was any voice authentic, or were all merely constructed for the purposes of the assignment (and for the ultimate goal of pleasing the female teacher and researcher)? A teacher-researcher's presence is always a factor that might influence the response of students. "Conversation is a highly contextualised phenomenon," warned Cameron (1985, p. 42), and students might have altered or monitored written language to accommodate an authority figure (me). Did male students question traditional gendered roles and female students support them because they presumed this is what I hoped for? Were students

speaking in voices they thought I wanted to hear? I will never know. But I did determine that through the ensuing dialogue, students were led to question more critically the nature of response, the role of gender, and their construction of selves.

I agree with Christian (1989), who suggested that we read the works of writers in various ways and remain open to the intricacies of gender in literature, sharing our processes along the way. Through this journal writing process, males and females not only can make personal meaning from their experiences with texts but also can be engaged in the questioning of how that meaning is made in a shared classroom context. In this sense, students truly explore what it means to be a gendered person in today's society.

As for my initial preoccupation with the practice of theory, dual-voiced journals have provoked me to think more profoundly about "the why" underlying what it means to be a literacy teacher committed to reader response, impassioned by gender, and intrigued by poststructuralist ideas. Theory has served its purpose. The albatross is caught.

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