

Teaching Peace  
through  
Transformative  
Literature and  
Metaethics



# Teaching Peace through Transformative Literature and Metaethics

By

Maryann P. DiEdwardo

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing**



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This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-1511-7

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1511-6

Dedicated to my husband, my son, my sister, and the Tuskegee  
Airmen, primarily African American military pilots  
who fought in World War II.  
They helped my father, who served in the U.S. Army Air Corps,  
when his plane was shot down.  
—M. P. D.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to the University of Maryland Global Campus for inviting me to speak about my case study on justice literacy at the “Community Meet Up” on November 13, 2020. The completion of this work would not have been possible without the generous and untiring assistance of Joseph A. DiEdwardo. He was also the cover designer.

## FOREWORD

MARYANN P. DIEDWARDO

I present here a book of my case studies about the teaching of transformation through literacy, most of which originated as papers presented at various conference proceedings. They demonstrate methods for the formal study of radical compassion in settings that aim to promote and sustain peace. My studies emulate the goals of my concentration on human rights. Using reflective practice, I teach peace through transformative literary works and transformational learning styles.

The key research in my field began with the 2021 Opensimulator Conference on “Justice Literacy, Critiques, and Cultural Landscape”. Metaethics, the philosophy of ethics dealing with the meaning of ethical terms, the nature of moral discourse, and the foundations of moral principles, is central to my work. My writing has also always been concerned with Zora Neale Hurston. I began to study Hurston as a literary scholar after she was recognized by Alice Walker at an MLA convention. Zora Neale Hurston, novelist, folklorist, anthropologist, and ethnographer, was known during the Harlem Renaissance for her wit, irreverence, and folk-writing style. She won second prize in the 1925 literary contest of the Urban League’s journal, *Opportunity*, for her short story “Spunk,” which also appeared in *The New Negro*.

The central purpose of my studies is to concentrate on the use of space, language, and Haitian folklore in Hurston’s works. Materials from Digital Humanities and the Hurston archive form the basis of my argument that the works of Zora Neale Hurston invite continued research. Visit <https://chdr.cah.ucf.edu/hurstonarchive/?p=hurstons-life> for the current materials. Semiotic praxis provides the primary framework for my exploration of Zora Neale Hurston’s *The Complete Stories*, as well as her book about field work in Haiti, entitled *Tell My Horses*.

The Kingian Principles also inform my work for peace:  
<https://www.gatheringforjustice.org/six-principles-of-kingnian-non-violence>

Writing transformational books, I practice global peace through the interdisciplinary and hermeneutical study of traditional resources (historical)

and contemporary forms of spiritual life (anthropological). Healing and transformation occur. Hermeneutics calls for action. Therefore, this book is a civic writing project and extends its area of study to include critical hermeneutics, which continues where traditional hermeneutics ceases by embarking on an examination of those social and historical conditions which make understanding possible. Researchers can have a great impact on their readers. We can change the reader with hermeneutics, metacognition, and cultural poetic approaches. Transformation, a concentration on curiosity, solitude, and self-development through writing are the themes in my papers, workshops, seminars, and symposium proceedings, as is the complexity of the interior self. I address the social functionality of literature as well as the theoretical processes of the literary scholar with regard to the power of writing for cultural change.

## Metaethics

George Kilcourse explained that “from January 1935 through mid-1940, while a student at Columbia University in New York City, Thomas Merton’s world adjoined the Harlem neighborhood, a 3 square mile black ghetto. From the frustrations of living in community to the solitude of the woods, Merton showed the latent sanctity within ordinary human struggles. He illuminated nature as a place of revelation”. *History is Now Magazine* commented that “the writer and the monk bring their respective books to a close with calls to action. Fifty years ago, Thomas Merton and James Baldwin exchanged letters devoted to this topic”.

Regarding future research, I advocate utilizing an approach which blends a focus on human rights with critical hermeneutics, an approach that is very different from traditional hermeneutics. Critical hermeneutics takes nothing for granted. In fact, it is the taken-for-granted nature of understanding and, in particular, where knowledge comes from, that is the object of study. Hermeneutics stops at the point of saying that knowledge and understanding are historically and socially bound. Furthermore, I advocate evidence-based change through service writing and volunteering at local, regional and national community engagement events, to inspire diversity, multiculturalism, tolerance, human rights, and civic values. My paradigm is transformational learning. As a teacher, I am a co-creator and evolve into a listener and a facilitator, and I build relationships with those whom I teach. Students read the works of multicultural authors and create audio presentations on YouTube. Music, photography, art, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook have become the new literature that enhances

learning. Stories that students create in the new literature of the social network become the new voices for a global cultural literature revolution.

## **Agape Love**

To enhance our learning community, as we define and implement cultural poetics with commentary that presents visions of global literary studies, I use compassion and agape love, or unconditional love. For the past 25 years, I have been managing learning environments in the area of distance learning. It is my specialty. I created my own system for my own school, which I ran between 1993 and 2002. When I completed my doctoral studies in 2004, I closed my private online programs and became a computer-based specialist and adjunct professor for four colleges and universities in the Lehigh Valley area. In the process, I lectured on the use of pop culture as a component of creating useful learning environments online; as an additional responsibility, I acted as course designer for online learning classrooms for the first online course offerings at Lehigh Carbon Community College for Literature-based English 2. Since 2003, I have usually been scheduled to teach three distance learning classes per semester online, with institutions such as Northampton Community College and Lehigh Carbon Community College.

I am also experienced in designing online learning paradigms and structures for traditional, hybrid and computer-based classes for my own online writing school and publishing company, Northampton Community College, Lehigh Carbon Community College, Penn State, Lehigh University, and DeSales University. I have lectured on technology and learning at regional, state, and national conferences. I am qualified to teach American Women's Literature, both pre- and post-1900. At DeSales University, I taught Introduction to Drama and American Literature: Colonial through Romantic (1450 to 1890) in eight-week sessions; Classical Literature, including Greek and Roman Drama; Stage History; Elizabethan Period Literature; Shakespeare; James Joyce; and British Poetry. My recent classes at Lehigh have concentrated on the works of Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison. Other classes have focused on Jack Kerouac and the Beat Period, British Literature, and Charles Dickens. In my graduate program at Lehigh, I concentrated heavily on Native American Literature. In my undergraduate studies at Penn State University, I focused on Stage History and Film Studies.

For the past fifteen years at Lehigh University, I have lectured at English and Education Department conferences on cultural diversity and feminism. In classes, I have offered presentations on transcendentalism. I

also studied American and British poetry, and I have taught film theory, which I have used to teach writing based on film theory with a concentration on American film history at Lehigh University in English 1 and 2. I am prepared to teach creative nonfiction writing and short story writing, and have recently published a juvenile fiction book and a set of short stories. My undergraduate degree, from Penn State University, was in theatre arts. At Lehigh University, I concentrated on performances by Katharine Hepburn, Vanessa Redgrave and Dame Edith Evans, and I published a book in 2005 based on my thesis. This book reflected on ideas about justice literacy. In my recent career as a writer, I have published a set of books called *Pennsylvania Voices*, which includes both fiction and nonfiction for all ages. At Lehigh Carbon Community College in 2006, I designed the first distance learning class that the college offered in English 2, with a concentration on Classical Literature. The class included short story, poetry, drama, and fiction units in an eight-week session.



# INTRODUCTION

A metaethic experience, an historical memoir of my studies, and an inspirational spiritual tale - my writing transcends time to reach my audience through a unique blend of nature and human kindnesses based on remembrances.

This book focuses on social justice as a paradigm for the English classroom. I have taught justice literacy for ages three through to adult. This project, justice literacy, focuses on the poetics of social justice forms within 21st-century topics, connected through the themes of human rights, diversity and justice, and through areas such as music, poetry, film, diaspora studies and gender studies.

I apply poetics to books and geopolitics to environmental issues in order to understand writing, music, poetry, and films such as *Feeling Through*. The book is about the poetics, or the flow, of writing and meaning. It is timely and has chapters on current events, films, poetry, issues like LGBTQIA rights, and books on women's issues and historic biographies of figures who fought for human rights. Social realism is the term used for work produced by painters, printmakers, photographers, writers, and filmmakers that aims to draw attention to the real sociopolitical conditions of the working class as a means to critique the power structures behind these conditions.

Aristotle's *Poetics*, written in 335 BC, is the earliest surviving work of dramatic theory and the first extant philosophical treatise to focus on literary theory. Aristotle defined all art as imitation. *Poetics* is distinguished because it crafted an understanding of how different elements can come together and produce certain effects on the reader. Most literary criticism combines poetics and hermeneutics in a single analysis. Cognitive poetics is a school of literary theory that applies the principles of cognitive science, particularly cognitive psychology, to the interpretation of literary texts. It is tied to reader-response criticism and the modern principles of cognitive linguistics. Topics addressed by cognitive poetics include deixis, text world theory, and the feeling of immersion within a text. Metaethical thinking considers concepts and metaphors.

I have participated in teaching, writing, editing, presenting, and performing case study research since the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in March 2020. At the Second International Conference of Human

Rights and Globalization Online, July 1–3, 2021, at the University of Seville, Spain, I presented a paper on the film *Roma*, a paper which was also accepted for publication in the Dykinson digital volume. I shall begin the explanation and argumentation for this book by offering a background of my peace studies and cultural studies interests, as well as of my interests in cultural poetics and approaching literature through the investigation of cultural landscapes as literary spaces.

Social justice is a thematic presence that we all share when we are able to see that the universe is on the side of justice - a Kingian Principle. Social justice, such as being oneself in the world, free from injury and hatred, blessed with hope and joy, was the driver of the research and writing of this book. I have strived to be on the side of justice within the writing of a book that acknowledges my own striving for peace in my own life.

### **Metacognitive Planning, Metacomponents, Metaethics, and Life-Story Writing**

This book is based on my ten-year research project that used metaethics, metacognition and life-story writing to enhance justice literacy. At the Northeast Modern Language Association Conference in 2017, I presented an original paper titled “Metacognition and Student-directed Pedagogy in Hybrid and Online Writing Courses” for the panel “Emerging Pedagogy and Tools for Online Composition and Writing Intensive Courses.” The central argument stressed the need for metacognitive activities in all writing settings, from K–adult. I included a sample life-story project, which demonstrated writing based on memory. Connections between ideas are essential for metacognitive thinking. Working memory is the part of our minds that holds information temporarily for processing. Yet, working memory is quite limited in capacity; we can hold only so much information in our conscious awareness at one time. However, when reading skills are fluent, then the burden of the working memory is reduced. Applying metacognitive pedagogy breaks down interior interpersonal borders. Metacognition and student-directed pedagogy in hybrid and online writing courses help students plan for tasks by thinking about preparatory skills that the students may have before class, such as social networking. Metacognitive skills also encourage students to reflect on their abilities to perform tasks. The writing process, with reflective journaling, peer discussions, peer assessments, self-monitoring and student self-assessments, offers insights into their own writing processes and interactions with groups.

Teachers set up conditions in which students can learn. One of the most important ways teachers do that is by organizing students into transition communities. The short story as an authentic assessment tool engages students. Through the concentrated study of sets of short stories that contain meaningful themes, characters, and human emotions, readers can significantly conquer self-doubt and break down self-imposed borders. Through reading, analyzing, discussing, and eventually writing short stories, creators develop self-understanding. Authentic assessment engages student writers by breaking down interior interpersonal borders. As a framework for teaching composition or introductory literature classes, the short story concentrates on the understanding of the themes of literary consciousness.

Metacognition refers to higher order thinking which involves active control over the cognitive processes engaged in learning. Metacognition is the ability to control one's cognitive processes. Self-regulation has been linked to intelligence. Sternberg referred to these executive processes as metacomponents in his triarchic theory of intelligence. Metacomponents are executive processes that control other cognitive components as well as receiving feedback from these components. Knowing when, where, and how to remember involves planning, evaluating, and monitoring. Furthermore, metacognitive processes require embedding, informing, and training.

This book presents a life-story essay to demonstrate a metacognitive pedagogical task. The following is a formative assessment that can be implemented as a writing process activity. It is important to give students feedback on drafts, discussions, journaling, and research methodology, and also peer-edit in group and private settings. Metastudy activities include collaborative study groups. I have called on my students to develop creative blog posts and short presentations about their life stories. I encouraged them to share collaborative ideas about mini-researches. I asked them questions about hobbies and interests. Teachers can help create students' voices in class with freewriting prompts as metastudy to prepare to write. Digital revolution projects abound with creative ways to use ePortfolios, WordPress, blogs, e-books, and other methodologies to write and to self-publish.

Zora Neale Hurston has been and continues to be my focus for research. Folklorist and novelist, prolific short story writer and gifted autobiographer, she was one of the most talented writers of her era. Testimonials often combine with very specific types of literature. For example, Zora Neale Hurston used folk writing at first. Next, she wrote plays, essays, mixed works, and short stories. She studied anthropology.

She travelled to Haiti and wrote a very important work titled *Tell My Horse*. Then she wrote her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

As a society, we continue to identify and discuss the cultural and literary heritage of African American authors and genres between 1900 and the Black Arts Movement (BAM) of the 1960s and 1970s. I met James McBride at a conference. His book/movie, *Miracle at St. Anna*, concerns World War II. In the Appendix to this book, I discuss my study with the M. K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence and Justice Literacy. Upon his death, Mohandas K. Gandhi was hailed by the *London Times*. Gandhi protested against racism in South Africa and colonial rule in India by using nonviolent resistance. A testament to the revolutionary power of nonviolence, Gandhi and his approach directly influenced Martin Luther King Jr. The Kingian Principles further the study of social justice literacy.

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# CHAPTER 1

## THE POETRY OF RITA DOVE

Rita Dove creates poetry of social change to bridge the common with the uncommon, the dead with the living, and the past with the present. She teaches us to live with ourselves and to be the social change we seek by sharing truths. She uses poetry of human dignity related to identity. The poet also creates a poetic language of truth and beauty. Based on truth, the poet invites us to enter a mythic, imaginative space. The poems verify the melodious nature of the poetics of social justice and integrate community and ancestral conversations. The presence of history, autobiography, and myth reveals a poetics of respect for life. My creative approach to teaching blends cultural poetics with a concentration on semiotics and using social justice as a paradigm. Semiotics, the philosophical theory of the functions of the signs and symbols of literary texts, gives meaning to literary works and discovers their deepest messages, which may be missed by readers without help from critics. Moving forward toward the goal of praxis, I argue that hermeneutic arcs are useful for organizing and interpreting information in order to prepare critiques. Through an arc that employs the case study methodology of research questions, record-keeping, reading, writing reflections, and analysis, I offer my readers the chance to share my journey into the poetic literary space. “Poetics of Social Justice of Rita Dove” is a presentation I delivered at the conference of the Northeast Modern Language Association on March 14, 2021. In it, I emphasized the importance of reading, writing, and analyzing the poetry of Rita Dove as a doorway to practicing social justice in communities and to developing a consciousness and awareness of social justice praxis. I performed case study research on a single subject, myself.

Born in 1952, Rita Dove was an American poet and fiction writer. She was also the Poet Laureate of the United States. Viewing the poet’s works as a social discourse, we attend to the ultimate vision of cultural poetics, which looks at cultural signs. This researcher intends to redefine herself and her approach to teaching with justice literacy through reading the poetry of Rita Dove. The goal of gender studies is to challenge and to reflect, to grow and to change. I apply gender studies, feminist theory, and

poetics as I build an argument based on case study research techniques. I argue that examination of the social and historical conditions under which the reader lives also make understanding possible.

Researchers can change readers by studying cultural landscape as praxis. Place is essential to a cultural vision. Poetry cracks through a mental block and revisits the past to bring new insight. Dove was often home. She resided in a home that she built for herself as a narrator. Based on truth, the poet invites us to enter a mythic imaginative space. She teaches us to live with ourselves and to be the social change we seek by sharing our truths. She uses the poetics of human dignity related to identity, and creates a poetic language of truth and beauty. Her works verify the melodious nature of the poetics of social justice and integrate community and ancestral memory.

The presence of history, autobiography, and myth reveals a poetics of respect for life. We gain hope from Dove's deep love that resides in her language and poetics. I shared my writing from during the pandemic with my students to inspire them. Lack of socialization during the pandemic changed us. My studies include letters, documents, and social media, and I acknowledge a methodology to teach peace and to initiate hope for survival.

Teaching during a pandemic is also a state of suffering, because humans need social contact. I began to heal through the poetry of trauma. Trauma. It was a sudden opening in a burst of spiritual awakening. This surge of healing only comes from insight, but the words of poets change us, offering a way to focus on memory and metaphor that reminds us of all the years that we lived without a pandemic.

## Case Study

The case study begins on March 8, 2020, upon finishing the NeMLA conference presentation in Boston, Massachusetts, and ends on March 10, 2021. The one-year case study on a single subject, myself, uses a journal to record my reflections. The purpose of case study research is to have a detailed qualitative study. I anticipate healing and growth, since this is my eighth case study during my period of higher level education. This period commenced with my Doctor of Education dissertation, "Pairing Music and Linguistic Intelligences," in 2003. Other case studies include: healing from vertigo through the study and practice of QiGong; studying works by Thomas Merton to heal; healing from grief through reading the works of Emily Dickinson; undertaking case study research in preparation for write the literary critiques for my monograph *Spatializing Social Justice*;

creating videos to practice blended learning pedagogy during the pandemic in 2020; and a year of case study research about teaching during the pandemic that resulted in a new monograph, *Teaching Radiantly*, which was published as an e-book in the United Kingdom in 2021. The reason we heal through reading of poets such as Rita Dove centers on our own relationship with love; love comes into the heart through contemplation of the words of the poet. Crafting our own visions of telling our social justice stories through poetry may enhance our understanding of the concepts. The poetry of Rita Dove has led my students to engage in activities that create a context which allows issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality to be freely questioned and affirmed.

I have taught poetry to my students weekly for the entire pandemic year, through online tutoring services to enhance English Language Arts curricula. According to David Stovall, author of “Urban Poetics: Poetry, Social Justice and Critical Pedagogy in Education”, young people need the means to analyze and make changes in their realities. He studied four poetry educators to “encapsulate their philosophies through researcher observation and participation.” He also suggested that teaching social justice through poetry was conscience-raising and helped young people develop understandings of their world to engage as agents of change.

Dove created tragic plots which were a reversal of the situations of her life and which recognized her own human suffering. The paradigm of using suffering to write is familiar and resides in the use of personal memory. In her poem “In the Old Neighborhood,” Rita Dove wrote of the “suds bath of worries” of her mother and the “reticent glory” of her father. We feel these metaphors, which offer social commentary. The poetic vision takes us back, because the poem was a sudden opening, a magnificent vision into a number of things about the house, the people of the past as metaphorical signs of our aging, and the intimate personal pain that we gather from similar memories. I related to the view of the home as a barren wasteland of dissociated memories.

## Results

What is hermeneutics? Hermeneutics is the practice and theory of interpretation and understanding of science, art, education, and philosophy. Moving toward the goal of the poetic praxis of teaching tolerance, we incorporate hermeneutic arcs into the curriculum to organize and interpret information.

## Note

1. Maryann DiEdwardo, *Hermeneutics, Metacognition, and Writing*. Spain: Vernon Press, 2020. *Hermeneutics, Metacognition, and Writing* investigates the social functionality of actions as an essential criterion of study. It focuses on hermeneutics: interpretation through the lens of philosophy of metacognition. Vital contributions to the book include several chapters by Maryann P. DiEdwardo herself, which explore various facets of the central topic, including the intersectionality of hermeneutics, metacognition, and semiotics, as well as social movements. This collection of critiques and case studies examines the imagined cultural landscape of specific works and associated activities such as fine art, music, poetry, and digital humanities, which aim to initiate self-monitoring as metacognition, or meta-reflection, by creating interior interpersonal space to overcome adversity. This edited volume will be of particular interest to scholars and students of textual hermeneutics as it relates to prose writing and artistic works in nonverbal media. ISBN: 9781622738229

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## CHAPTER 2

# SPATIALIZING POETICS: A LITERARY CRITIQUE AND REIMAGINING 20TH-CENTURY AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS FOR THE PURPOSE OF PEACE

### Poetics

The study of diversity, understanding global perspectives, a cultural awareness of diverse peoples through analytical strategies, close reading, the analysis of figurative language, and the comprehension of narrative structure define this researcher's thesis.

Aristotle's *Poetics* is the earliest surviving work of dramatic theory and the first to extend a philosophical treatise to focus on literary theory. Aristotle defined all art as imitation; in other words, poetry imitates nature, which is the same as saying that art imitates life, whether natural objects or human actions. *Poetics* is distinguished because it brought an understanding of how a text of different elements can come together and produce certain effects on the reader. Most literary criticism combines poetics and hermeneutics in a single analysis; however, one or the other may predominate, giving the text the aims of the one doing the reading. Cognitive poetics is a school of literary theory that applies the principles of cognitive science, particularly cognitive psychology, to the interpretation of literary texts. It ties criticism to the reader's response and also their grounding in modern principles of cognitive linguistics. Topics addressed by cognitive poetics include deixis; text world theory; the feeling of immersion within text; and schema and script and their role in reading attention—for grounding and genre.

I use cultural poetics, intersectionality, intertextuality, modernism, and semiotics to decipher clues about multiple strands of complexity in the works of Willa Cather, who migrated to Nebraska from Virginia as a child, and Toni Morrison. My presentation focuses on a chapter from my new

book, *Spatiality and Reimagining 20th-Century Writers for the Purpose of Peace*.

Applicable to the study of Cather and Morrison, the writing of oneself, the lonely island of the self, represents our search for words to describe situations. Based on the study of Aristotle's *Poetics* (free online text), I argue that Cather and Morrison apply poetics as a methodology to capture and apply the feminine myth as an island of selfhood, in the creation of works of fiction and nonfiction. This poetics of language is related to my study of methaethics, and is essential to the significance of the messages.

First, the significance of Cather's message in her book *My Mortal Enemy* is "suffering". My readings view Cather as a writer who designs poetics as the cause of the work. The island of the lonely voice and female selfhood are components of her work. Recent research in the area of stylometrics explores the ways in which Cather's voice in her correspondence differs from the voice she used in her public writing.

Amy Ahearn, in a biographical sketch of the writer for the Willa Cather Archive, remarks that Cather was famous for who she was. Willa Cather is remembered for her depiction of pioneer life in Nebraska. She established a reputation for giving breadth as well as breath to the landscapes of her fiction.

## Writing Trauma, Modernism

Morrison's *Beloved* is a signifier of the importance of the spiritual in writing and language. In fact, Morrison creates the voice of a dead child to represent spirituality through myth. Ultimately, writing is a personal journey determined by the ghost's placelessness, which becomes an island place of worship. The depth of Morrison's vision resides in her ability to use the key themes of this book: geopolitics, gender, peace, and environmental studies. She generates issues about race, human rights, the lack of home, and the search for peace that represent current 21st-century topics.

## Place (East Village)

In *Quicksand*, Nella Larsen uses concepts which concern the space of trauma. In the first chapter, Larsen writes: "She loved this tranquility, this quiet, following the fret and strain of the long hours spent among fellow members of a carelessly unkind and gossiping faculty, following the strenuous rigidity of conduct required in this huge educational community of which she was an insignificant part. This was her rest, this intentional

isolation for a short while in the evening, this little time in her own attractive room with her own books.”

Background research uses the summary of a passage from *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature: Volume 2, 1920 to the Present*, First Edition, edited by Gene Andrew Jarrett. The *Wiley* text is poignant, with the presentation of short biographical sketches before important works. For example, in the text we can study a series of authors who represent important historical periods of African American literature. The biographical section about Nella Larsen is quite compelling. Although some scholars have dismissed her as a real-life version of Helga Crane and Clare Kendry, the tragic mixed-race protagonists of these novels, Larsen’s public career was defined less by pathology and more by her ability to uncover the psychology and pretensions of European America and the African American middle class with whom she has often been identified. As the mixed-race daughter of a working-class Danish American woman, and raised in the rough neighborhoods of Chicago, she fit no more “naturally” in African American high society than she did among neighboring whites.

## Praxis

Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* and *Passing* are novels which represent signs of loss. I practice searching for praxis of the study of semiotics in my lectures, essays, and books. Praxis is the ability of the writer to achieve a high moment of clarity about the human condition. Praxis joins together the signs of cultural change with the literary elements of characterization and plot. The writer then creates multiple fields for readers to use as bases for their visits to the fictional work. The creation of the inner life of a character, through narrative, lies within the substantive study of the semiotic basis for the narrative by Larsen. The creation of narrative eventually demands characterization and other devices, such as dialogue and dramatic effect, within the creative space in the fictional world.

Let us define that creative process and relate it to the use of narrative as a semiotic vision. A narrative in the fictional world puts the characters at risk of failure. Nella uses the humanity of her own experiences as the principle of her fictional works.

In the study of the novel and of the novel as a narrative, we suggest that Nella Larsen picked up observances of various cultural milieus, in particular during her experiences in Harlem. These gave her knowledge of aspects of a natural social phenomenon. The semiautobiographical *Quicksand*, my favorite novel, is about Helga, who was born to a white

mother and an absent black father. As a young woman, Helga, like me, teaches. Moving to Harlem and eventually to Denmark, she attempts a new life.

Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* is centered on the narrative of a fictional character, Clare Kendry, a light-skinned biracial woman living as a white woman. In this way, this novel breaks down the thematic binary of black and white. In addition, Larsen's novel simultaneously explores the theme of gender.

The historical, cultural, and literary function of the novel is to act as an agent of change. As we focus on *Quicksand* and *Passing*, we study recurring forms and techniques of the form as narrative and a dominant literary social document. Projects that we teach students based on the writings of Nella Larsen may become novellas or book chapters with an awareness of the responsibilities to create a novel. In a class based on the creative narrative of Nella Larsen, we emphasize the study of diversity, understanding global perspectives, the cultural awareness of diverse peoples through analytical strategies, close reading, the analysis of figurative language, and the comprehension of narrative structure.

Historically, we continue to see that Zora Neale Hurston was influenced by Nella Larsen in the early 20th century. Furthermore, I became acquainted with the Larsen's work when I was preparing for my online class which I teach at UMUC. Both authors show us how to write about real events in order to make a difference.

## Civil Rights

Flannery O'Connor wrote about civil rights through powerful language and poetics. I argue that my study of *A Prayer Journal* by Flannery O'Connor indicates a study of the language of trauma. Prayer may be the internal voice one uses to cry for help. To understand this, we compare her work with that of Jacques Derrida in "White Mythology." Derrida's passages refer to the "reverse metaphorization of concepts." The reversal is such that there can be no final separation between the linguistic-metaphorical and the philosophical realms. We learn the opposite of peace in the works of O'Connor. Readers feel despair.

Flannery O'Connor was born in Savannah, Georgia, in 1925. A devout Catholic, she lived most of her life on a farm. She wrote two novels and thirty-two short stories, as well as reviews and commentaries. Her Southern Gothic style used regional settings and grotesque characters. She won the 1972 National Book Award for Fiction, after her 1964 death. The Catholic revival and a Catholic theory of fiction, as well as the Christian

realism of the “here and now” and postwar America, are themes that highlight our quest to understand O’Connor’s writing in her private journal titled *A Prayer Journal*. It was published in 2013 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, USA. As soon as I realized that the private journaling of one of my favorite authors was available, I purchased and read the book. Observing O’Connor’s prayers defined the poetics of her inner life. The book changed me. The poetics of her work are essential for insights into the purpose she hoped her writing performed. The powerful language and poetics of Flannery O’Connor’s works change us as we experience her inner life. Therefore, an analysis through the lens of the definition of civil rights portrays O’Connor as a leader in the thematic approach to ethics and human dignity. She wrote about the human condition with a poetic voice that mattered and which also applies to our 21<sup>st</sup>-century times.

Chapter six in *American Women Writers, Poetics, and the Nature of Gender Study* (Maryann P. DiEdwardo (ed.), 2016, Cambridge Scholars Publishing) explores prayer journaling as intense spiritual writing. The use of Flannery O’Connor’s *A Prayer Journal* to investigate poetics, is based on my observances from an ongoing study of my use of grammar to form language, with evidence from observations based on life-story writing, a key characteristic of the methods of field study through journaling. As I interpreted the poetics of O’Connor, a case study on the thought processes of my own writing prepared me to create a useful pedagogy as well as life study on the power of writing for cultural change. I also studied my own unpublished prayer journals to observe place through language, in the context of the topic and to make comparisons.

Upon my first reading, I contemplated one passage on one page for days. The study of O’Connor’s poetic work is essential to our literary understanding for its insights into the writing she hoped to perform. Yet, reading the prayers brings peace. In humility, I myself whisper the words in the hope of reaching to her spirit to thank her for writing prayers.

The handwritten, darker-inked portion means so much to us as journaling writers who seek to reach out and write from the depths of our souls and minds. As I try to maintain a prayer journal in my own voice, I gather thoughts about the thirty-seven pages of printed text to represent the actual journal; the original text is included at the back of the volume, in O’Connor’s own hand. Page 3, the first undated entry, showed us the inner life of the author.

As writers, we are specialists in imagination. We deliver messages that we get from our writing life, which are distinctly related to voice and talent. So, to understand O’Connor, we compare her poetics and her

language as messages. I argue that we should recognize the journal as a way to approach the writing process with the first basic instinct of our nature: inner thought. We translate our thoughts through journaling as we approach our daily writing. The habit of writing in a journal precedes the actual writing of a final manuscript. Journaling and historical memoir based on life story writing are a part of learning to write. As a writing practice, journaling is an ethic that relates to the personal quest of the writer. We gain more insights from works such as Farrell O’Gorman’s *Peculiar Crossroads: Flannery O’Connor, Walker Percy, and Catholic Vision in Postwar Southern Fiction*. The book introduces us to the malaise and mystery of Flannery O’Connor.

To conclude, I attempted to place *A Prayer Journal* into a pedagogical model for educators. A student at my conference presentation was fascinated with my use of O’Connor’s writing. I related that I was writing a book with ideas from O’Connor’s journaling. I often use my own interests in writing and my journals as examples in classes. I consider that my argument for prayer journaling as an ethic may be a paradigm for teaching writing. From a pedagogical view, I discussed O’Connor’s work as journaling that blends the Christian ethic with the importance of writing a journal for engaging in the neurological healing connected to journaling. In fact, we can use journaling in the educational setting of writing classes. The sociocultural phenomenon of online journaling explores the development of the classroom in models that serve the students of the 21st century.

## **Agency, Rosa Parks**

Imagination, individualized by each writer, captivates us. We become agents of change if we share the new formations that research and reading offer us. We can take action and go further than our heroines.

Rosa Louise McCauley Parks was born on February 4, 1913, and died on October 24, 2005. On December 1, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, she rejected bus driver James E. Blake’s order to relinquish her seat to a white passenger. Parks was arrested. Her case was important and led to the Montgomery bus lawsuit, which succeeded in November 1956. At the time, she was the secretary of the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP, having been an activist since 1947.

The important part was that she volunteered to be arrested, a justice literacy concept that teaches radical compassion.

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