SEPTEMBER 7

I spoke in class last week about my hope that we could find ways of approaching race and gender that would allow for accounts, and examinations, of our own personal, even private, attitudes and opinions—especially as they are embedded, often almost invisibly, in the stories we tell to and about ourselves to explain the fact that we have ended up together here to study and talk about this literature. As I was imagining it, these stories would be subject then to various kinds of critique—as they collide or mesh with the stories others here among us are telling, as they are inflected by the poets we will be reading, who have themselves both challenged and reflected our cultural habits for marking off race and gender as matters of (in)consequence, and as they can be interrogated by the range of critical instruments our discipline offers for systematic inquiry.

Since Toi invited me to teach this course with her, I've been thinking a lot about what I might have to offer here, especially the degree to which I felt authorized to teach a course like this. I am middle-aged, white, heterosexual, male. What authority or cachet could someone

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like me possibly bring to such a course? I have no idea how, if at all, you will allow me to intrude on your thinking here; how, if at all, you will open yourself up to changes by your interactions with me. I believe I will need to persuade you to do that, to begin to imagine that I am worth engaging in a serious way on matters apropos to this course. I intend to use these weekly essays to accomplish some of that persuasion, a persuasion I believe can only be indirect, a process of engagement. As I said above, this course is a place where our personal, even private, stories about ourselves not only have an ancillary propriety, as one kind of discourse through which we can learn; they are, really, as I see it, the most essential materials out of and around which the other kinds of more customary learning—about various authors, periods, movements, critical systems, ideologies, and so on—must circulate.

This notion of learning is problematic. Toi and I both agreed very quickly when we first talked about teaching this course together that what we hoped to accomplish was more than just transmitting a body of information about the poets and critics we already knew a lot about. We were interested, ultimately, in change. Yours *and* ours. Let me be clear, though: Toi and I both agreed that we are not here to proselytize. We are here to put ourselves at risk, and open ourselves to change, in the same way that we are asking you to. For me that means, first of all, finding a way to think specifically about race and gender not as academic or even political concepts but as aspects of my personal history. The way I have chosen to do that is through weekly writings like this one, searching in the process for a way of speaking, a discourse, that will allow me to integrate genres that don't go together so easily—personal narrative, literary criticism, pedagogical theory. I'm tempted to call what I'm after "ideological autobiography." I have no clear idea precisely what that is, but I know where it has to begin: with the stories I tell myself about how and why I've ended up in this classroom with you.

I'll start with some stories about my development as a writer, as a poet, stories that for me tend to revolve around the metaphor of se-

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crecy. There's the story, for example, of my first memories of poetry as something that could be, or at least seem to be, entirely mine. For reasons that I simply don't remember, I bought the *Mentor Book of Major American Poets*. I was in the seventh grade. It was the first book I had ever bought myself. I started reading Edgar Allen Poe and was just mesmerized: the rhythms were so hypnotic in my ear, the sounds, especially the vowels, so lush, so exotic in their repetitions. I couldn't believe anything made out of words could deliver that much sensuous pleasure—bodily pleasure, the breathing, the tension, the kind of pleasure that simultaneously turns you into someone else and makes you feel entirely yourself. Having been raised in a very rigorous Catholic household, I immediately assumed that it must be sinful and must therefore be hidden—in this case the book went under my mattress, from where I retrieved it nightly to read for a while—and I never spoke a word about it at home, at school, anywhere. That book, and Poe in particular, changed my life around entirely: what I wanted to be, to do, to think about, all of it. I would be a poet. But, to paraphrase the old joke, I couldn't let anyone know it.

This secrecy was amplified by my immediate social surroundings: I grew up in an old mining town in northeastern Pennsylvania. To the extent that a town of 2,000 can be said to have distinct neighborhoods, in ours, for a boy at least, being able to play ball, to spit, to fight, swear, and break windows, were important social skills, and I honed all of them. There were no neighborhood poetry readings. I don't think I could have imagined at that time a greater embarrassment than to have my friends know I read poems. So poetry was something I felt I had to hide from everyone. And I did. I spent the next month or so, maybe ten minutes each night in bed just before I went to sleep, memorizing "The Raven." I knew right then that one of the things I wanted to do in my life was write at least one thing that would have that hypnotic, scary, exhilarating effect on someone; or if not that, at least to find ways to bring this kind of material to bear in a powerful way on other people. I started reading books of poetry in the library at school, although I always hid them inside of books on science or

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math, the career path that even at that age seemed inevitable for me. I didn't understand why until much later, but this was 1961, a few years after Sputnik, right in the heat of our own hyperbolic national reaction to that apparent humiliation. I was male, I was a good student, "gifted" in mathematics. The pressure to pursue science as a career was overwhelming, from family, from the school, even from the small town I grew up in. None of this, I know, was meant to be destructive, but it weighed on me like an unbearable burden for most of my adolescence. In a context in which I began to feel that nothing of my intellectual life was really "mine," poetry, my secret, played a powerful, compensatory role.

The secrecy in which my early exposure to poetry was steeped has influenced my professional identity in significant ways. For one thing, I have always felt like, and have in fact often cultivated my role as, an outsider in the various academic circles to which I have gained access. Part of that is purely personal, of course: although I knew that the process of professionalization involved getting past the stubborn "mine"-ness of the knowledge I had acquired, I refused to concede this sense of self-possession entirely to institutional forces, quite often, as you might guess, to my disadvantage. Probably the only reason this habit of mind has not ended my career, as it easily could have, is the historical accident of entering the various stages of my professionalization at moments when institutional structures were, basically, coming apart. I went to college during a time (1967–1971) when it was possible to shut down a university. Renegotiating my curricular obligations seemed a minor matter in the context of the other kinds of activities I was engaged in. I did my graduate work in an experimental program (the Doctor of Arts) at a time (1972–1976) when cuts in state funding threatened to dissolve the graduate program entirely. People of consequence in the small world of my department had much more on their minds than whether I did this or that, this way or that way. I began my occupational life in the late seventies when poststructuralism was an "outside" discourse, offering the instruments for a powerful critique of entrenched critical traditions, particularly in our discipline. Reading Derrida's *Of Grammatology* in 1978 was as exciting to me as

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reading Poe in the seventh grade. It was really in the on-the-fly retooling that I and my newly hired colleagues were engaged in at the time that most of my professionalization was accomplished. That I survived the disarray of the profession during those first few years of my employment was more a matter of luck than anything else I can point to.

One of the odd effects of midstream reversals of this sort is a kind of alienation (more, for me, in the ironic than in the disengaging sense) from all of the available discourses: the ones that have been denaturalized by the process of their replacement—which remain very potently "there," even under this mode of erasure—as well as the ones that have been acquired by means of a very obvious and artificial process of reeducation—which never, because of that, have the free and easy feel, nor the solitary comfort, of having been there first. And finally, I came into composition, my primary area of specialization now, almost by accident, at exactly the moment it was beginning to develop into a relatively freestanding "field." Early on, into the mid-1980s even, composition was a very open and negotiable area; it had no long-standing instruments of "discipline" (in either of its senses) by contrast with the much more traditional area of "literature." A compositionist could be all kinds of diverse things that are much more difficult to get away with now. I thought and wrote about textbooks, students, metaphor, modernist poetry, Plato, Heidegger, dream research; whatever seemed useful to me to work through what I wanted to work through. It was also much easier then than it is now for a compositionist to teach and write "in" both literature and creative writing—which I have been lucky enough to continue doing in this department; to avoid, in effect, becoming entrenched in one of the occupational grooves by which work in the academy is channeled.

The fact, then, that I was a male of a certain social class who became interested in poetry at a very specific historical moment has had a profound effect on how I have chosen to design and pursue both my work and my career. My personal experience in this regard might not be typical, but its general contours were, I think, common to many young, male writers of my time. The interest and commitment took

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root outside of any public or institutional arenas, like schools for example. The discourse of the self, of individual identity, took on heroic proportions. And secrecy was, for me, its originator and its keeper. I won math and science awards in high school, got a scholarship to a college known for its programs in the hard sciences, and majored in physics. Since math was always easy to me, what I did, basically, was spend most of my time surreptitiously reading poetry—voraciously, everything from the Greeks to the confessionals—and writing poetry—spare, labored, awful stuff. Language was just the opposite of mathematics. I had to struggle to master everything related to it—eloquence and intelligibility came slowly, painfully; even reading was hard work, and to this day I have a hard time understanding how anyone can both read and relax at the same time. But poetry challenged and excited me in a way that mathematics never did. Late in my junior year I finally decided to complete a major in English, which I was able to do with some overloading. As soon as I graduated, my career as a physicist was over.

In the course of all my subsequent professionalization, whatever secrets I had were pretty much pried loose. At best, I think, what I have been able to do is negotiate the transactions between what seemed to be mine and what was obviously not. And that is what I still spend much of my time trying to do when I teach and when I write: negotiating transactions, bringing incommensurable ways of thinking and talking about reading and writing into contest, and perhaps confluence. That is all part of the legacy—as both a burden and a gift—that comes with the sort of secrecy I am trying here to describe.

Other Voices

My dear "Race and Gender" Class,

What an exciting and terrifying first meeting. And the old questions haunt me. Will I be a "good" teacher? What is a "good" teacher? What lesson am I to learn here among your hearts and minds? What

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lesson do I want to learn? What will I learn in spite of my unwillingness to learn?

Always the fear of being misunderstood and stupid, of being judged, and the desire to say something that makes me loved, famous, greater than anybody in the room, better, smarter, the greatest teacher/poet/person ever born in history, Jesus . . . and the face of Mother Superior before me saying—"Your I.Q. isn't high enough."

The power of the teacher: the teacher who teaches us words also teaches us how to love ourselves and hate ourselves, how to have contempt for ourselves and others.

Michelle said, as she was leaving, that sitting at our table she thought of marriage, how hard it must be.

TOI DERRICOTTE

One fear I have about our class is that comments, and even opinions, will be placed on some sort of scale of importance. I think it's difficult to discuss such engaging issues as race and gender without bringing some comments into question and rewarding others. . . .

Also, I have questions as to how democratic such a class can be in terms of discussion. Last week, the exercise of allowing everyone to go around the room and state their case was valuable, but will such an exercise have relevance in later classes? Obviously, some voices are more eager to be heard (or have less inhibitions about speaking up, maybe), but I'm afraid that some people will be more quiet than others, even (or I should say especially) when they have something important to say. . . .

The emphasis on self-disclosure is also disconcerting—is this synonymous with the goals of a graduate course in literature? I'm going far into debt to be here as an MFA, and I want to make sure I'm learning what I think I need to learn in order to justify the cost. . . . I think we cheat the possibilities of our class when we skirt around a discussion of the poem and its implications and engage solely in a discussion about our perceptions of race and gender.

ROBERT N. CASPER

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What I'm hoping to express here are the thoughts I found weaving through my head, but which I left unsaid, our first class meeting, all of which pertain to my relationship (emotional and intellectual) to the materials, topics of conversation, and self exploration I expect will occur as a result of my being in this course. I can't recall the exact phrasing of Toi's first question to the class—I remember it as having something to do with our personal connection to the literature assigned—but I clearly remember how uncomfortable I felt even thinking about expressing, or should I say "confessing," that such a relationship exists. Yet, the truth is, writing and reading literature are intensely personal and essential acts for me. Moreover, my uneasiness made me wonder when and why did it become taboo for me to discuss this? This led me to ponder my socialization within the academy and the unwritten (or perhaps it is written) *modus operandi* for approaching literature within the walls of classrooms. . . .

I can't help but compare this course, the direction it seems to be taking, with other graduate courses I've completed here at the University of Pittsburgh. It seems so often that what's real, what's really thought or felt, the individual's emotional and intellectual agenda, is too easily negated or denied by the theoretical discourse to which they defer. It's a rhetorical strategy, and one in which I've participated, that allows for forms of self-regulation and self-censorship in which we all participate in order to avoid exposure.

MARIA MCLEOD

(WITH A NOTE: "DON'T READ THIS ALOUD")

I fear that this class will fall into one of two extremes. First, to say that I think or feel a certain way because of my race, gender and sexual orientation is, in my opinion, to miss what it means to be a human being. There may be tendencies of those in a race or gender to think this way or that way, but there will always be exceptions, and to deny those exceptions is to stereotype. I dislike being stereotyped as much as the traditionally oppressed, and I fight back just as hard. On the other end of the spectrum, I'd hate the class to dissolve into a

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touchy-feely validation of everybody's feelings. If I wanted validation, I'd be in a support group. I want challenge, so I'm in a university. The middle ground I desire is a razor-thin strip between these two vast extremes. Finding it will prove a difficult job.

PAUL HAMANN

My fear . . . that instead of engaging with the multitude of voices I will shut them out in favor of some false harmony or comfort. That I allow myself to be silenced and don't even realize it. My fear . . . weakness. That I am weak, and that I don't show it, which is also weakness. The language will keep tripping me up like that. Fear . . . that I don't understand the simplest things about myself, which is perhaps that "productive" fear we were puzzling over last week—the fear that I don't understand myself leads me to attempt to understand myself . . . and of course, there is the fear, standing in opposition to this attempt to understand—the fear of what I may find.

And is the lifetime's work of the poet to be chasing after the voice? The voice that leaps out of the throat and runs; the voice that is never quite caught?

LIZ AHL

When you first asked us what we were afraid of, my fear instantly hit me. I had been feeling uncomfortable since the orientation session several weeks ago. I was with a group of M.F.A.'s mingling, when Catherine Gammon introduced herself to the group. The woman next to me introduced me to Ms. Gammon and said, "She's a poet." This phrase really caught me off guard. I have never actually said, "I am a poet," to anyone in my entire life. When I am questioned about what type of [graduate] work I am doing, I have always responded, "I'm studying poetry." I never noticed my avoidance of the phrase, "I am a poet."

M. E. KUBIT

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Postscript

> *I think this course could function like a very pleasant sorbet between the "main" courses of my schedule this term.*
>
> A STUDENT IN THE CLASS, DURING OUR FIRST CLASS SESSION

Pedagogy is intrinsically ideological. What a teacher chooses to do or not to do promotes change at the most fundamental level. For me, ideological positions develop from two extremes. On the one hand, I begin with principles of the most general and intense sort, beliefs, commitments, ideals if you will, and, on the basis of these, I try to develop a specific agenda and its attendant set of practices. On the other hand, ideology arises from, or coalesces around, specific moments, statements, or actions to which I react viscerally, without quite knowing at the moment why that is so. There is almost always an ultimate connection between the threads emerging from these two extremes, although sometimes it takes me a while to weave them together.

The above quote—from one of the two Ph.D. students in our class during our around-the-table introductions—capsulized for me one of the problems I've seen over and over in trying to teach graduate courses in the way that Toi and I were, here, going to insist on, in a way that accords status to the personal. It is quite often perceived—especially by those who have already been partially disciplined by the accoutrements of theorization—as shallow, superficial, so much fluff. A way to clear the palate to prepare for the next, main, course. I was prepared for the position that this comment indexed. Toi and I anticipated it during our meetings over the summer. I spent time in the first class session trying to suggest the ways in which autobiographical material, as we intended to mine and deploy it in our discussions, was not to be construed simplistically, as either therapeutic confession or mere opinion. It was a place to start the work of critical inquiry, a way to generate the positions and materials that needed to be

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examined, revised, re-viewed, a reservoir of motives for change. I wanted to use my first missive to reinforce this argument, hoping that I could persuade the more advanced graduate students in the class that it would be worth their while to stay and participate in our discussions.

One chronic tension that afflicts entry-level graduate courses in our department derives from the sometimes fundamentally different ways that "writers" and "theorists" have for thinking and talking about what literature is, where it comes from, and what it is for. I have a lot of experience negotiating that argument—sometimes successfully, sometimes not—in the Seminar in Teaching Composition that first-year teaching assistants take in concert with their teaching assignments. I look forward to such negotiations with an odd combination of hope and dread, knowing full well how much is at stake, not just in terms of how easy or hard it will be to teach the course, but how much we can in fact learn in the process about ourselves and one another as "writers" and "theorists"—when those terms are construed as *positional*, as representatives for habitual ways of thinking and talking about reading and writing. Apparently my comments during the first class failed to persuade the two Ph.D. registrants. They both dropped the course. I was both disappointed and relieved, given what I know is possible, for better or for worse, when the argument I am talking about here takes center stage in a course. But we did retain all of the M.A. and M.F.A. students, eighteen in all, whose variety and enthusiasm were ideally suited for the course Toi and I had in mind.

In my first meeting with Toi the spring before we taught the course, she suggested that we open the reading for the term with a book called *Women Writing in India*, an "anthology" of work—mostly short fiction but a lot of poetry as well—by female Indian writers, many, perhaps most, of whom had no canonical status in their own literary traditions, let alone ours. These works were translated into English from eleven different languages and dialects. Toi's suggestion was so

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unexpected to me, so out of the realm of possibilities I had myself been considering, that my mind raced to find a way to account for her rationale and for the possibilities that the book might open up. As I remember it now, I thought: What a great opening salvo for a course of the sort we were talking about—a set of texts that alienates every one of us in some fundamental way from its authors, their materials, even the primary genre of the course. I have a very elaborate set of recollections of what we agreed upon in relation to the use of this text. But I'm not sure, in retrospect, if we really talked about it at length or if my mind, so excited by such a wild idea, spun out its own justifications—based on the assumption, or even the *pre*sumption, that I somehow knew what Toi was thinking—for agreeing to use this text. I depict this scene, in a cautionary way, as a sort of metaphor for the acts of interpretation that it became the work of this course to investigate: acts of interpretation in reaction to the unexpected, the alien, the "other." When faced with such a text we sometimes actually do arrive in a mutually negotiated way at a reading of its meaning(s). Sometimes we just think we do by acting as if we already know what we need to know to comprehend the text fully and properly. Most often, we are doing a good bit of both, and it's important to be self-conscious about what is coming from where.

Recollecting this scene of my conversation with Toi is troubling to me now. Perhaps, I find myself thinking, I may never have known exactly why she wanted to open with this book, and still don't know even now. Perhaps I just filled in myself crucial parts of my dialogue with her and operated on the basis of what may in fact have been a fundamental misunderstanding. Then again, perhaps we did talk at length and in detail about these matters. This is the readerly problem I want to posit at the outset here only in an emblematic way, because it is one form of the readerly problem that afflicted our discussions of the book we started the course with, that afflicted so many of our discussions throughout the term: No matter how unusual and surprising is the text we are confronted by, no matter how much it defies our

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expectations, even resists our entry, we generally proceed in some way to interpret it, and often, on the basis of that work, which is essentially our own, we presume to "understand" something of what it means.

At the beginning of their introduction, the editors of *Women Writing in India* pose a series of questions that might serve as paradigms for the sorts of questions that hovered over the course, especially so when we discussed the several anthologies we had selected to read:

> What was the point, we were sometimes asked . . . , of putting together an anthology such as this? Why did we think women's writing was different or that it called for special attention? Weren't women writers as much victims to social ideologies about the subordinate status of women as men? If we were arguing that women writers had been marginalized and their work misrepresented and misjudged, how did we suggest they should be read? (1)

Tharu and Lalita devote 105 pages in the introduction of this text not so much to the task of answering these questions, which are ultimately unanswerable with any finality, as to the project of laying out their critical method. Their argument became the occasion for translating the above questions to the project of our own course. The discussion we had was both testy and productive. It addressed the larger question of what it means to separate out a particular subset of a culture's literature according to the authors' cultural markers. This was seen as, simultaneously, both a necessary and a destructive move. Toi and I tried to suggest the manner in which the categories of our course were of a different conceptual order than the one of the book. Race and gender are, after all—unlike the category "women"—completely inclusive. We could, theoretically, approach them as well through the writing of white, male writers. Why that was not what we chose to do—for a variety of very compelling institutional, ideological, and cultural reasons—was, we hoped, to become a matter of some ongoing consequence to the work of the course. It was in this vein that, again, I tried to carve out a place for what I hoped to be able

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to contribute from my own perspective, which is endowed from the outset with both a race and a gender. I'm not sure I was any more successful at this act of persuasion than I was during the first class session.

The other conversation we started that night circulated around the role of, and the potential problem with, contemporary critical theory as an agency for the "recovery" of "marginalized" literatures. Tharu and Lalita deploy a feminist/poststructuralist method that is decidedly European/American to open up the literatures that are their concern. They are aware of the potential contradictions that arise from this choice, and they offer an extensive rationale for it. Our discussion tended to inscribe this choice as a significant "problem" with the project of the book, as well as, potentially, with our course. Most of our class were first-year graduate students and creative writers who had not yet read a lot of theory. But most had read some and were generally skeptical of, if not inimical toward, its apparent intercessory role in pre-reading the texts of these women writing in India. They chafed under the weight of all that Western theorizing, all that politicizing, all that historicizing. The assumption seemed to be that there was a more natural and unmediated way to get at this material. No one, though, was able to come up with it. The initial general sense was, in fact, that we had no capacity, and perhaps no right, to presume that we could ever come to understand anything of consequence about the texts of these Indian women when they are offered to us (1) in translation, (2) in small chunks, (3) through the lens of Western critical theory, and (4) in the distorting format of an anthology. There was some discussion in this framework of how and why Toi and I had chosen the "required" texts for the course, which were in some of their aspects susceptible to parts of the same critique.

The first move we made to get beyond this apparent impasse was to ask members of the group to take us to specific pieces in the book, to see what, if anything, it was possible to talk about, to "know" about, one of these "women writing." We looked at three or four specific texts over the next hour or so. One of them was the following poem by Nita Ramaiya:

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"Ognisso-Ognyaeshinun Varas"

(The Year 1979)

This is the year
When my mother looked back at us through the water
Submitting the joys and sorrows of sixty-eight years to the
  Machu River

This is the year
Of the last scream of my brother
Assigning to the flood his twenty-three years
Which could not be contained in his piercing eyes and
  shining shoes.

This is the year
That reduced to stammering
Learning literature politics ideology
Understanding intelligence wisdom . . .
How can I explain to my son
Whose each footstep's presence brightens
the courtyard of my parents' home
that each footstep grinds me to dust?
That with each footstep the life is drained out of me

This is the year
Of the invisible scene hanging
Between
My son's ten-year-old's mood
And my face molded by that year

This is the year
Of the shameless thirst
Of the deranged river.
(462–63)

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This is a recent poem (1985) by a published author who teaches English. It looks and sounds on the surface a lot like a contemporaneous imagistic poem in our own literature, which may have been why it was selected. No one had any difficulty in understanding what the poem was about in either a factual or an emotional way. And we talked about all of that. The poem was, in fact, being read as if there were no barriers at all between us as human readers and its author as a human writer. We had seemingly elided the problem of cultural "difference" simply by presuming to talk. The one part of the poem, though, that kept coming back as somehow baffling, untranslatable, in our evolving reading was the section about the son's footsteps. There was some speculation that this opacity arose from the fundamentally different relative status of male to female in the Indian culture by contrast with our own. And some speculation that it arose from the unrenderable intensity of the initial *maternal* tragedy itself. There was, it turned out, no way for us to resolve this conundrum that arose at the intersection of "self" and "culture." The knot at the center of this discussion would be there throughout the term.

What I remember about each of the discussions we had of specific texts from *Women Writing in India* was that they followed the same sequence. The initial speaker/reader would begin with a disclaimer about not being able to know anything about the text or its author and would then go on to comment, often in detail and with a sense of personal authority, not only on the text in question but also on the "life" that animated it. I remember thinking, "this is, really, one of the paradigmatic acts of reading for a course of this sort: I cannot read this text; therefore I will read it."

This seemingly self-contradictory mode of interpretation is, of course, merely an exaggerated version of the one we use whenever we seek to understand an "other" discourse, whether that otherness is inscribed by differences in language, dialect, culture, race, gender, or historical time. In our seminar, these differences were—through the literatures themselves, through the modes of anthologization by which those literatures were being promulgated, or through the

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machinations of the course's dialogical method—being quite self-consciously called to the fore. While the exact boundary between insider and outsider was not always easy to locate, the readerly necessity to distinguish between the two was inescapable. If any of us felt that we fell into the latter category—and in the case of the women in India, we all seemed to—our choice was simple: either stop reading, conceding that it was impossible to cross the chasms before/between us, or press on, with what devices and skills we could muster on the way to making sense, and meaning, from the experience.

On a smaller scale, the readerly position of the student is usually analogous to this. Most of the texts we bring into our classes are, in some fundamental way, "outside" their range of familiarity, even if only historically. The readerly position of the teacher is a more vexed question. Quite often we have through long labor made ourselves expert on, and therefore, in professional terms at least, insiders to the texts we teach. But when it comes to a course like ours, one could legitimately argue that this sort of expertise offers no resolution to the problem at hand. The fact that I had previously read and studied many of the authors we were about to read for the course really gave me no advantage whatsoever over those in the group who had not yet read, or even perhaps heard of, them. My otherness was no different from theirs, presenting the same challenges, the same choices, the same opportunities. Which is to say that while authority (a theme I return to throughout the book), at least of the sort that professional expertise accords, has its uses and values, it never elides cultural difference. Nor does it, in and of itself, accomplish change (another theme that recurs in the book) of the sort I'm trying to write about.

Now that I've completed one weekly cycle, I'd like to say a little more about my method of composition in this half of the book. My own essays are presented here in pretty much their original form. As I prepare the manuscript for publication, it is now about five years since I wrote them. My thinking has changed—in sometimes consequential

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ways—about what I have to say in some of these essays. And in some cases I would just say differently what I tried to say back then. But I chose to keep them largely as they were to maintain a semblance of verisimilitude about the experience of producing them in this form and in this sequence for the course. Where I made cuts, it was to eliminate material that was so specific to the course, or repetitious, or, well, boring, that it would have little appeal for a wider audience, or might easily be misconstrued. This included three whole essays and big chunks of two others from my original manuscript, which were removed at various stages of the revision process on the advice of other readers or on my own initiative. Where I made additions, it was to add clarifying or contextual information that was not necessary to the audience for which they were initially composed.

I added the "Other Voices" layer to the text more than a year after the course ended, once I had made the choice to develop these materials into this longer form. I worked from the stack of duplicated pieces that various respondents handed out to accompany their oral presentation during the weekly read-arounds. This was a large stack—everything that had been reproduced for the group—but not a complete index to what got said or read during those intervals. For example, in most of the instances that Toi read, it was from drafts of poems—which she did not duplicate; or, if she did, did not want to publish yet, or in this forum, for obvious authorial reasons. Many others in the group read regularly from texts they did not duplicate for distribution. In the end, I chose to render here about 20 percent of the textual material available to me. I would say that about half of what got said or read during our read-arounds was presented only orally. So in effect, I use here about 10 percent of the actual material that surrounded my texts. (Some weeks the read-arounds took as long as thirty or forty minutes to complete!) And I made all of the initial editorial choices about what to include by myself. I chose excerpts that seemed to me to reverberate with the story I was trying to tell, to present these other voices as interlocutors with my own, which remains dominant. There was another professor teaching with me and there were eighteen stu-

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dents in the class. When I quote them along the way, their "voices" are my take, and a very partial one, on their contributions to the course. Each of them I'm sure would have a different story to tell, and a different way to tell it, if they so chose. If all of these nineteen other texts were to come to fruition, one would have a more complex, although I would argue still partial, representation of this course. What I offer here is my part of that larger story, hoping it will be interesting enough in its own right to be enjoyable, and that it can serve as a sort of object lesson, rendering the ways in which the classroom, any classroom, is always, for every course we teach or take, productive of consequential knowledge, knowledge that can and should have standing in the profession. The nineteen other stories that make up the rest of the record of this course are not, in my view, mine to tell.

I decided early on that I wanted to attach a real name to each piece I used. A couple of members of the group felt uncomfortable, for their own good reasons, with having their names attached to the pieces I had selected, so I chose not to use their work. This is not to say that I am opposed to using student work anonymously (with permission) in our public, professional venues. I think that much of the recent work that has begun to restore the figure of the student to our discussions would not have been possible without making that move. But in this case I wanted all parties to the discussion to be enthusiastic—rather than simply willing, or even worse, grudging—participants in the project of the book. In each case, I asked for permission to use the excerpt(s) and for permission to use the name of the writer. I offered each writer the opportunity to revise the piece in question so that it did accurately represent her position in the way she most preferred to see it rendered, and I sent them each a copy of the full text of the project I was asking them to become a part of. I toyed with the idea of writing myself a brief characterization for each contributor, even perhaps naming the specific positions or interest groups they tended to represent. These were, after all, regular, often dominant, participants to our discussions, and I got to know them very well. I decided quickly against that and in favor of the brief, customary "bios" they composed

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for the introduction to this section. I felt that the degree to which I brought other parties directly into my story, they should be allowed to speak for themselves. There are after all obvious issues of confidentiality that pertain here, and that I felt needed to be respected scrupulously.

In my retrospective essays, which I began to write about a year and a half after the course was completed, I chose a critical method that is, following that of my weekly essays, considerably more personal than is customary for me. In some cases, I tried to highlight the major trajectory that the weekly discussion followed. In some cases I focused on my own reaction to the social dynamics of the seminar. In some cases I continued, retrospectively, the line of inquiry that my original text initiated. In some cases I do several of these things in sequence. Because I had no initial plan toward publication when I wrote my original pieces, I felt free to write in whatever forms suited my purposes at the moment. The method of the course warranted this freedom for me, and I found it both enjoyable and productive. I decided to retain at least some of that same discretion in my retrospective essays as well. All of this is to say again what I have said in any number of ways thus far: This project is not an aborted effort at ethnography or educational research. My main focus was always on what I learned and how I changed, to foreground that side, the teacher's side, my side, of the transformative equation of pedagogy. Just above, I described this part of the book as both story and object lesson. At least as I understand the term, an *object* becomes *lesson* simply by presenting itself to us and not by offering an explanation of its significance. What I have tried to do in my retrospective essays is to continue to make *my* experience of teaching the course visible. My story becomes thereby an example, whose purpose is not to urge other teachers to do what I do, but to remind them that what they are already doing for their own courses all the time may be worth their writing about.

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