

Down the Rabbit Hole with David Greetham

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ABSTRACT

Based on a talk given at the Symposium in honor of Dr. Greetham's retirement, this essay addresses the influence Greetham has had on the author's scholarship and pedagogy. Lauer describes a project she completed as Greetham's student in which she analyzed the illustration history of the book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. She argues that the history of a text's illustration can be read as a history of publishing intent: just as different annotations suit a text for a particular implied readership, so too do different illustrations. The illustrators of *Alice* come after each other, not to re-envision the words of Lewis Carroll, but to re-envision the scenes as already represented pictorially. Furthermore, Lauer posits that the creation of different illustrated editions is part of the historical trajectory of versioning. As Greetham says of annotation, illustration, too, is "always contingent and local, for the relationship between text and audience is always changing" (1994, 369).

ON APRIL 11, 2014, THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK GRADUATE Center held a symposium: a day-long series of events commemorating the retirement of Dr. David Greetham, Distinguished Professor and Co-founder of the Society for Textual Scholarship. There was a workshop, there were toasts, there was poetry, there was a guest lecturer, there was a panel of papers, there was a party. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the common thread running through all these events was that there was no way the influence of David Greetham could be adequately explored in just one day. During that symposium, I delivered the talk "Judge a Book by its Cover: Textual Scholarship of Pop Culture Texts" as part of the panel "Autopsies: The Textual Body After David Greetham". It was a difficult task for me to write about David's influence on me, because he was influential in so many different ways. I could have talked about how his interdisciplinarity and enthusiasm for unconventional projects has influenced my teaching, or about how reading his book *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction*, influenced my dissertation project and subsequent scholarly work, or about how his version of the required class for the CUNY English PhD program, "Theory

And in the second category, that of critical medium, the various branches of historical criticism, concerned with the reconstruction of moments in the past and an exposure of their *alterity* or “otherness” (again dependent on a faith in predictable historical development and the mapping of this development along linear paths) were challenged first by the anti-historical bias of New Criticism, in its attempt to isolate the complexity of textual utterance from such extraneous features as author, audience, and cultural context, and later by the post-structuralist dictum that all writing (*écriture*) is “always already written,” a weaving of intertextual associations seemingly denying any place for the individual authorial consciousness.

Figure 1. Paragraph from page 315 of *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction* by David Greetham.

and Practice”, influenced my thinking about what English departments can and should achieve. I could even have talked about how my favorite sentence in *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction* is an 11-line paragraph that begins with the word “and” and yet still achieves admirable sense, which has influenced my writing (fig. 1).

I attempted a balance between talking about David’s significant influence on my pedagogy, and talking about a representative “weird” project I did for his class that eventually worked its way into my dissertation. For the “Theory and Practice” class, which was the first time I met Dr. Greetham, I gathered and worked with several decades’ worth of illustrations to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. David’s encouragement of this unusual project launched the ways in which he has been foundational to my life as a teacher and academic. His book *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction* achieved its stated purpose of introducing me to textual scholarship, and his “Theory and Practice” class influenced my life now as well as my dissertation, as I am primarily a teacher and cultural studies scholar. I use the textual scholarship and pedagogical techniques I learned from David in both my teaching and my academic writing to clarify for myself and my students the ways in which textual concerns both shape, and are shaped by, the culture that produces them.

When I first read *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction*, I was already interested in how books as objects make meaning visually, and how different editions of the same “text” can have very different tones based on book size, font, paper choices, paratextual material, etc. I did not already know,

however, that there was a field of scholarship devoted to such issues.¹ Thus, reading *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction* not only introduced me to new concepts and a lot of new information, it also gave me a vocabulary framework for discussing and analyzing elements of readership that I already found to be important. As Greetham writes in his introduction to *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction*, textual scholarship involves “the technical and conceptual recreation of the past through its texts” (GREETHAM 1994, ix), a process that requires examining “texts as both artifactual objects and conceptual entities” (x). He further defines textual scholarship as “the general term for all the activities associated with the discovery, description, transcription, editing, glossing, annotating, and commenting upon texts . . . all these fields reflect a *historical bias*” (2 italics in original).

This recognition of a historical bias was refreshing. I was drawn to textual scholarship because I appreciate its transparency: it acknowledges the scholar. David writes of textual criticism “It is critical, it does involve a speculative, personal, and individual confrontation of one mind by another” (1994, 295).² Editing, annotating, and making decisions about the presentation of a text all involve subjective decision-making. Recognizing that appeals to me both in its honesty, and for its implication that this stuff is an art rather than a mere tabulation of a data set.³ I am trying for this kind of transparency in my notes for this essay, which began as a gimmick for my symposium talk in David’s honor. On that day, I was the only panelist not to address digital archives, and as such embraced my role as the analog representative by eschewing the use of the projector entirely and handing out a page of printed notes to my talk.

My introduction to Dr. Greetham and his work occurred when I enrolled in his “Theory and Practice” class, which met during the Winter intersession between the Fall and Spring semesters. Since the time was so short, we met several times a week during January to discuss the copious and far-ranging reading list, and then had the whole of the Spring semester to complete our projects for the course. Dr. Greetham’s reading list and

1. For instance, I just used the term “paratextual material”. Before being introduced to the field of textual scholarship, I did not know that term existed.
2. I go back and forth between referring to David Greetham as David and as Greetham. Trust me, he is both. Later, I’ll go back and forth between referring to the author of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* as Carroll, his pen name, and Dodgson, his given name. You can consider this a sneak preview of that vacillation as well.
3. This is reminiscent of the current move toward transparency and disclosure in journalism away from the illusion of objectivity, which I also appreciate.

assignments were novel: we were required to do actual archival work in libraries, and required to actually read about the history of our own profession, even though other versions of the “Theory and Practice” class generally treated it as a practicum for writing the dissertation proposal. David would stride into the tiny, windowless room in which our class was held, with a different massive stack of books each day, generously bookmarked. He rarely consulted these books during class, but the tower of them on the table was a constant reminder of his expertise. Those class sessions seemed to take place in a sort of incubator: packed into a small room, meeting multiple times a week for only a month.⁴ What I remember most from that claustrophobic, fertile environment is David’s eager expression as he walked into the room, and the energetic glee with which he led discussions, pointing out the various dilemmas, catch 22s and self-contradictions in the theoretical frameworks he had assigned us to read about.

For that class, I created the project “Pictures in Conversations: Down the Rabbit Hole” in order to analyze the illustration history of the book *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.⁵ Starting with Tenniel and Dodgson’s collaboration, I looked at how the novel was illustrated by several other hands in the intervening years since the book’s initial publication for the Christmas market in 1865. I argued that the history of a text’s illustration can be read as a history of publishing intent: that just as different annotations suit a text for a particular implied readership, so too do different illustrations, in a way that can be read in the aggregate as well as the particular. Basically, I believe that the creation of different illustrated editions is part of the historical trajectory of versioning and that, as Greetham says of annotation, illustration, too, is “always contingent and local, for the relationship between text and audience is always changing” (1994, 369).

Consequently, illustration can be considered a form of annotation. As Claire Lamont has argued about annotation, “something has been done to the reader by the annotator. It is this realization which has made the most recent commentators on annotation regard it as a question of *power*. . . . The critical view of the annotator is that he or she, in the guise of offering help, is knowingly or otherwise controlling the situation by both enabling and limiting interpretation of the text and both serving and creating the

4. Had I been aware of the phenomenon of “speed dating” at the time, this class would have reminded me of a sort of speed dating for theoretical approaches.
5. David referred to this project in an article for the Italian journal, *Ecdotica* in 2006 and I delivered a paper presentation based on this project at the 32nd Annual Meeting of the Society for Utopian Studies in Toronto, 2007.

reader” (LAMONT 1997, 53 italics in original).⁶ I believe that the illustrator too has this power, because illustrations mean the reading experience is modified by visual representations of the reader’s encouraged focus. Interior illustrations regulate your response to the text they illustrate because the pictures—their subject, style, size and frequency—help construct the reader’s interaction with the story presented—as do annotations. And just as “Annotations will . . . have an implied reader, who may not be the same reader as the implied reader of the text” so too do I believe different illustration situations will have different implied readers/viewers/purchasers, which may be different from the original intended reader of the written word (LAMONT 1997, 48).

In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll’s words and John Tenniel’s pictures together present Alice and her dreamworld as fully realized creations. From the moment Dodgson and Tenniel began to collaborate, their words and pictures were influenced heavily by each other’s work. Carroll’s writing style was well-suited to working closely with a meticulous and communicative illustrator like Tenniel. In fact, Carroll would generally wait to do much of the final wording until his first proofs were back from the publisher, so it is likely that the various lines directing the reader to the illustrations, such as “if you don’t know what a gryphon is, look at the picture” (CARROLL 1866, 130) or the line about how a king wore his crown over his judge’s wig, “look at the frontispiece if you want to see how he did it” (1886, 151) were written after some conversation between Carroll and Tenniel about the illustrations for these lines. Both men had the goal of making the reading process, including words and pictures, seamless for the child reader, and in the *Alice* books, the original child reader’s focus was undivided between the goals of the words and of the pictures.

Though Tenniel’s illustrations of the *Alice* books are almost universally lauded as masterpieces, different illustrators have still created their own versions of Alice over the years. In a strictly collaborative enterprise like the one between Tenniel and Dodgson, does it work to remove one person’s contribution and replace it with the work of another person? In an illustrated book, the words and pictures are being presented as parts of the same cultural text. So why illustrate what has already been illustrated? Why modify the representation of something already represented? These

6. Normally in an academic article I would strive to include quotations from recent scholarship in the field. Here, I am instead intentionally limiting myself to those texts that were particularly influential when David Greetham assigned them during my tenure as his student and advisee.

were the questions I was starting to approach in this project, which I would go on to address more fully in my eventual dissertation.

Novels that have been illustrated multiple times present various trajectories of publishing intent. They imply different societal uses for the novel in different eras and for different reading audiences. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has been claimed by many different sectors of society. These different social claims for it can be observed in different editions' illustrations since examining the appearance of a received text helps "demystify claims of art to 'universality,' unmasking instead the social contingency of its production and reception" (BORNSTEIN 2001, 165). In *Alice's* case, the book was almost immediately claimed by two disparate groups: educated adults, since Dodgson was an academic and Tenniel a political cartoonist; and children, Dodgson and Tenniel's primary intended audience. In the intervening decades, different illustrators have clearly targeted different audiences.

Consider, for instance, editions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in which Alice is depicted as variously tan, smiling watercolor, abstract blocks of bright, dynamic color, or still and grave in black and white (fig. 2).

While the bare arms and flyaway hair of the Oxenbury illustration connote freedom and sweetness, the McGraw illustration favors style and composition over characterization, and the Tenniel Alice connotes composed neutrality. Imagine the different readings of Carroll's text that would result from these depictions. A reader could be thrown off by the disjunction between the written Victorian mores and the carefree, present-day style of Oxenbury's character's dress, mannerisms and hair, or the contemporary abstractions of McGraw. To paraphrase Lamont, "something has been done to the reader by the [illustrator, who,] in the guise of offering help, is knowingly or otherwise controlling the situation by both enabling and limiting interpretation of the text and both serving and creating the reader" (LAMONT 1997, 53 with my changes). Editions of "classics" with new illustrations create an extra layer of mediation between the reader and the original text: The goals of the new artist may be multiple—to update the look and feel of the novel for the current day, to fit the text into a particular genre, or suit it to a particular readership. And regardless of the new artist's motives, the new illustrations will be shaped by the history that has occurred since the text's original publication and the knowledge that it has become a "classic".

For this project, I examined several editions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and attempted to find corollaries and intersections between the subjects *represented* in the illustrations and the techniques and tones



Figure 2. Three disparate Alices. Illustrated by (*top left*) Helen Oxenbury (2000), (*top right*) DeLoss McGraw (2001), and (*bottom*) Sir John Tenniel (1865).

of the illustrations. Notably, even when drastic changes are made, such as adding color, fitting hundreds of illustrations into the book instead of Tenniel's 42, and even when Alice beams a big smile from all the new pictures, there seem to be many choices made by Tenniel that are absorbed and repeated by later illustrators with no acknowledgement that they originated there. These include the choice of which textual moments to illustrate, Alice's mannerisms, especially in the arms and legs, and the line and shape of a full skirt, even when the updated outfit of a new visual version of Alice doesn't seem to call for that kind of stiffness.

This was a thought experiment inspired by George Bornstein's analysis of a composite edition of *Ulysses*, to which David had introduced me. Bornstein claims that by combining all witnesses of the text, the composite edition "fractures the deceptive unity of any single 'clear text' edition . . . there is no 'the' text, but only a series of texts, built up like a layered palimpsest" (BORNSTEIN 2001, 138). So I attempted to build up a layered palimpsest of my own by creating composites of *Alice* illustrations. Due to

the time constraints of a project that needed to be completed in one semester, I focused on the illustrations to the first chapter of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, "Down The Rabbit Hole". This chapter introduces a little girl who cannot imagine enjoying a book "without pictures or conversations". She and the reader are then together introduced to Wonderland. This chapter seemed an appropriate focus to demonstrate my ideas about the illustration history of the novel because of its introductory nature. As the first chapter of the first book, it is through "Down the Rabbit-Hole" that a reader's first impressions of Alice, the rabbit, and Wonderland itself are shaped. Thus, it is through the illustrations in this chapter that the characters and locations will first be envisioned by the reader. If the first illustration of Alice does not interest a reader, it will be much more difficult for the subsequent illustrations of her to capture the reader's interest.

This chapter moves Alice between worlds: Tenniel's illustrations for the first chapter of *Alice*, "Down the Rabbit-Hole", do not include any picture of Alice or her sister, reading, suffering from boredom or discovering a rabbit hole: the first Tenniel illustration of Alice does not come till Alice has fallen, landed, and is exploring a hallway. This is very late in the chapter, and it effectively means that Alice is not shown to us, the readers, until she is already in a world unfamiliar to her. However, at least seven later illustrators attempt to create an idyllic scene of Alice with her reading sister—a scene that bored Alice to sleep. Why depict it as an enjoyed peaceful pastoral? The artists who choose to include visual evidence of this scene are choosing to make the dream world less all-encompassing in the narrative. This can have the effect of making Wonderland itself safer, less exciting, by providing first ocular proof of a mundane base for Alice.

First, I photographed or scanned the illustrations of the 13 editions readily available to me.⁷ I then sorted the illustrations into categories of what they depicted and made a collage of each depicted event (fig. 3)⁸ Like

7. In retrospect this is a small sample size. I now yearn to do a larger archival project to see if my results hold up. For instance, only two of the included illustrators are women. How might the trajectory of publishing intent be seen to shift if more female illustrators were included? Right now, with this small sample size, I am unable to differentiate conclusively between what Matthew G. Kirschenbaum refers to as the absence of evidence versus the evidence of absence. See page 59 of this issue.

8. I took some liberty with the backgrounds of various illustrations (I removed some and rearranged others within their designated collage), but I did not combine illustrations of different events. For instance, I would not have used part of an illustration of Alice falling down the rabbit-hole to augment the collage of



Figure 3. My collage (a two-page spread) of the various illustrations of Alice falling down the rabbit hole—undepicted by Tenniel, but included by many, many others.

the *Ulysses* composite edition discussed by Bornstein, I felt that my project, in addition to fracturing the unity of any individual edition, created a virtual palimpsest because the removal of Tenniel’s illustrations is akin to the scraping of parchment. In each case, blankness can only be created imperfectly by removing what has left a mark.

Clearly, this is not a “normal” project for a class in an English PhD program, but it is just the kind of project David got excited about—a hybrid between an edition and an archive.⁹ Coincidentally, during the CUNY Grad Center Symposium in April, after the panel of David’s students had spoken, we received a question from the audience inquiring about our propensity towards, and David’s willingness to work with, this kind of “weird” project. We all agreed that one of the liberating features of working with David was his enthusiasm for enthusiasm—that is, his students could propose an unusual archival project or edition and he would tell us to go for it, and then proceed to treat it with as much academic rigor as any 10-page seminar paper could be treated. I remember while working on the *Alice* illustrations project I found evidence of a “Classic Illustrated Edition”

illustrations of Alice discovering she has shrunk after drinking from the “Drink me” bottle.

9. This is how Jeffrey Druin has described his own work. See page 25 of this issue.

of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* that included illustrations by different illustrators “compiled by Cooper Edens”. Worried, I emailed David with this information, and asked him if it would still be acceptable for me to do my project, since this edition already existed. David emailed me back promptly, telling me to go ahead with my project, which he declared was on “a different order” from this gift book. Later in person, he elaborated that mine was different precisely because I would be doing something *scholarly* with mine. That is the kind of confidence and encouragement that David gave his students.

The act of creating this representative archive/edition of the first chapter of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was, indeed, illuminating. It led me to theories about how the text had been approached, marketed and consumed in the many decades since its initial publication. Sorting the illustrations resulted in the realization that not every inch of written text has been illustrated by various artists over the years, but rather that the same few lines of text have been illustrated again and again by different hands. I believe each artist's new *Alice* illustrations fit into part of a heritage: a narrative that starts with Tenniel's art as much as with Carroll's words. From the first chapter—a chapter of about 160 lines of words—a total of 16 were illustrated, and those *ad nauseum*. While the illustrations vary in style, they do not vary much in their subject matter. Not once was it difficult to categorize an illustration based on the works of other illustrators. That is, even when later illustrators depict moments unillustrated by Tenniel, they select the same moments as each other. The illustrations for *Alice*, then, seem to be different renditions of the same tune—they seem to share a core of meaning that is elaborated in different directions. To return to my driving conceit for this project, this is like an annotation history of the text. It explicates and draws attention to specific lines over and over again.

With this aggregate illustration history, what emerges is not a story, but rather a collection of set scenes, waiting to be enlivened by different illustrators. The illustrators come after each other, not to re-envision the words of Lewis Carroll, but to re-envision the scenes as already represented pictorially. This parade of illustrators is like a parade of annotators—explicating the text for each other at least as much as for their purported “intended” audience. The several editions I examined were all categorized and shelved as children's books, but it is hard to escape the feeling that many of the illustrations, (for instance the staged still life photography of Abelardo Morell,) were created more as academic exercises for the illustrator and less for the delight and edification of the child reader.

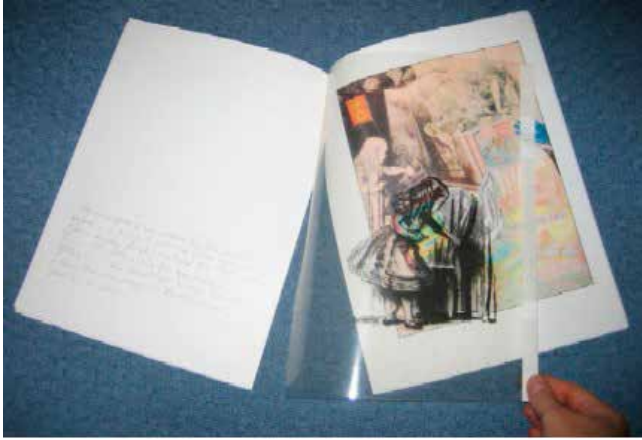


Figure 4. A page spread of my mock-up edition with illustration by Tenniel on transparency between the lines by Carroll being illustrated and the collage of later illustrators' versions.

I did not stop with this collation/collage of the illustrations. That part was the archive: what made this project also like an edition is that once the collages were done, I made a mock-up of a possible edition using these collages as illustrations. I copied the three Tenniel illustrations for the chapter onto transparencies individually and inserted the transparencies between the pages of text and collaged images on opaque paper. Each page spread in my mock-up thus presents both the collage, and the few passages of Carroll's written chapter illustrated by the work in the collage. If applicable, Tenniel's work is overlaid so that it can be turned over and juxtaposed with Carroll's words (fig. 4). This way, Tenniel's work can be seen as part of the illustration history, but it can also be "scraped" off the surface of the collaged image and paired with the original text being re-envisioned by later illustrators. The act of turning the transparency creates a moment when Tenniel's work is physically as well as figuratively in a liminal space: between, neither and both the "original" and the "after".¹⁰

David agreed to become my dissertation advisor soon after I completed this project for his class. In my dissertation, called "Drawing Conclusions: Visual Literacy in Fiction", I used four different illustrated novels of the

10. The act of flipping the transparency is also a nod to the method by which these illustrations were reproduced, since the wood engraving done by the Dalziels was the mirror image of the illustration that appeared on the printed page.

Victorian era as representative cases to address the ways that textual creation is informed by economic and social realities as well as literary and aesthetic theories. I used the situation of each novel's illustration to argue that the appearance of a written narrative (literally the way it looks) can subvert, reinforce, supplement or update that narrative.

This is, of course, a broad view of textual scholarship akin to how David has described Jerome J. McGann's "alternative view of composition, in which the entire history of the world is a fit subject for textual scholarship, and even posthumous changes by editors, publishers, friends and relations, are to be considered a perfectly valid part of the text read as a social construct" (GREETHAM 1994, 337). Not everything in a text is necessarily there due to authorial intent, but the different parts of the text as received may be equally worthy of analysis regardless of intent because the text as received is what has influenced our culture. As Bornstein posits, "the literary text consists not only of words (its linguistic code) but also of the semantic features of its material instantiations (its bibliographic code). . . . Bibliographic code can include features of page layout, book design, ink and paper, and typeface as well as broader issues . . . like publisher, print run, price, or audience" (BORNSTEIN 2001, 30–31). Different versions of the same text can be part of a larger textual fabric of culture, like D. F. McKenzie's "sociology of the text" that "takes an entire culture as 'text'"; as David has noted, this takes textual criticism "away from the book narrowly conceived . . . toward a consideration of all forms of communication in a society" (GREETHAM 1994, 338–39).

One of the major ways a book communicates is by its packaging, so I sometimes ask my students to analyze that packaging before we even open the book itself. Visual analysis of a book cover is often an excellent gateway for students into an understanding of the cultural and economic forces behind a text's publication. As part of a cultural studies approach in the classroom, judging a book by its cover can help students figure out how the content of a book is being marketed to them, and how they are being invited to make assumptions about that content. For instance, in my English 102 class "Introduction to Literature", we analyze the differences between the social context of the first edition of *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and the current Norton Critical Edition (fig. 5).

It becomes clear to my students that the first edition of this book was not only cheap, but cheaply produced: with a combination of typefaces that now feels amateurish, with the general feel of a title page rather than a book cover, and with the publication date changed by hand, all of these factors make the book feel as though it was meant to be ephemeral—like a

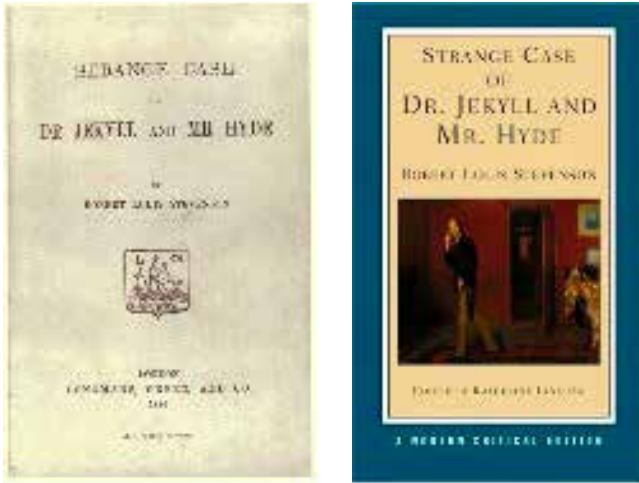


Figure 5. The cover of the first edition (1886) of *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as reproduced in the Norton Critical Edition (2003), contrasted with the cover of the Norton itself.

magazine or an issue of a comic book from the 1950s. In contrast, the Norton Critical Edition makes the text feel anything but ephemeral. Its cover is glossy, high-quality paper, well-bound, it has multiple layers of frames around the title, and the image—now in color—is one by a famous artist, of the author. Clearly, this cheap little text has grown into something much more substantial and weighty.¹¹

In my teaching today, it is not only David’s writing that has influenced me, but also his pedagogy. During our “Theory and Practice” class he proposed that what defines English as a discipline is that English is a *method* of study rather than an *object* of study; that is, rather than dealing simply with the study of the English language (and with the literature that happens to be written in the English language), “English”, in its current form in academia, is an approach. It in fact means reading things as texts. English departments are thus full of professors encouraging students to approach a variety of cultural productions *as* textual and therefore readable. That

11. I ask my students to do this kind of analysis in other situations as well. In an article for the pop culture issue of the pedagogical journal *Transformations*, I discuss how my freshman composition class analyzes the cover of *Amazing Fantasy* #15, the comic with the first appearance of Spider-Man, for its bibliographic codes as well as its linguistic and pictorial codes.

perspective on the profession influenced me to explore cultural studies, to make the courses I teach and the subjects I write about interdisciplinary and intertextual, and it also inspired me to seek to apply techniques of literary analysis to “texts” far from the literary canon in the courses I teach.

Also pedagogical, perhaps the biggest effect David has had on me is one of attitude. David always treated me as though he was unflinchingly interested in my work from the time I proposed the *Alice* illustration project after being in his class only a few weeks to the time I studied my orals list with him, to all the time and energy he spent as my dissertation advisor. In every situation, he was remarkable for his generosity with his own enthusiasm. Thanks to his influence, I now prioritize being as enthusiastic about my students’ projects as he always has been for my own.

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