Ashley T. Shelden
Associate Professor of English
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Promotion to Professor Review Narrative

Looking back on the ten years I have been at Kennesaw State University, I can see that my reflective teaching practice has become more focused and precise; my scholarship as a literary and cultural critic has deepened in content and expanded in reach; and my service has afforded me greater responsibility and opportunities for leadership. These transformations are evident when considering not only the arc of my ten years at Kennesaw State University but also the shorter path from my application for tenure and promotion in 2014 to the present. This latter period is, in many ways, when the most significant changes to my professional life have occurred—when the quality and significance of my teaching, research, and service have become most apparent—and these last five years are the focus of this narrative. In what follows, I aim to convey that my performance in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service is noteworthy, according to the criteria for promotion to Professor laid out in the CHSS Promotion and Tenure Guidelines (CHSS P&T 5, 6, 7). I hope my narrative and portfolio will show the ways I am already performing at the level of Professor, as articulated in the 2019-2020 Kennesaw State University Faculty Handbook (3.5.D.3). I am grateful for this opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments that make me “a leader, mentor, scholar, [and] expert” (Faculty Handbook 3.5.D.3).

Teaching Philosophy

I began elaborating my teaching philosophy in my “Third-Year Review Narrative” when I explored Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive dissonance as the principle that underwrites my teaching (6). I developed this philosophy further in my “Tenure and Promotion Review Narrative,” in which I reflected on the importance of cognitive dissonance to my pedagogy of
defamiliarization (5). Both cognitive dissonance and defamiliarization play important roles in my teaching, which I think of as “multi-perspectival.” I borrow this term from the field of history education, in which historians educate students in the different, potentially contradictory perspectives and narratives that make up an historical event or era (McCully 148-149). Though I do not work in the discipline of history, I always teach literature and film with an eye toward historical investigation (26, 67, 72, 77, 98, 102). Moreover, while the term “multi-perspectival” might belong to the domain of history education, it is also a principle that informs modernist and contemporary narrative (my area of scholarly expertise). Multi-perspectivity, indeed, is the method by which so many of the films and novels I teach proceed; it is also the method I use to teach them.

In the environment of the classroom, what I mean by multi-perspectivity is this: I do not teach students what to think, but rather a variety of methods for how to think. My aim is to give my students the space in which they decide for themselves which frameworks, which methods of thinking, suit them best. My final paper topics for ENGL 4570 and ENGL 2145 exemplified this principle; students chose the framework(s) with which they wanted to approach the texts on which their essays focused (22, 27). I believe the power of this pedagogical strategy is the way it puts on display my students’ agency in their learning process. In this way, my teaching is inspired by the work of Paulo Freire, who rejects what he calls “the banking approach to adult education,” which is characterized by an understanding of students as “‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher” (Freire 73, 72). Against this model he proposes a pedagogy that invests students with agency and authority, encouraging them to “see the world not as static reality, but as a reality in process;” to self-consciously reflect on their learning as a central component of the learning process; and in so doing, to be active participants in the transformation of the world
through thought (Freire 83). Freire suggests, “The teacher’s thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students’ thinking” (Freire 77). Such a statement rings true for me as I reflect on my teaching, which focuses on in-class discussion in which all students can participate. I structure my classroom this way because I want students to take responsibility for their own ideas and to be adept at articulating and defending them. My teaching, at its best, is a dialogue. Therefore, Freire’s idea that authentic student thinking is the only thing that can make authentic my own thinking resonates in every class I teach. Ideally, I want to teach by thinking with my students; in doing so, I aim to foster their active, agential, and authentic engagement with the texts we study, with ideas, and with the world around them.

Teaching, Advising, and Mentoring

My investment in multi-perspectivity is apparent in all of the courses I teach. The form it most often takes is when a course focuses on a genre, a director, or an idea, and approaches that central focus from many directions (108). I employed this strategy in my FILM 3220 course that focused on the films of Pedro Almodóvar, which explored the transformation of a single director’s work over the span of his career (102, 103). I also created a new version of FILM 3220 that focused on mafia cinema, “Filming the Mafia,” which approaches popular representations of the mafia from a variety of perspectives (77, 7). I taught not only established examples of this genre (like Martin Scorsese’s GoodFellas and Francis Ford Coppola’s The Godfather), but also the 1946 Bugs Bunny cartoon, “Racketeer Rabbit,” and Billy Wilder’s 1959 film, Some Like It Hot. Even as one student in the Spring 2019 version of this class would have liked “a broader view” of the films I taught, many other students responded well to my multi-perspectival approach (13). Another student in the same class commented, “I really enjoyed . . . how it [the course] did not focus on one aspect of mafia appropriation but all aspects. This made for a well-
rounded learning experience and left me with a view of the mafia depicted in cinema that was not flat” (13).

Multi-perspectivity can also be seen in ENGL 2145: Introduction to English Studies. In Spring 2017, I completely revamped this course after teaching it the same way (with some small changes here and there) for eight iterations (95). I entirely changed the syllabus and decided to focus on a theme: mystery stories (42, 21). The principle of the course, then, remained the same: to introduce students to as many aspects of the English Major as possible. But instead of using a collection of loosely related artifacts, we would use mysteries as our entrance into the English Major. The texts we studied were varied and multiple: of course, we read some classics by Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler, and Wilkie Collins. But we also thought about Christopher Nolan’s 2000 film, Memento; Tana French’s 2008 novel, The Likeness; and J.K. Rowling’s 1998 novel, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone as new, different perspectives on the tradition of mystery stories. The first time I taught this course, one student felt that the class taught her or him “how to think in a whole new way” and “increased [the student’s] understanding and appreciation for literary works” (47). The second time I taught the course, some of my students’ comments suggested that I achieved my aim to create a coherent, unified course that nevertheless emphasized different perspectives. For instance, one student stated that he or she “learned about different genres and conventions of literature (how to detect them and create them),” also noting that the course introduced “different concepts of critical theory,” “how literature affects the world, and how global perspectives are varied” (25). Another student highlighted how the course “encouraged discussion of varying perspectives” on literature (25).

Even as I have made successful, substantial changes to some of my courses, there are nevertheless areas where I want to keep working to revise my pedagogy. For instance, one
frequent comment I received in my ENGL 4570: 20th-Century British Literature courses had to do with the amount of reading I assigned (109). No matter what the thematic focus of the course was, the generic focus was predominantly novelistic (26, 33, 48, 64, 67, 88). What this means is that even though we typically only studied seven novels, it nevertheless required quite a bit of reading. This was a difficult situation, because I am committed to the importance of the novel as a form and to what my students can gain from delving deeply into it. Moreover, while students pretty consistently mentioned the amount of reading that was required in ENGL 4570, they did not dislike it universally. In general, there was more positive feedback from students than negative (109). Nevertheless, I have experimented with ways to lighten my students’ load by making response papers due on the first day of the week, so that the students have the weekend to complete the reading and writing. Additionally, a couple of students suggested that the readings be shorter mid-week, which I have also tried. Neither of these strategies completely eliminated the issue. That being said, because most students conveyed that they learned a lot from these courses, I remain committed to teaching novels and to figuring out manageable ways to assign the reading.

Another issue I encountered in my courses had to do with one of my central pedagogical tools: class discussion. At times, students did not enjoy class discussion or felt that it was difficult for them to have their own viewpoints heard (109, 110, 111). I always take very seriously such comments, because I never want any of my students to feel like they cannot contribute. I see lively, interactional discussion as the best way for me to put into action my commitment to Paulo Freire’s ideas about authentic, agential student learning. And I love these class discussions, because I learn from my students. The surprise of class discussion, therefore, is always my favorite part of teaching, and moreover, I believe that it gives students an excellent
opportunity to learn by doing. My students often responded very well to my pedagogy. For instance, one student noted my strength “at facilitating discussions in class,” giving “every student a chance to voice their opinion” (111). Another student appreciated my “respect for all the students in the class,” while others could see that I “facilitate a positive atmosphere” and “genuinely love to hear [the students’] input” (111, 110). One student even thought that my pedagogy achieved exactly what I was aiming for: “authentic, meaningful discussion” (109).

My teaching is always in the process of becoming, and I am consistently finding ways to innovate and improve in order to enhance student learning. One way I have done this is to ask the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) to do a Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID) in one of my ENGL 4570 classes. Dr. Esther Jordan stated that, “watching [me] facilitate a discussion was like being in a master class on discussion facilitation,” but she also offered me concrete strategies to continue to improve as a teacher (106). I have integrated into my teaching a number of these suggestions, while there are still other areas that I am still working to strengthen. One such area is my use of technology. In general, I received good scores in this area, but from time to time, students were not satisfied with how I used technology (109, 110, 111). In Fall 2019 I am teaching a hybrid ENGL 4570 for the first time, and this seems an excellent opportunity to work on this area of my pedagogy. In Spring 2019 I attended a workshop with Adobe representatives, and based on what I learned there, I plan to integrate into my course an assignment that will ask students to use Adobe Spark to remix in a digital format material they will have already generated for a more traditional argumentative essay.

Some of the ways I already create assignments to engage students, enhance their learning, and respond to different learning styles are on display in my portfolio (11, 30, 70). For instance, when we were studying David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* in ENGL 4570, we progressively created
from class to class a visualization of the relationships between the competing narratives in the novel (65). Or in FILM 4200: Advanced Studies in Film, instead of asking them to write a traditional final essay for the course, I asked them to write a more “creative” essay. Since the topic of the course was “Metacinema: Films About Film,” their assignment was to write a “meta” essay about one film *from the perspective of a character* in another film (92). The essays that resulted were smart, surprising, inventive, and fun. Indeed, one of the students in that course commented that the “tests and essays are fair and exciting” (94). Similarly, in my most recent versions of ENGL 2145, the first essay assignment in the course was a literacy narrative that encouraged creativity and experimentation (44). In previous class meetings, we discussed a range of devices that fiction writers use to create narrative, construct character, deceive their audiences, and inspire interest (24, 46). I encouraged students to use any and all of these devices in their literacy narratives, as they imagined their own creative work that blurred the boundary between reality and fiction.

I offer a variety of types of assessment in all of my courses so that the picture I get of student learning throughout the semester is not unnecessarily narrow. In my film classes, I typically give two exams (78, 81, 91, 99), a presentation assignment (40), and a formal writing assignment at the end of the semester (74, 12). My ENGL 4570 courses are designated as Writing-Intensive, which means that in addition to one shorter formal paper at the midterm (31, 69) and one longer, researched essay at the end of the semester (27, 68) there are frequent low-stakes writing assignments as well as opportunities to practice reflective writing throughout the semester. In addition, each student gives a brief presentation once a semester (28).

But the course of which I am most proud is ENGL 4620: Senior Seminar (37, 14). The real success of this course was the scaffolding of assignments. Each and every piece of writing—
whether formal or informal, small or large—moved the students toward their final essay for the course (15), and each piece built on those that came before (16, 18, 19). I offered students a very clear trajectory, giving them a sort of loose structural outline of their final essay at the outset of the semester (17). We returned to this document repeatedly throughout the term, giving it more detail and focus, as the students gradually constructed their final essays. Based on their evaluations of the course, they appreciated this rigorous structure and benefitted from it (20). One student commented, “This course has been arguably the single most well put together course in the whole time I’ve been in the college” (38). I believe the success of this course was the cumulative result of my reflective teaching practice. In short, I synthesized feedback I received with all the reflection and revision I have done in my teaching career, and applied it to this course to excellent effect.

The responses I received from students in my Senior Seminar are very gratifying, as are my students’ responses to my other courses, which convey the quality and significance of my teaching. Students often give me high scores (sometimes even 4.0) in categories such as, “the instructor challenges me to think,” “treats students with respect,” “provides useful feedback on student work,” and “was effective in helping me learn” (20, 25, 32, 38, 41, 55, 63, 76, 97, 87, 101). Over all, my teaching regularly creates positive impacts for my students, which certainly is my primary pedagogical goal (107).

**Scholarly and Creative Activity**

The multi-perspectivity that guides my teaching also guides my research and writing. The intellectual focus of much of my work has been to offer new ways of understanding a concept with which we are all familiar: love. My early publications began this work, and it culminated with the 2017 publication of my book, *Unmaking Love: The Contemporary Novel and the*
Impossibility of Union (118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123). The single-author scholarly book is the coin of the realm in my discipline, and I am pleased that mine was published by the top-tier Columbia University Press. The quality and significance of this work is also borne out by an excellent review in Contemporary Literature (124). And most notably, Unmaking Love was named as a finalist in 2018 for a major award in the fields of queer studies and queer theory, the Lambda Literary Award in LGBTQ Studies (1, 2).

Even as Unmaking Love is my most noteworthy scholarly work since being granted tenure and promoted to Associate Professor, it is not the only scholarly work I have done during this period. I presented at four conferences (129, 130, 131, 132). And I completed a short piece on the scholarship of teaching and learning, specifically focusing on teaching queer theory. A colleague invited me to contribute this piece, “Queer Theory, Under the Radar,” to a special issue of the journal Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture, which is currently under review (112, 113). And further evincing my expertise in my field is the fact that since my essay, “Cosmopolitan Love: The One and the World in Hari Kunzru’s Transmission,” was published in 2012, it has been cited by a number of other scholars (126).

Most important for the next phase of my research, the influential journal differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies recently accepted for publication my essay, “The Abject Genealogies of Kenneth Halliwell (and Joe Orton),” pending minor revision, which I will submit for publication in mid-September (114, 115). In 2016, I received some funding from the English Department to conduct research in the UK for this essay, and then in 2018, the CHSS Manuscript Completion Program allowed me to finish it (4). Having this essay published in differences, which is housed at the Pembroke Center at Brown University, reflects the quality of my
scholarship as it is a prestigious journal in the fields of literary, queer, feminist, and poststructuralist theories with a 15% acceptance rate (116). This essay is the first part of a new book project, *Abject Intimacies*, which I am conceiving as a scholarly book on the cultural and theoretical ramifications of the psychoanalytic concept of abjection. I have begun research on the next part of this project, which will focus on the relationship between the abject and desire in Yorgos Lanthimos’ 2018 film, *The Favourite*.

**Professional Service**

Seeing from many perspectives is important not only in my teaching and research but also in my service. Taking on a variety of service roles allows me to understand better how the University works. In the last five years, I have taken on increasingly significant leadership roles, from co-chairing important Department committees (such as the Tenure and Promotion Committee and the Curriculum Committee) to becoming Director of the B.A./Undergraduate English Studies. A crucial part of my service is to understand how all of my professional responsibilities are connected. As such, my service, even as it has great breadth, is also focused and intentional. My service to the Department, College, University, and Profession is fundamentally organized by my focus on three primary categories: service in support of teaching (163), in support of research and creative activity (164), and in support of the life of the institution (165). My expertise as a teacher and scholar of literature, culture, and theory informs every service opportunity, whether that work is explicitly related to teaching (e.g., my work on the Assessment Team or co-leading a seminar on facilitating class discussion at CETL) and research (e.g., serving as a reviewer for the CHSS Manuscript Completion Program or for top-ranked journals such as *PMLA*); or whether it is less easily categorized (e.g., sitting on the 18th-
Century British Literature Search Committee or on the Department Faculty Council), because such work is focused on multiple elements at once.

All of this work has culminated with my current leadership position, Director of the B.A./Undergraduate English Studies, in which I have served one year of a three-year term. As the English Major is my main area of responsibility, my focus is primarily on teaching and curriculum. As Director, I am responsible for a number of important initiatives that help to support the English Major curriculum that include: leading the Working Group on Revising the English Major, undertaking the program credit audit requested by the University, revising curriculum in response to that audit, collaborating with the faculty members and the Curriculum Committee on curriculum proposals, and administering and synthesizing meaningful program assessment (153). I also run the Major Dialogues series in the department, which focused last year on revising the Major, rhetorical pedagogy, undergraduate research, and program assessment (154). Since faculty research cannot help but inform the curriculum, supporting research is another important aspect of my work as Director. To this end, I organize faculty writing groups and hold Faculty Works-In-Progress events. I have also begun organizing a Task Force on Scholarly and Creative Activity Equivalencies, which will help our faculty think through the relationships between the different forms of interdisciplinary work we do in the English Department (155). Such interdisciplinarity is fundamental to the English Major; as such, I regularly participate in meetings of the literature faculty, the Writing Studies Committee, the General Education Literature Committee, Advisory Council, and the Leadership Team (156).

Another fundamental component of my position is to provide collaborative administrative support for the Department in a variety of ways. I assist the Associate Chair with the scheduling of Writing-Intensive, Senior Seminar, and ENGL 2145 courses as well as fielding course
requests and soliciting course descriptions each term. With Dr. Lara Smith-Sitton, I write and administer a yearly alumni survey, and in support of Dr. Dorothy Kuykendal, I have represented the Department at majors fairs and spotlight tours, where I spoke with both prospective students and their parents (157, 162). Finally, as Director I helped to plan English Department retreats (160), organized the writing of the “Department of English Workload Document” (159), addressed grade appeals, assisted the Chair with Annual Reviews, led the newly formed ad hoc Social Media Committee (161), and administered a faculty survey (158). Whether I am serving as a member of a committee or directing the English Major, my service work helps me to see the Department, College, University, and Profession from new perspectives, which in turn allows me to be a better colleague and leader.

Conclusion

In this narrative I have highlighted my accomplishments in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service as Associate Professor of English at Kennesaw State University. My multi-perspectival work in these areas has grown and improved in tandem with my increasing professional responsibilities. I strive always to be a good colleague, an active leader within the University community, an accomplished scholar, and perhaps most importantly of all, an engaged, enthusiastic, and reflective teacher for the students of Kennesaw State University. I believe the portfolio I present here conveys my success in accomplishing these goals and my aspiration to continue growing and developing as an educator, scholar, and colleague.
Works Cited

Kennesaw State University College of Humanities and Social Sciences Promotion and Tenure Guidelines. https://chss.kennesaw.edu/docs/faculty-staff/promotion-tenure-guidelines.pdf

