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**Queensland Christian secondary English teachers and critical literacy:
faith, and the Marxist and poststructuralist underpinnings of the
curriculum**

Thesis submitted by
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in April 2011

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Abstract

The 2002 Queensland Senior English syllabus emphasizes a critical approach to reading and writing that is predicated on Marxist and poststructuralist theories. An examination of the critical literacy support materials reveals that Lyotard's suspicion of meta-narrative, Barthes' death of the author, Foucault's genealogical analysis of power as knowledge and Derrida's deconstruction have become embedded in Senior English in Queensland. While there is a paucity of literature at the interface of critical literacy and Christianity, an examination of the interface of Marxism, poststructuralism and Christian literature identifies three very broad salient areas of tension around notions of self, or subjectivity, emancipation, and truth/meaning. These provide the thematic and organizational structure for the entire thesis. An analysis of the materials made available to teachers of Senior English makes clear that poststructuralist and Marxist views, including views regarding self, or subjectivity, emancipation, and truth/meaning deeply inform these materials. Semi structured interviews with Queensland Senior English teachers in several Queensland Christian schools, demonstrate that theoretical tensions do emerge for them at this interface. It is clear, however, that although these tensions arise in both the theoretical literature and the interviews, there are significant differences within each: neither the teachers, nor the Christian philosophers and theologians, speak with a completely unified voice on these matters, in the same way as the Marxist or poststructuralist voice is not unitary. An examination of practitioners' experience of critical literacy in Queensland classrooms disrupts a double marginalization in that often teachers' perspectives and Christians in particular, are silenced. The issues raised here are not just pertinent for educators who adhere to foundational truths, ultimate textual authority and transcendence. Questions raised about the poststructuralist rejection of presence in identity and texts, the atheistic anthropology in Marxism, the possibility of emancipation through literature, the emphasis on a suspicious hermeneutic, the rejection of absolutes and foundations and the death of the subject, book and author are intimately connected to the values that drive our culture. Whether there *is* something *there* in the text or the person, whether something *can* be known in the text and ultimately whether learners have an obligation *to a text* are not just important questions to raise for people of Christian faith but are of fundamental importance to all educators.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis examines the tensions that exist for Queensland Christian teachers of English given critical literacy's Marxist and poststructuralist lineage. The project from which it arose was commenced in 2006 at a time in Australia when there was impassioned argument and counter argument over the value of critical literacy in subject English. This was played out in the journalistic media (Carlton, 2005; Davies, 2005; Devine, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Mackay, 2005; Rowbotham, 2005a, 2005b) and the national newspaper, *The Australian*, in particular (Golsby-Smith, 2005; Gosch & Macnamara, 2005; Kelly, 2006; Lane, 2005), including its editorials, with one pointedly entitled *Fashionable Theory Fails our Children* (Editorial, 2005). Over the last decade there has been a tense and public debate about literacy education, with Slattery (2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e), Donnelly (2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c) and various educators and academics slugging it out in the public forum (Freemith, 2006a, 2006b; Wiltshire, 2006). It appeared that the culture wars (Hunter, 1991) were playing themselves out in Australia over what it means to become literate (Snyder, 2008).

The vitriol was clear, with each side accusing the other of getting it wrong. The problem, according to some, was that postmodernism had infiltrated Queensland education. The Queensland Education Minister at the time was vowing to purge postmodernism from the English syllabus (Welford cited in Lucy & Mickler, 2008, p. 4), journalists were bemoaning the reign of deconstruction (Kelly, 2006) and others were concerned about the anti-realist stance in critical literacy (Slattery, 2005c). The Prime Minister at the time (Howard, cited in Lucy & Mickler, 2008, p. 5) complained that English had drifted off into the "relativist wasteland" where students were asked to "deconstruct texts using politically correct theories." Australia's next Prime Minister Rudd (2006) waded into the argument, arguing that among other influences postmodernism in English had the "accumulative effect of undermining the influence of the mainstream Catholic and Protestant churches across the West." Others simply saw these attacks upon critical literacy as conservative politics using ideologically loaded statements posited as naturalized common sense. Education, as they saw it, needed to become *more* political (Sawyer, 2004). Educators needed to create a questioning, critical and ethical citizenry that would lead to a healthy democracy.

Literacy Debates/Culture Wars

Wiltshire (2006) suggests that this debate about the teaching of English is about who gets to control the details of the core curriculum. Others, however, argue that much more is at stake. Snyder (2008) posits this debate as similar to the American culture wars of the 1980's. If we accept the notion that "literacy debates are always related to broader social, cultural, political

and economic forces” (Green, Hodgins, & Luke, 1997, p. 22), and that the outcome of these debates will ultimately “shape the ideals and values of the next generation” (Hunter, 1991, p. 211), then this is an extremely contentious and politically fertile space to speak into. Since historically, approaches to English have been affiliated with the pursuit of moral and ethical improvement (Hunter, 1988), the question arises as to who determines what is moral and what is ethical? What sort of English provides moral and ethical improvement and who gets to judge? To begin with at least, Snyder, a professor of education, and Vanhoozer, a professor of theology, agree that debates about language and meaning are really about “competing views and beliefs about society” including “what it is, what it has been and what it should become” (Snyder, 2008). Or, as Vanhoozer (1998, p. 19) puts it, “implicit in the question of meaning are questions about the nature of reality, the possibility of knowledge, and the criteria for morality.”

At the same time as this debate ensued in education, about the value of postmodern thinking and various literary theories in subject English, the debate about their value also raged in Christian circles. Some construe the fundamental themes of the postmodern philosophers and the central ideas of orthodox Christian theology to be mutually exclusive (Ingraffia, 1995) while others envisage the theological changes in response to postmodern thought to be conducive to ending the marginalization of theology (Berry, 1992). As Downing (2006) explains, whereas the modern mind excluded religious faith, the multi-perspectival postmodern mind holds no principled barrier to it and therefore it can actually serve faith. It was in response to this theoretical milieu that I began to give thought to the interface of Christianity and critical literacy.

It was these debates, and the sense that there were major issues at stake, that were the catalysts for this project. I have been an educator for the past 20 years and from 2003 to 2006 I taught senior English at a Christian college in central Queensland. The 2002 Queensland Studies Authority syllabus was very clearly framed from a critical perspective (Gutierrez, 2008), and as I attempted to implement the syllabus and understand the support materials I recognized two things. The first was that the language explicating a critical practice in the support materials was reminiscent of my last research project written from a feminist poststructuralist position. The second was that teachers appeared to be somewhat irritated and confused by critical literacy. Anecdotal evidence suggested that for many Christian teachers there were some theoretical tensions in its appropriation and implementation. They seemed somewhat embattled as they were called upon to adopt theories and practices that appeared to some extent to be hostile to their beliefs. The concern, expressed by Sawyer, Watson and Gold (1998), that the content and methods of English were being defined and circumscribed by outsiders with their own agendas, was definitely something that had arisen in teacher discussions. While the theological and philosophical underpinnings of critical literacy within its Marxist and poststructuralist

genealogy seem to be accepted as a given in its own discourses, I wondered whether this created conflict for those with a biblical faith.

As I cast around for insights into this issue, it became apparent that there was an absence of research at the interface of Christianity and critical literacy. I therefore framed this project to explore this issue, to begin to remedy the gap in research about it, and to catalyze further explorations in this area. I wanted Christian teachers to review what is taken for granted in the rhetoric of critical literacy, especially where the theological and philosophical assumptions are not made explicit. While the assumptions underpinning critical literacy, within its Marxist and poststructuralist genealogy, seem to be accepted as a given in its own discourses, I wondered whether this created conflict for such teachers. The broad question I sought to explore with these teachers was not what ‘truths’ can I find in the data but what kind of ‘truths’ are produced in the teaching of critical literacy, through what technologies and whether, and in what ways, these ‘truths’ might be enabling or limiting. I suspected that the underlying philosophical ideas behind critical literacy, and instantiated in the support texts, might create conflict for Christians and that significant theoretical differences would become apparent at this interface.

The Shape and Scope of the Project

The project evolved ‘backwards’ from my interest in how teachers understood and engaged with the tensions between poststructuralism, Marxism and Christianity as they teach the Senior English subject. I began the project with the knowledge that there were tensions for Christian teachers in teaching critical literacy. I came to see, as I worked on shaping the project, that in order to understand how the teachers saw and engaged with these issues, I needed to understand the materials from which they generated their teaching. To understand how these materials embodied philosophical assumptions and to understand the issues these might pose for the teachers, I needed to understand in a rich, complex and systematic way, the nature of any tensions that might present themselves to those whose work focuses explicitly on explicating the philosophical nature of those issues – the theologians who address them in their most ‘pure’ form. It therefore entailed three main bodies of work: an analysis of literature in which Christian writers (mainly theologians and philosophers) explored relations between Christianity and Marxism and/or poststructuralism; an analysis of the materials provided to support teachers in their teaching of critical literacy within the subject Senior English; and the conduct and analysis of interviews with a number of self-identified Christian teachers of Senior English.

The Literature

The first body of work, developed in Chapters 3, 6 and 9 is an examination of the nature of those tensions as they are articulated in contemporary theological discussion. In the early stage of my research, apart from the work of Kapitzke (1995, 1999), it appeared that there was a

paucity of literature at the explicit interface of Christianity and critical literacy. Consequently I moved further a field and began an examination of the underpinning Marxist and poststructuralist notions behind critical literacy. I read in the area of Christian theology, philosophy and literary theory because I expected that if there were tensions at this interface they would emerge in these disciplines. This seemed important because it would provide the most developed and sophisticated understandings of the relations between faith and the theories that I understood informed the Senior English subject. The most pressing tensions emerged around notions of self, emancipation and truth/meaning. Consequently I framed the entire thesis around these three themes.

The Curriculum Support Materials

The second body of work, found in Chapters 4, 7 and 10, is an examination of the materials which most directly informed the teachers' actual teaching of critical literacy in subject English. This was necessary for me to be confident that the materials were, in fact informed, to some extent, by the philosophies of Marxism and poststructuralism, to appreciate the nuances of the ways in which they were thus informed, and to understand as clearly as I could, the ways in which these theories presented themselves to, and thus might inform, the teachers' teaching of the subject. Gutierrez (2008) says that, given the ever evolving debate about what critical literacy is, these texts can assist in giving an insight into the ways critical literacy is understood and implemented in classrooms and around the nation. This section of the thesis was stimulated by the work of Cherryholmes (1988) who identifies school text books as having important material effects. These chapters demonstrate that support materials are not only key sites that guide and direct teachers' work, but they also make claims about self, claims about what it means to be liberated, and claims about truth and meaning. In many, although not all cases, these notions are presented as a given. They therefore have definite intellectual and pragmatic influence. Chapters 4, 7 and 10 make visible that the support materials naturalize various Marxist and poststructuralist positions. The construal in critical literacy of the subject, the notion of what it means to be emancipated and the notions of truth and meaning, emerging as they do from a Marxist and poststructuralist lineage, are not givens but social constructions that need to be examined as such. In arguing this I draw from a comment from Meyers (1984, p. 334) who says

If we are serious in believing that the role of theory is to oppose cultural authority, if we are sincere in our objective of putting self evident certainties under interrogation, what better way than by leading our students to struggle against the authorities that we ourselves have placed in their hands.

The Teacher Interviews

Third, and the point from which the project started, entailed exploring, with teachers, their understandings of the philosophical assumptions in the syllabus. This included an analysis of interviews from teachers in Queensland Christian schools to ascertain their responses to critical literacy with particular reference to the tensions raised in Chapters 3, 6 and 9. I take up the notion that textual representations, to some extent, constitute not just the readers' sense of self, but also their view of the real. The research outlined in Chapter 3 convincingly demonstrates that language, reading and the sense of self are deeply entwined. The poststructuralist conceptual framework encourages teacher researchers to turn their gaze on the ongoing processes of their own subjectification. Given that language is powerful in the constitution of subjectivities, this project turns its analytic gaze to what the constitutive effects of *critical literacy* language might be. It raises the question of what moral commitments, patterns of desire and ways of knowing the critical literacy meta-language might substantiate. This is generated by the view that critical literacy will have its own ideological prefigurements. In this context, my interest lies with the experiences and responses of teachers of Christian faith to critical literacy. How might the discourse of critical literacy affect their subjectivities?

This is part of the point made by Gutierrez (2008) that when it comes to thinking about what critical literacy actually is we need to consider the voices of the teachers who operationalize these constructions and who create their own constructions. The interview-based Chapters 5, 8 and 11 demonstrate how Christian teachers negotiate a critical practice that places boundaries around theoretical concepts that they are not prepared to discard. These chapters explore how they establish alternative forms of discourse within their critical reading practice that challenge some of the theoretical notions implicit in the support materials while appropriating others.

Overview of Thesis

It became apparent that tensions for Christians with Marxist and poststructuralist thought congealed around three broad themes. These were self, emancipation, and truth/meaning, which incidentally paralleled Huntington's (1996) view that cultural clashes are always about these three issues.

The structure of the thesis reflects, but did not follow closely the structure of the project. Rather than present my discussion of the theological/philosophical literature, then my analysis of the teaching materials, followed by my account of what the teachers said, I opted to structure the thesis itself according to the three broad themes that emerged from the analysis of the literature and subsequently structured both the analysis of the materials and the framing of the teacher interviews similarly. Thus, the substantive body of the thesis is organised into three main sections. The first explores the competing Marxist, poststructuralist and Christian notions of

self. Chapter 3 examines the literature to ascertain possible points of tension at this interface. Chapter 4 examines the critical literacy support materials to see whether, and how, Marxist or poststructuralist notions of self emerge. Chapter 5 examines interviews with Christian English teachers of critical literacy, to see whether the tensions concerning notions of self, identified in Chapter 3, are problematic for them.

The second substantive section of the thesis explores the competing notions of emancipation from Marxist, poststructuralist and Christian positions. Chapter 6 examines the literature to ascertain possible points of tension at this interface. Chapter 7 examines the support materials to ascertain whether Marxist or poststructuralist notions of emancipation emerge there. Chapter 8 examines interviews with Christian English teachers of critical literacy to see whether the tensions concerning notions of emancipation, identified in Chapter 6, are problematic for them.

The third substantive section explores the competing notions of truth and meaning from Marxist, poststructuralist and Christian positions. Chapter 9 examines the literature to ascertain possible points of tension at this interface. Chapter 10 examines the support materials on critical literacy to see whether Marxist or poststructuralist notions of meaning and truth emerge. Chapter 11 examines interviews with Christian English teachers of critical literacy, to see whether the tensions concerning notions of emancipation, identified in Chapter 9, are problematic for them.

These chapters are framed by a discussion of some key terms, concepts, and theoretical assumptions of my own position in relation to both the research and to the issues under consideration. Chapter 2 discusses the methods I used to select or (in the case of the teacher interviews) generate, and analyse the data, and their rationales and a number of methodological issues they raise. The concluding chapter summarizes the issues explored in the substantive chapters, notes a range of limitations to the study and within these limitations, draws conclusions and suggests implications for practice and further research.

Theoretical Issues

Five broad theoretical notions frame this work. First is the notion that emotional upheavals of thought are a fertile place to begin a research inquiry. Why did the Christian teachers feel so strongly about critical literacy? Second is the view that the philosophical or theological underpinnings of critical literacy will have material effects. What do Christian teachers say the effects of critical literacy might be? Third is the notion that literary theories are actually engaged in theologies so Christians need to speak into this milieu. Do the Christian teachers perceive this theological connection? Fourth is the avowed critical practice that opens space for difference. What do Christian teachers, as a marginalized or silenced group themselves, say about their experience of critical literacy? And fifth, and in keeping with a truly critical

practice, critical literacy's own theoretical underpinnings have established its own dominances but not without losses. What do Christian teachers say is lost?

Emotions a Fertile Site for Academic Inquiry

In accord with the generative work of Boler (1999) and Nussbaum (2001), recognizing emotion as a fertile site for educative inquiry, this project pays particular attention to the emotion expressed by Queensland Christian teachers as they grapple with the comprehension and implementation of critical literacy in the senior English 2002 QSA syllabus. This is in concert with a number of Christian scholars who construe wisdom in the Biblical sense as more than intellectual knowing, in that it embraces emotions and actions and one's entire being (Naugle, 2001; O'Brien, 2002; Sawatsky, 2004).

While Christian teachers applaud many aspects of critical literacy's work to denaturalize givens and debunk entrenched ideologies, they do raise some points of dissension, and sometimes with a degree of heightened emotion. These discordant notes are especially evident at the interface of Christian thought and critical literacy's poststructuralist lineage. Furthermore, as one might expect, this is most clearly evident where the teacher's thoughts are tempered and constrained by Biblical concepts. The tensions, or "upheavals of thought" (Nussbaum, 2001), expressed by Christian teachers in response to aspects of critical literacy testify to the fact that emotional responses are often fruitful indicators of resistance, and also demonstrative of the fact that teachers engage in uneasy negotiations as they endeavour to make sense of elements in a mandated curriculum.

Philosophies have Consequences

This project embraces the view that philosophical movements shape cultural phenomena rather than the converse (Schaeffer, 1968; Smith, 2006c). Every discipline has an associated field of philosophy foundational to that discipline, and the philosophies are never theologically neutral (Moreland & Craig, 2003, p. 3). It is important, therefore, to examine the philosophical commitments behind the literary theories that inform critical literacy; as Erickson (2001, p. 182) claims, poststructuralist thought "now seems to be of such proportions that its theoretical basis is functioning much like a metanarrative or worldview." Similarly, Fish (1994, pp. 54-55) insists that the reason there is no longer a "vigorous discussion of deconstruction in the academy" is because it has "been canonized" and that the implications of poststructuralism have been "extended far beyond the realm of aesthetics and philosophy to the very texture of everyday life."

While philosophers influence culture, those whose thinking is influenced by them do not necessarily know *why* they think and feel as they do, or what it is that is affecting them (Erickson, 2002; Kraft, 1996). As Meek (2003, p. 7) points out, current views on truth and the possibility of meaning have "been centuries in the making" but they have "only recently reached the streets."

To explore these often subterranean influences, Chapters 3, 6 and 9 examine the literature to seek to understand the philosophical underpinnings of critical literacy (Schaeffer, 1968; Smith, 2006c), and to foreground possible points of tension for Christians. Even if, as some are suggesting, Theory's dominance is dying (Harris, 1996; Patai & Corral, 2005; Payne & Schad, 2003), others suggest that the critical approaches to literature are likely to have long term affects and these still need to be addressed (cf Kraft, 1996; Sire, 2004). Vanhoozer's work calls educators to think carefully about deconstruction's conception of truth and knowledge and whether it can be known. He says that there will be implications in embracing focused undecideability (Belsey, 2002a, 2002b) and rejecting determinate meaning and proper predication. What we read and how we read is of crucial importance because literature "has effects" (Barratt, Pooley, & Ryken, 1999, p. 10). It is imperative to examine the influence of these theories about reading and meaning because ideas do have consequences (Weaver, 1984).

Literary Theories are Engaged in Theology

Many Christian thinkers argue that literary theory and postmodernism have had an enormous influence in education, especially in the teaching of English, and that Christian educators need to speak into this space (Barratt, et al., 1999; Veith, 1990). Some view literary theories and Christianity as wrestling with similar areas of human experience (Dawson, 1995), while some suggest that theories about language, representation and meaning are actually engaged in philosophy (Rabate, 2002) or theology (Eco, 1990a; Handelmann, 1982; Vanhoozer, 1998). Thiselton (1992, ch 3) argues that Derrida has developed Saussurean linguistics in ways that he never envisioned and that they have been developed into a "virtual worldview" that carries with it aspects, that for some, are antithetical to Christian faith. Vanhoozer (1997, p. 133) actually calls poststructuralist theories, in particular, "anti-theologies in disguise." In a similar sense to the work of Milbank (1990), who construes secular social theory as constituted in its secularity by its "heretical" relation to orthodox Christianity, Vanhoozer (1997) construes literary theory as also bound up with the modification or the rejection of orthodox Christian positions. With this in mind, Wahlout (1991) cautions Christians against understanding current literary theory as religiously neutral and available for eclectic appropriation. Veith (1990, 1994) insists that Christians must not cavalierly dismiss contemporary literary theorizing simply because of its secular assumptions, but must examine the nature of these theories. Similarly Vanhoozer (1998) strongly encourages Christian educators to come to some understanding of what is at stake in taking up these notions.

There are a number of Christian thinkers who attempt a dialogue between Christian theology and literary theory and in varying ways uphold a Christian voice within literary studies (Jacobs, 1991; Walhout & Ryken, 1991). Many construe this dialogue as being mutually beneficial to each (Cunningham, 1994, 2002; Fiddes, 2000; Ingrassia, 1995; Mills, 1995a, 1995b;.

Vanhoozer, 1998; Wright, 1992; Wright, 1988). Ingrassia (1995, p. 238) urges Christians to develop a particularly Christian critical theory that acknowledges the validity of Marxist and feminist critiques of religion, but also their limits, in so far as these critiques are informed by modern, Enlightenment and postmodern or poststructuralist rejections of theology. Ferreter (2003) works towards this, arguing that while most influential schools of contemporary literary and cultural theory reject truth claims and the value of Christian theology, it remains legitimate to interpret literary and cultural works from the perspective of Christian faith and theology.

Valorisation of Difference

I write at a time when it is difficult to bring Christian scholarship to the arena of public debate (Marsden, 1997; Newbiggin, 1986, 1991; Sider, 2005). I was completely surprised to see Scheurich's (1997, p. 34) unabashed statement that Christian thinking is "currently outside the socially defined boundaries of what is considered valid approaches to the generation of knowledge," although he does leave us with the caveat that in the future it may become "allowable." Now however, in a postmodern pluralist academic environment that turns its face to the Other (Culler, 1983; Derrida, 1978b), and encourages a resurrection of subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980), Christian perspectives ought to be acceptable in the public forum of debate. As Marsden (1997) asserts, now that the postmodernist environment celebrates and welcomes all viewpoints and identities it is theoretically impossible to eliminate one merely as a consequence of past actions or past hegemonic violence. Many see a double standard in the dismissal of believing subjectivity in the academy (Bush, 2001) since feminist, Africanist, Marxist and psychoanalytic critics are not shy about asserting the continual relevance of their own particular subjectivities to literary studies (cf Cunningham, 1995; Platinga, 1998; Vanhoozer, 1998). And, ironically, some observe that Christianity is one of the few institutions in the world today that is truly prepared for a postmodern world because it truly is global, multicultural and multigenerational (Oden, 1992, p. 54).

I, too, take up the imperative in critical literacy of making space for the marginalized to speak. I seek a reordered equity that recovers a place for Christians to speak at the table of public debate and a renewed access that goes some way to overcoming the public/private, fact/value, secular/sacred divides that gate-keep Biblical scholarship out of the public sphere (Lyon, 2000; Pearcey, 2004). Often Christians tend to view their personal religious experience as narrowly religious rather than broadly cultural and therefore separate from the "real" political, economic and aesthetic experience (Crouch, 2008). This work seeks to enter this space as a partial remediation of this. If Sommerville (2006) is correct then it is important for Christian scholars to make their faith visible in their academic roles in order that the marginalization of the university in contemporary culture, which he attributes to secularized values, might be redeemed (cf Burtchaell, 1998; Marsden, 1994). He insists that universities themselves are

increasingly marginalized in society because their commitment to secular values renders them unable to answer the big life questions; questions that people still want answered. He argues that the value of Christian scholars speaking into the academy, lies not only in their ability to answer primal questions, and so redress much of the hollowness that sits at the core of higher education, but that in so doing, it might also work to redeem the marginalisation of the university.

While the thoroughly secularized Australian culture has largely silenced the Christian voice, regarding it irrelevant and reducing faith to a purely private affair, postmodernism, which defines itself over and against the arrogant hubris of modern rationality, claims a place for all perspectives. It is worth noting here that when Derrida began articulating criticisms of rationality, the reformed tradition in Christianity could claim that they had been postmodern, in their delimitation of the claims of rationality, for some time (Hart, 1997; Olthuis, 1997; Smith & Venema, 2004). The well established critical concern for the marginalized voices and perspectives (Hart, 2009; Ludwig, 2009) might now include religious voices and perspectives as well. There are certainly other ways to know: non-rational ways of knowing which are wise to the "other;" a spiritual knowing of the heart with the passionate eye of love (Hart, 1997). Some envisage this 'postsecular' period as a reaffirmation toward religious ways of knowing and, in literary theory in particular, a turn to the religious (McClure, 2007). Hinkson and Ganssle (2000, p. 87) explain that the postmodern ambition to break the modernist hegemony by including marginalized and excluded voices has "resulted (if only reluctantly) in a measured sponsorship of a Christian voice." They say that while this is "not a homecoming, it is a return from exile." This foregrounding of difference is an imperative of critical literacy itself (Morgan, 1997), so I draw confidence from Morgan (1994, p. 36) that critical literacy is "precisely not about shutting down inquiry by pre-determining answers" and that this space is open for dialogue.

The voices of the Christian teachers, in Chapters 5, 8 and 11, emerge at a time when literary theorists, who formerly embraced the emancipatory possibilities inherent in critical reading practices, have shifted position (Culler, 2003; Eagleton, 2004; Fish, 1999; Lentricchia, 1996; Said, 2004). These voices, both Christian and otherwise, suggest that some aspects of critical reading practices are not embraced completely and whole-heartedly by everyone and that as educators we need to look for ways to continue the dialogue about these issues. An authentic critical imperative would require us to enlarge the conversation (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2004) to include the dissenting voices of others, and not just those marked by gender, race, class, and sexuality. It is imperative for the continuation of a genuine critical practice that all voices are brought to the table and that critical practices are not dominated by any particular regime of thought (Patai & Corral, 2005). I take this to be a major imperative of any critical practice, to be

open to critique of its own theoretical underpinnings (Morgan, 1997), and to an exposure of its own prefigured commitments.

Suspicion of 'Theory'

A number of texts have been written that raise important concerns about the dominance of a particular version of social and literary theory in the teaching of literature (Eddins, 1995; Harris, 1996; Kernan, 1997; Patai & Corral, 2005) and following Patai and Corral, among others, I label these 'Theory' (see p.14 below). I am speaking of a body of theory which I discuss below and will designate with a capital T. There is, according to Patai and Corral (2005, p.1 - 14), a growing scepticism regarding Theory. They say that the contributors to their volume are trying to reach a generation of "readers who have been made suspicious of concepts and distinctions" such as "facts and beliefs," "evidence and truth," and "knowledge and opinion," and yet are confused as to what to put in their place (Patai & Corral, 2005, p. 14). After the full force of deconstruction has been brought to bear on these modernist concepts, some now ask what postmodernity seeks to put in their place (Beckford, 1992). What one Christian epistemologist suggests we are left with in Western culture when we affirm the notion of no truth is "not comfortable" for humans and "leaves nagging questions" (Meek, 2003, p. 8). Many teachers share these concerns.

It is not just difference emerging from a faith perspective that fuels my desire to enter this debate but also the belief that if we are going to study developments in theory in the English classroom then we must expose students to reasoned critiques of it as well. I draw impetus from Patai and Corral (2005, p. 12) that we must "scrutinize what is lost as well as what is gained" from the orthodoxies of the past few decades. They consider it crucial to make available to students the many grounds on which the reign of theory has been challenged, so that they "avoid feeling obligated to mirror the dominant discourse as a mark of their own sophistication or their membership in the club" (Patai & Corral, 2005, p. 12).

Some suggest that Theory's malaise points to the need for an ethical vision that reinforces a confessional mode of theological criticism (McCarraher, 2004; Snyder, 2006), while others propose that the resurgence of post-secular religious narratives highlights the need for a religiously inflected disruption of secular constructions of the real (McClure, 2007). Even with the secularisation of Western culture, McGrath (1999) insists that there still exists an underlying hunger for spiritual things. Ludwig (2009) construes this as a turn towards religion and, drawing on the earlier work of Buber (1970), calls for a renewal of the religious to counter the prevalent secularism of this age. The 2007 MLA seminar calling for a turn to religion in literary studies appears to point in the same direction (Kriner, 2009).

This project is a Christian response to literary theories such as Marxism and poststructuralism that moves in that direction.

Key terms

The thesis recurs throughout to a number of key terms: Christianity, critical literacy, poststructuralism, postmodernism, deconstruction and Theory. Each of these terms has a range of meanings, some of which are hotly contested. Each, therefore, requires some brief explication to show my understanding – the understanding that shapes the discussion throughout – of them.

Christianity

Christianity is multifaceted, both in its adherents' assorted doctrinal beliefs, and also their differing views about biblical interpretation. This work is openly situated within a broadly conservative evangelical framework even though there are many other forms of Christian expression within biblical studies such as the historic-critical tradition. This work does not seek to examine its own discursive trajectory or other forms of Christian expression. I have limited my interviewees to people who fit the conservative evangelical position(s) because it was this particular interface of evangelical Christianity and critical theories that I was interested in exploring. While I do not construe the conservative evangelical biblical position(s) as non discursive or inviolable, I do accept as a given that the bible is authoritative in the life of the believer. The Christian teacher interviewees also embraced this position. Both the teachers' voices and mine, emerging from this evangelical standpoint, certainly do not speak for all Christians. Oftentimes when I speak about a 'Christian response' to a particular viewpoint I am referring to this evangelical tradition alone.

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy is not the name of a "finite established identity" (Lankshear, 1997, p. 47). Gee (2001, p. 15) calls critical literacy a "socially perceptive literacy" because it has "so many meanings." It takes "many forms" (Comber, 1993: p. 75) and is "only provisional" and still evolving (Lankshear, 1994). There is "no ultimate paradigm, no final orthodoxy of critical literacy, waiting to be discovered" (Lankshear, 1994, p. 4). There are many ways in which coherent meanings for critical literacy might be, and have been, constructed, and it is much more institutionalised in Australia than it is in North America or the United Kingdom (Misson & Morgan, 2006).

In Australia, critical literacy emerged from the work of Freire (1970, 1973; 1987). It followed neo-Marxist trends, presenting an approach to English that would work on behalf of the oppressed, the suffering and the marginalised (Cox, 1990; Paulo Freire, 1970, 1973; Horton &

Freire, 1990; Shor & Freire, 1987). The hope was that it would enable students to comprehend and critique their personal realities (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gilbert, 1992, 1993), empower them to actively question the social reality around them (Gee, 1989; Muspratt, Luke, & Freebody, 1997), and teach them to continually dispute the values, beliefs and judgments enmeshed in literary instruction (Baker & Freebody, 1993; Freebody, Luke, & Gilbert, 1991; Gilbert, 1992, 1993, 1994) so they could be active in a more democratic social reality. Students taught critical literacy were trained to reflect on the world around them and take action to reform it (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Shor, 1984, 1992).

New understandings of the term ‘critical’ were incorporated into critical practices from the work of Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard so that increasingly it was shaped by poststructuralist notions with close ties to cultural studies. During the 1970’s and 80’s in Australia “poststructuralist thought effected changes at every level of English in Australia” (Mellor & Patterson, 2004, p. 9). Many English educators were thinking and writing in ways that changed the way Australian teachers engaged with texts (Corcoran & Evans, 1987; Davies, 1989a, 1989b; Gilbert, 1989; A. Luke, 1988). The meaning that readers made of texts was tied up with ideology and involved in producing, reproducing and sustaining inequitable power structures (Comber & Kamler, 1997). Moon’s (1990; 2001a/1992) work, along with that of others who created texts for teacher use in the classroom (Mellor, O’Neill, & Patterson, 1987; Mellor & Patterson, 2001a; Mellor, Patterson, & O’Neill, 1991; Mellor, Raleigh, & Ashton, 1984) was instrumental in furthering a poststructuralist view of texts. Other work widened the conversation in terms of popular culture, social class, postcolonialism, race, ethnicity, and boys, for example (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997a, 1997b; Comber & Kamler, 1997; Cope & Kalantis, 1993; Freebody & Luke, 1990; Freebody, et al., 1991; Martino & Mellor, 2000; W. Morgan, 1994, 1997; W. Morgan, Gilbert, Lankshear, Werba, & Williams, 1996). In the course of this project I saw a number of texts being used as class sets to help explain critical literacy (M. Miller & Colwill, 2004; Moon, 2001; Robinson & Robinson, 2003; Yaxley et al., 2005) and others, although not used as class sets, were often used to create class units (Fraser, 2001b; W. Morgan, et al., 1996). As I show in Chapters 4, 7 and 10, they had important links with poststructuralist and Marxist theories.

The presence of critical literacy in the 2002 Queensland Senior English syllabus is very strong. Critical literacy is now included in the state curricular design as a pedagogical platform rather than simply an add on (Alford, 2001). This syllabus, first used in 2003, is heavily aligned with critical literacy approaches, as demonstrated by Gutierrez (2008). Her analysis suggests that the view of language in the syllabus is definitely postmodern. Thus, for instance, all the exit criteria for assessment in Queensland senior English are instantiated with a critical approach to

language, especially the third criterion which calls for students to demonstrate a knowledge and application of the constructedness of texts.

Poststructuralism, postmodernism, and deconstruction

It is important to distinguish between poststructuralism, postmodernism and deconstruction because they are key terms that are often conflated, or used interchangeably (M. A. Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 5). What is understood by the term poststructuralism in the United Kingdom and Australia is often subsumed under postmodernism in North America (Misson & Morgan, 2006). Even though deconstruction may be included as poststructuralist, poststructuralism is a more expansive umbrella term than deconstruction (S. D. Moore, 1994, p. 3). Poststructuralism is a loose term that includes Lacanian psychoanalysis, Kristevan feminism, Althusserian Marxism, Derridean deconstruction and Foucauldian genealogy (S. D. Moore, 1994; Payne & Schad, 2003), even though Foucault denies being a poststructuralist (M. A. Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 17). This particular project touches mainly on the work of Derrida and deconstruction, Foucault and the notion of subjectification, Lyotard and the critique of metanarrative and to a much smaller extent, Kristeva and the notion of intertextuality.

Misson (1998b, p. 146) delineates two strands of poststructuralist thought as generative for critical literacy. The first reconceptualises language, and changes the way texts are read and worked within the classroom.

Misson explains (1998b, p.146):

It provides a theorisation of how people produce different meanings out of words and texts, warns of the danger of closing off meaning too quickly, gives us respect for the multiplicity and the shiftiness of language, shows up the limits of meaning and demonstrates that meaning is not in texts and that meanings are constructions.

The second is a stream concerned with the theorisation of the relationship between language, ideology and human self, and the effect of discourse on the subject. Poststructuralist theories emerge in both the support materials and, to a certain extent, the teachers' understanding of critical literacy.

According to some, there is no such phenomenon as postmodernity, only postmodernities (Tracy, 1999) and some warn that when we attempt to define or analyse the concept of postmodernism, we do it at our own peril (Vanhoozer, 2003). Ironically, however, any description of postmodernism or poststructuralism will reject the notion that a definition is neutral, so at the outset anything definitive said about these terms will be suspect. Postmoderns resist closed, tightly bounded totalizing accounts of such things as the 'essence' of the postmodern. Caputo (2007, p. 145) claims that postmodernism is a term that has drowned out poststructuralism, and Downing

(2006) that there are just as many kinds of postmodernism as there are of Christianity. Greer (2003) identifies Foucault and Derrida, among others, as those that matured the postmodern paradigm. However to complicate matters Derrida, according to Caputo, rejects both terms and embraces the “modern enlightenment project of social and political emancipation” (cf Smith, 2006c). According to Best and Kellner (1997), there is at best, a shared discourse of the postmodern, and there are common perspectives and defining features that coalesce into an emergent postmodern paradigm (cf Borgmann, 1992; Connor, 1989; Toulmin, 1990). Some construe postmodernity as a theological condition (Vanhoozer, 2003).

Deconstruction, a term coined by Derrida in 1967 (Smith, 2005b, p. 34), is “difficult to define and sometimes what cannot be pinned down and labelled is regarded with fear” (Leggo cited in Appleman, 2000, p. 100). Moore (cited in Appleman, 2000, p. 102) says that many have confused deconstruction with destruction. He claims that it is not a kind of “textual vandalism” or “mindless dismantling” or “destruction” as some seem to think. It is also not a method according to many deconstructionists. Miller (cited in Abrams, 2004, p. 207) argues that deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. This project identifies deconstruction as developed in the support materials and in the teachers’ English classes as a method where the students take the text apart layer by layer to make visible the underlying ideology of the text.

Theory

When I use the term Theory I mean literary theories broadly played out in structuralism, Feminism, Marxism, reader response, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, poststructuralism and postmodernism, new historicism and postcolonialism (Hawthorn, 2000; Selden, 1989; Wolfreys, 1999). The modern prophets of Theory, according to Cunningham (2005, p. 27), are Barthes, Derrida, Kristeva, Foucault and others. According to Cunningham such theories, as a loose ensemble of ideas have had an interactive, cumulative and mutually reinforcing affect, and have become an almost irresistible orthodoxy in contemporary academic culture and have filtered out into Western mainstream popular culture to shape everyday understandings of self, freedom, meaning and truth.

I was, and remain, interested in the Christian teaching community coming to grips with Marxist and poststructuralist theories as they inform critical literacy so they can place themselves within the debate with confidence. I am hopeful that the work generated from this project will lead to an improvement in the capacity of Christian teachers (myself included) to read critical literacy and apply its practices in ways that maintain confidence in a faith position as paramount, without losing that which is valuable in critical literacy.

Chapter 2

Methods and methodology

This thesis seeks to remedy the apparent absence of research at the interface of Christianity and critical literacy, and to catalyse further explorations in this area. It adopts a qualitative approach to the research, identifying or generating, and exploring, three bodies of data: broadly theological and philosophical literature that examines relations between Christianity, on the one hand, and Marxist, and poststructuralist ideas on the other; the body of materials recommended for use by teachers teaching critical literacy as part of the Queensland Senior English curriculum; and interviews with twelve self-identifying Christian teachers teaching Senior English in Queensland schools. This chapter offers a rationale for this approach, and discusses a range of methodological issues associated with this approach, including epistemological issues, ethical issues and analytical strategies, and ‘applied’ issues, such as the selection of texts, the selection of teachers, and the original design of the interviews and modifications to the interviews as the study progressed.

Why Qualitative?

Qualitative methods were ideal for this sort of study because I sought to understand the meanings people make of aspects of their professional work. To do this I needed to explore their understanding of critical literacy. However, to develop a rich understanding of the significance of their accounts, I also needed to understand both the intellectual resources with which this aspect of their professional practice was shaped, and the broader discourses within which these materials were framed and might be understood from the broad faith position these teachers shared. I construe all the data, the scholarly exposition, the critique and debate, the curriculum texts and the teacher interviews, as ‘people’ data, data concerned with the articulation of meanings, understandings.

I recognize that qualitative inquiry is constantly being reinterpreted (Schwandt, 2001), and that it represents a variety of methodological and philosophical ideas drawn from a plurality of traditions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I regard this work as qualitative in that it is interdisciplinary blending the vocabularies and ideas from disciplines and fields as diverse as English, philosophy, theology, poststructuralism and literary theory. It generates qualitative data in that it is interested in how critical literacy is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced and constituted. My research interest is in the meaning that Christian teachers give to critical literacy; how it is understood, explained and implemented. I also have an interest in the development of my own perspectives and especially any theoretical changes that might have occurred in the course of this study (Esterberg, 2002).

Qualitative inquiry acknowledges that all inquiry is bounded and that it cannot be abstracted from its context. Our experience as humans is always shaped in context, and nothing in the social world can be understood adequately if isolated from it. Contrary to Sherman and Rodman's (1988) claim that qualitative research does not seek to verify a predetermined idea, I did, in the first stage of reviewing the literature, look explicitly for the existence of tensions at this particular interface. I take as a given that all inquiry is questioning or searching with intent or an objective in mind and that it is not possible to context-strip entirely all knowledge claims. While I certainly did find the expected tensions at this interface I also found multifaceted agreements and an unexpected plurality of views that I was not expecting. Both the literature and the teacher interviews did not always bear out my initial presuppositions.

In taking a qualitative stance, I take as a given that the data, and my subsequent analysis of it, is not beyond judgment. I prefer, as Seale (1999, p. 6) suggests, a "fallibilistic" approach more in keeping with the subtle realism of Hammersley (1990) or the critical realism of Bhaskar (Basden, 2004; Norris, 1999). Schwandt (1996, p. 69), in explicating the purpose for qualitative research inquiry, says that it must be successful at "enhancing or cultivating critical intelligence in both parties in the research encounter" and also that good qualitative inquiry will enable the "training or calibration of human judgment." I hope that has been the case for the teachers; certainly, for me this entire project has led to a readjustment of *my* thought in some areas. Buchanan (1992) construes qualitative research as more emancipatory than quantitative research because it has ethical goals of helping people lead less alienated lives. I would like to think that the process of this research for teachers achieves these goals, but it is not necessarily the case that qualitative research works towards emancipation and I hesitate to make those claims for this project.

Rationale for Three Data Sources

Semi-structured Interviews

The central data for exploring teachers' views was generated from in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995) with twelve English teachers from Queensland Christian schools. This involved face-to-face contact in one-to-one situations where we engaged in interactional exchange of dialogue. I did two interviews per person, with a third interview to clarify certain points in some cases. The interviews lasted for about an hour and were conducted at the place of the teacher's choice, which was usually the school where they taught. I studied the interview data for their themes and contradictions *and* their silences (Minichiello, et al., 1995).

I used in-depth interviewing because I wanted to explore the significance of the teachers' experiences as described from their own perspective (Minichiello, et al., 1995). Because

interviews require a researcher to have personal interaction with the individuals in their context, I could hear their language and observe their behaviour in a face-to-face encounter. As Geertz (1973) points out, this careful observation enabled me to be more aware of contradictions and ambivalences within what, on the surface, might seem like a simple reality. In this interaction I needed at times to be able to clarify certain issues so that I was as clear as possible on what they were saying. Exercising only loose control over the format of the questions allowed me flexibility to address the significant suggestions that the teachers initiated (Denscombe, 2003 p. 166). I bore in mind Kvale's (1996) point that the more structured the interview situation the easier the later analysis would be but maintaining the flexibility proved productive, and a rigid, more formal approach to interviewing could well have instantiated a researcher/teacher gap that I wanted to avoid.

The eventual analysis, explanation and argument required that both the teachers and I needed to develop an understanding of the theological issues at the interface of Christianity and critical literacy. This required interviews that were in-depth and that carried a degree of complexity, detail and context, or what Mason (2002, p. 3) calls "well rounded contextual understandings." The interviews were semi-structured so that I could be flexible and sensitive to the context of the interview. The teachers on a few occasions introduced aspects of the topic that I had not thought of, or sometimes the teachers saw things from a different viewpoint than my own. As a qualitative researcher I wanted them to speak for themselves even if it challenged my preconceived views (Mason, 2002; Schwandt, 2001). I tried to be actively committed to a type of self-critical reflexivity so that I did not blindly continue to drive the interviews in the direction I wanted. This required a self conscious approach on my part, in which I had to constantly take stock of my own actions and my role in the research process. Semi-structured interviews in particular facilitate this sensitivity to the interview context in ways that a rigidly standardized structure does not.

Analysis of Support Materials

While the teacher interviews provided the critical core data, in order to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the teachers' grasp of critical literacy, I saw a need to examine the curriculum support materials used in each school. This enabled me to see the ways in which critical theories had formed their theory and practice of critical literacy and I was able to identify where poststructuralist and Marxist views emerged in the materials.

Analysis of Literature

While an examination of the support materials provided an insight into one of the ways that critical theories were understood by Christian teachers I deemed it essential to venture behind these texts to also examine their theoretical underpinnings. This facilitated the development of

the initial research questions that were in turn adjusted and honed for the interviews. I worked backwards in a sense from the initial anecdotal understanding that Christian teachers found aspects of critical literacy problematic, to an exploration of what theories underpinned critical literacy in the support materials to the overarching philosophical and theological ideas that informed these materials. I was unable to conduct the interviews before I understood what notions of critical literacy were presented to the teachers in the support materials and I was unable to examine the support materials until I understood where the tensions, and sometimes convergences, lay for Christianity and various critical theories.

Methodological Issues

Epistemological Framework

Qualitative research seems to be caught between competing conceptions about the nature of the social world and how we may know it. Positivism, realism, critical theory, feminism, interpretism, constructivism and poststructuralism are all competing within the Western social sciences to name the truth or, as in deconstructionism, to leave truth nameless (Scheurich, 1995). In the very broadest of terms, Esterberg (2002) classifies these competing frames between researchers as those who assert that research is all a matter of interpretation, and those who try to persuade readers of the truth value of their own positions. Fortunately Seale (1999) reminds us that we do not have to solve these paradigmatic disputes before we enter into research, but we do need to be clear about where we stand.

Critical Realism

The epistemological framework that I am most comfortable with is critical realism, originally explicated in the work of Bhaskar (Basden, 2004; Norris, 1999). This is an acceptance of an objectively existing world with the possibility of trustworthy knowledge of it. However this position recognizes the prejudice of human knowing, and so advocates an ongoing critical conversation to repeatedly reassess the essentials of one's framework. Bhaskar claims that a critical realist stance avoids epistemological absolutism by accepting that all beliefs are contextually prefigured, and yet avoids relativism by rejecting the claims that all theories or knowledge claims are equally valid. Critical realists say that there *is* literary knowledge with determinate meaning and correct interpretation, but that we cannot be absolutely certain that we have it. In critical realism the world is there, independent and determinate, but yet indescribable apart from language and interpretive schemes, and even then any one scheme is only partially adequate. Naugle (2004d) calls critical realism "a golden mean epistemology" that avoids the arrogance of modernity and also the despair of postmodernity, a more chastened and modest view than either, with a degree of epistemic humility.

I draw on the earlier work of Harstock (1983) and Harding (1986), and instead of assuming that objectivity is possible, I assume that it is impossible. When humans are the researchers, as well as the objects of study, we always have a vested interest in what we study. I simply accept that the way I approached the initial research questions, and the way I framed my research questions, is unavoidably situated. I am prefigured and constrained by a biblical mindset and framework to start with. As much as I would like to read the transcripts outside of my Christian paradigm, or outside of a language game, to really see contradictions that do not fit and to read for difference or absences, it is a very difficult thing to do. There certainly is a set of discourses that goes with being a Christian, and it is very difficult to step outside of those traditional concepts and categories of thought. Thus, Derrida's notion of defamiliarisation or internal distancing to prevent concepts settling down into routine habits of thought is the opposite of the Christian mind that is called to conform to biblical concepts. The Old Testament understands memory and repetition of scripture as invaluable in forming the individual's inner being. A major part of the thrust in Christianity is a common language that identifies and establishes who we are in Christ (Kapitzke, 1995). To prevent these concepts from settling down and congealing as truths is actually contrary to the traditional Christian position. Whether this has Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant specificities I could not say.

The poststructuralist suspicion of rationality has opened space for new epistemologies that draw on religious belief. I draw on the work of Quinn (2001) who advocates a redeeming of Western education away from the soulless domination of rationality, to retrieve story, narrative and imagination in education. She posits the need in education for a renewed concern for spiritual matters. She claims that privileging rationality neglects matters of the soul so that the deeper issues of life, such as questions of origins and matters of ultimacy, are silenced. This project acknowledges trans-empirical realities and an embrace of the metaphysical, daring to be sincerely religious within the academy without being "deemed irrational and fideistic" (Naugle, 1994, p. 1). Christians are increasingly arguing that the diminishment of the epistemological domain through the "confining assumptions of modernity not only suffocates the human spirit but also places limiting and perhaps unnecessary restrictions on other knowledge enterprises including science itself" (Allen, 1989; Naugle, 1994; Swinburne, 1993). There appears to be a renaissance in the religious way of knowing, led by the Reformist Christian philosopher Platinga (1984, 1998, 1999; Platinga & Wolterstorff, 1983; 2002). Platinga argues that belief in God can be properly basic and rational without evidence or support by any argument. Natural theology is unnecessary for the epistemic credibility of religion and Christian philosophers should take certain Christian doctrines as assumptions in their philosophical search (Naugle, 1994). The critique of the modernist mindset with its ratio-evidentialist epistemology has

provided space for a legitimate option in the postmodern context, such that the boundaries of the rationally and intellectually respectable are increased dramatically.

My Stance

Esterberg (2002, p. 9) calls all researchers to make their world view explicit, arguing that the different worldviews or paradigms that we use are not provable so they are *all* “essentially matters of faith.” To that end, I want to make clear that the overarching theoretical position of this work derives from a Christian faith position. My understanding of the world emerges from a ‘biblical’ perspective, even though I acknowledge the multiplicity of positions indicated by that term, and that it signifies in many different ways for different people. I believe that God exists objectively and independently of our human constructions of him and that he has been revealed in history through his son Jesus Christ. Knowledge about God is socially and historically contextual but the interpretations are not endless because the final authority is in God himself. God constituted reality and continues to hold it together and he speaks into the world and into our human constructions through the Holy Spirit. All communities, academic or otherwise, create grounds on which the plausibility of their truth claims can be judged. Whether the grounds that I use can be supported in an ultimate sense is a matter of faith and eventual eschatological resolution.

I began this project knowing very little about where my broad guiding question would take me. As I launched into the deep waters that these questions raised I began to feel uncomfortable with the fact that I was not entirely sure where I was situated as a Christian. I knew emphatically that I was one, but I was not sure what type. I assumed I was a Protestant Evangelical, but when I gave it some thought, I was not entirely sure what that was. I had always harbored in my heart a couple of Catholic sensibilities, so where did I really sit? In the course of this work I came to see that Evangelicalism is now a seriously contested and disputed concept (Brand, 2004; Wells, 1993); that many now work to define just what an evangelical is (Hunter, 1987; Penning & Smidt, 2000); and that it is very difficult to define (Bloesch, 1983; Wells, 1994b). Some even argue that there is no such thing anymore (Dayton, 1976; Hart, 2004), although there are others who still engage in work to explicate what Evangelicals think (Wells, 2005; Wells & Woodbridge, 1975) and others who write from an avowedly Evangelical position (Erickson, 1998a, 1998b, 2002; Wells, 1994a). Brand (2004, p. 283) argues that the term Evangelical is still of use in describing the broad coalition of conservative Christianity today. He maintains that the following beliefs mark out an Evangelical: a belief in the triune God, an expectation of a second coming, a need for evangelism, an embrace of the authority and reliability of scripture, and a life of discipleship before God. Every one of these core beliefs intersect in interesting and sometimes tense ways with both the Marxist and poststructuralist ideas that underpin critical literacy.

Ethical Questions

Informed Consent

Because qualitative data is mostly based on analyses and presentations that may personally identify the informants, the question of confidentiality is important. To this end I coded the teachers, the regions and the schools so they would not be recognized. I do not foresee any potential harm accruing to my participants. The teachers were consenting adults who discussed their experiences of a teaching practice and its related theories; they were not therapeutic interviews. I believe the sum of the potential benefits to the subject will outweigh possible risk of harm, if any, to the subject (Kvale, 1996, p. 116). I did however watch for critical or sensitive issues that may have arisen in the interviews. I provided teachers with a context for the interview by a briefing beforehand, including a definition of the topic, by speaking of its purpose and the fact that I would audio tape it, and by a debriefing afterward (Kvale, 1996). The high level of trust that the teachers placed in me required a marked degree of responsibility to ensure that I did not abuse that trust. I certainly hope that my conduct in the research, and the work that emanates from this project, does not cause any damage to the interests of the teachers (Finch, 1984). I obtained the subjects' informed written consent to participate in the study and to publish my subsequent analysis of the data. Each teacher signed a formal letter of consent written as a contract. This included the fact that they voluntarily entered the project and that they could leave the project at any time. It informed the teachers about the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design as well as any risks or benefits that may accrue to them as a result of participating in the research project.

Consent in qualitative research is a bit difficult to lock down in some ways (Esterberg, 2002). A problem I did foresee in providing too much information about the specific purposes of the study along with the informed consent was that it could lead them to specific answers. I thought if I said less about my preconceived ideas at the beginning it might be easier to gain their 'natural' views on the subject, and not just ones that coincided with mine. I did not provide much detail about the questions beforehand, only a general overview. I thought this might help me obtain knowledge as uncontaminated by my initial hypothesis as possible (Kvale, 1996, p. 113). As it turned out, had I provided a full disclosure of a design plan of questions with the consent form it would have been somewhat changed in the course of the interviews, as unanticipated leads materialized from the teachers themselves. This in turn changed the questions somewhat. All this said, I agree with the common sense notion of Eisner (1991, p. 215) when he says, "how can we inform others so as to obtain consent when we have such a hard time predicting what we need to get consent about?"

Benefits for Informants

In research today, the legitimization question of whether a study is scientific tends to be replaced by the pragmatic question of whether a study provides useful knowledge (Kvale, 1996, p. 42). These are ethical questions of course, because researchers need to ask what benefit the teachers will gain from the giving of their time to the project. In my research project I hope that I am able to help Christian teachers embrace the tools of critical literacy with a newly informed understanding of the areas of tension between it and a faith perspective. The work of questioning may encourage a renewed confidence in Christian teachers when syllabus documents make requirements of them that clash with their faith position. It certainly has for me. The wider benefits are that any negotiation of meaning, interpretations and truth are matters that must be pertinent to universities and indeed to all humanity. The wider plan was always to write a support text for Christian schools that could be used in conjunction with the critical literacy support materials. This would be potentially useful for all Australian schools.

Methodological Issues

Problems with Interviews

One of the arguments raised against qualitative research relying on interviews is that it is too subjective and contradictory and therefore of no use. The interviews might be unreliable in that they rest on leading questions, are too inter-subjective, too person-dependent and only explorative not quantitative. However, I draw on Kvale (1996), to argue that it is precisely the subjective nature of the interviews that is their real strength for this project. The interviews capture the teacher's view of a theme and their particular picture of the "manifold and controversial world" (Kvale, 1996, p. 7). The qualitative analysis of a cultural practice is not an experimental science seeking a causal law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning (Kvale, 1996). Interviews are particularly well suited for studying people's understandings of the meanings in their lived world. I certainly found them invaluable for clarifying the Christian teachers' own experiences of critical literacy and the meanings they made of it. I accept as a given that there are knowledge potentials in human conversation. The knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations and experiences of humans are definitely meaningful properties of the social reality, which my research questions were designed to explore. Qualitative interviewing tends to be regarded as involving the construction and reconstruction of knowledge rather than the excavation of it (Kvale, 1996; Mason, 2002). In that way, the meanings and understandings we came to together in our interaction in the interviews became a *co-production* involving myself and the teachers. Scheurich (1995) points out that new empathetic interviewing has appeared that openly takes an ethical stance in favour of the individual or group being studied. My hope and intention is that the teachers became advocates

or partners in the study, and that their participation, and the outcomes of the study, have been, and will be, beneficial for them.

Interpreter Bias

Although I struggled with the issue of whether my frame of reference would force the data, I also acknowledge at the outset that the process of knowing in no way resembles an impersonal achievement of detached objectivity. All acts of knowing “are rooted throughout from our selection of the problem to the verification of the discovery in personal acts of tacit integration” (Polanyi & Prosch, 1975, p. 63). To some degree all human knowing is subjective. My presuppositions will definitely determine to some extent what meanings I find in the text. If we continue with the belief that neutrality is impossible even though desirable, then taking a stance is unavoidable (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 696). What I will do is make my framework clearly visible so that readers of my research understand the extent to which this project has been influenced by my world view. I can only hope I am self-reflexive enough to challenge my own interpretations and to look for glitches and gaps that do not support my perspective to see what they might tell me. Fontana and Frey (2005, p. 696) assert that the goal of scientific neutrality in interviewing is largely “mythical” and that when we do interviews it is really a two-way, collaborative process, not a neutral exchange of asking and answering questions (Fontana, 2002; 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Scheurich, 1995). Data will always to some extent be produced through pre-existing values and theories. This is unavoidable. I admit I did become painfully aware that when I first began reading the transcripts I was reading from a strong biblically-framed viewpoint. I was scanning the transcripts looking for a particular narrative or looking for a particular doctrinal position. This, I might add, is something that I have seen done numerous times in critical literacy, as students scan the literature for evidence of inequitable representations of gender, race and class.

I concede Derrida’s (1981) point that it is difficult to break free from the discourse out of which the research issues arose in the first place. Any re-inscription is always old cloth. My poststructuralist leanings have made me, to some degree, suspicious about language and interpretations, and I found this a real point of tension in terms of interpreting what the teachers were saying. When I was reading the transcripts I was aware that I was seeing language that is part of my referential history and culture and that affirmed my own assumptions.

It was a difficult process trying to actually read the transcripts for contradictions instead of reading for unity, because on the one hand I was going to write to achieve some degree of coherent unity (after all, someone was going to read and examine this thesis), but on the other hand I was endeavouring to look at these transcripts and somehow jump out of my own

subjectivity, what Habermas (1973, p. 181) calls “jumping over the open horizon of your own life activity.”

I worked hard to suspend the context of the tradition in which I belonged and in which my own subjectivity as a Christian was formed. I must be honest, I found it a very difficult thing to do, even given the respect I feel for the Derridean view of being open to the Other. I recognized at the outset that I needed to be open to a possible shift in my own perspectives. I did modify the research questions a little once I began my investigation, and, as it turned out, I did need to have the ability to remain open to what the research had to offer (Esterberg, 2002). Other points of view arose in the course of the interviews that I had not thought of, and I explore those in my concluding chapter even though they did not support my original thesis. A number of my presupposed meanings were not held by the teachers. However, even given that determinate meaning is difficult to arrive at, I choose to take up Schwandt’s (2001) counsel that we should still be relatively confident that genuine meaning does emerge in the encounter with that which we seek to understand.

The Difficulty of Language

The current change of emphasis in social research from observation of, to conversation with, the social world, means that interviews might now have a privileged position (Kvale, 1996, p. 289). However, there are difficulties that arise when using interviews for data. I can see that the perceptions generated in an interview are not a direct reflection of understandings already existing outside of the interview situation. I cannot assume that their answers are their final statements on the matter. Neither can I assume that these twelve teachers constitute ‘the’ Christian voice. I am certainly not producing universal truths from Christian teachers about critical literacy. I cannot be certain that I have produced a valid account of the interviews, try as I might. Language is a difficult medium. Twice when I revisited an answer for clarification the interviewer pointed out that I had not understood them correctly or they had changed their position over time. Many things intervene in the process to make a statement about validity very tenuous. Nouns were often an issue. When terms such as emancipation, liberty, freedom, identity, truth and meaning were used they were fraught with multiplicity. For instance when the term ‘emancipation’ was used this had specificities within education discourse *and* religious discourse that could never be assumed to be unitary. As soon as I asked questions linking the notions of emancipation to notions of textual authority it was obvious that this was a place of very fertile multiplicity even within Christianity alone.

Even given the difficulty of language I still hold to the view that signification ceases at some point. Multiple interpretations and possible significations are not endless because the interview

transcripts speak back to me and therefore I am not free to interpret them any way I want. The language itself limits the possibility of signification.

Leading Questions

I also struggled at the beginning with the notion of leading questions. As the interviews progressed, I learnt to give less and less explanation of what I was trying to get at with the questions. Giving too much information about the specific purpose of the study led them to give specific answers. I found, as I interviewed more participants, and said less, it was easier to gain *their* views on the subject and not just views that coincided with mine. This was a consideration that I saw working out in practice (Kvale, 1996). However, even with the problems associated with language, I used interviews because I required a “depth, a nuance and a complexity in the data,” rather than broad surveys or questionnaires of more superficial patterns (Mason, 2002, p. 65). I believe in language as a gift to creation that can point towards meaning and truth. I also regard the human subject as the best possible resource for ascertaining knowledge, especially when my research questions were specifically asking about their thoughts on something. Instead of viewing interviews of people and their lives as too person-dependent, I view the person as a rich site of knowledge and interviews, as that which provides a unique interaction between the researcher and the teacher (Davies, Flemmen, Gannon, Laws, & Watson, 2002; Davies & Gannon, 2006; Kamler, 1999). Or, as Kvale (1996) explains, the knowledge produced by interviews will produce *Inter View (s) data*. In this way the researcher becomes a conversational partner with other speakers and other texts; partners engaged in a joint search for meaning.

Choosing Teachers to Interview

I have chosen teachers strategically by selecting them on the basis of their relevance to my research questions, my theoretical perspectives and my analytical framework (Mason, 2002). I do not pretend that my sample is representative of all teachers in Christian schools, and it is certainly not representative of the entire Christian population. All I can suggest is that the twelve teachers offer an example of what Christian responses to critical literacy might be. I chose to focus strategically and meaningfully on a small number of Christian teachers to bring their in-depth perspectives to my research question. I chose the teachers on the basis of five criteria. First, that they have an acknowledged faith in Christ; second, that they teach English at senior secondary level; third, that they have taught critical literacy as part of the English syllabus; fourth, that they regard the Christian scriptures as authoritative in their lives; and fifth, that they are able to make themselves available within both our time constraints. I am not interested in a broad sweep or a census view of the issues, but rather a deep, fully situated and localized view of this research problem.

Practical Issues of Access

I procured a Christians Schools Association list for Central and North Queensland, and after ethics approval I wrote to the school Principals, and followed up with a phone call. They passed me on to their appropriate Head of Faculty, and I discussed the five criteria that I required in the teachers to be interviewed.

The choice of committed Christians might appear as if I was setting the research up to get what I was looking for. This was, in fact, the case. I was looking for the points of tension that might exist for Christians at this particular interface, so I needed the teachers to be committed in their faith and knowledgeable about the scriptures. I did not need just any English teachers, and I did not need just any Christian teachers. I need Christian English teachers who had thought about these issues, and had a sound knowledge of the Christian scriptures. There were informants in the regions where I worked, and further north, who fitted these criteria. Although I am certain it would provide fascinating data, I did not analyse dimensions of age, gender, ethnicity or social class in this project, as these variables were not crucial for my purposes.

Which Schools?

I chose teachers from the Queensland Christian Schools Association because a requirement to work in their schools is that you must profess a Christian faith. In many church schools or many denominational schools this is not a condition of employment. Thus, I considered that I was more likely to find teachers that fitted the above five criteria in the independent Queensland Christian Schools Association than in other church schools. I required the teachers to meet these particular criteria so I could generate a close up, detailed view of their response to my research questions. Not all the teachers I initially approached were happy to be interviewed, and the busyness of a teacher's life made it difficult to get time for interviews.

Moral Implications of the Study

I initially hoped that this study would contribute knowledge that went some way to ameliorate the situation for teachers of faith that might experience some ambivalence to teaching critical literacy. I also hoped it would help them conceptualize a way of reading critical literacy that is based on faith and that still allows for an embrace of the tools of critical literacy.

Methods of Data Analysis

First Data Set: The Literature

In the first data set, I selected literature that discussed Christianity, postmodernism, poststructuralism and Marxism, and relations among them, mostly from a Christian point of view; I teased out the tensions and agreements among them in Chapters 3, 6 and 9. The issues I

found were complex and there was not perfect agreement at all between Christians on most of the issues raised; indeed, there was sufficient diversity of views such that I was able to discuss only some of the complexities involved in the arguments and counter arguments they raised.

Second Data Set: The Curriculum Support Materials

The texts that form a corpus of curriculum support materials for teachers teaching Senior English constituted my second set of data. These texts had been purchased by the participating schools to provide professional instruction for teachers in the critical practice of reading/viewing/hearing and writing about texts. I employed three criteria for choosing which of these texts to examine. First, they had to be texts that teachers used; second, they had to be explicating a critical approach to texts; and third, they had to target the demands of the Queensland Studies Authority 2002 Senior English syllabus. I paid particular attention to texts that were used by the teachers as class sets because, according to the teachers, they had some constitutive effect on their construal of critical literacy. This was especially the case where teachers had no professional development, or theoretical background in critical literacy, and consequently relied on the support materials to inform their practice of critical literacy. A number of teachers said they felt they were grabbing a life line with these materials, particularly in the case of the texts that were used as class sets.

The following is a summary of the seven most commonly used and cited in this project:

Challenging the Text: Critical Literacy units for Secondary English (Fraser, 1996, p. 3) was specifically designed to help Queensland English teachers to acquire a better grasp of critical literacy practices (Gilbert, 2001). It includes 15 English work units written by a team of North Queensland English teachers during the second half of 1994 (Foster, 2001; Fraser, 2001a; Gillespie, 2001; Hannay, 2001; Johnson, 2001a; Jones, 2001; Larrazabal, 2001; Lemon, 2001; McEwan, 2001; Pappalardo, 2001; Queitzsch, 2001; Salk, 2001). Guided by critical thinkers (Comber, 1993; Gilbert, 1993; Lankshear, 1994; Luke, et al., 1994a; Luke, 1994; Misson, 1990; Moon, 2001; Peim, 1993; Thomson, 1992a) they work to denaturalize their classroom practices, expose dominant discourses, restore the marginalized, expose gendered reading practices, make visible textual positioning, foreground language as a social practice and offer strategies for rethinking authorship, single human identities, textual authority and personal response.

Literary Terms: A Practical Glossary (Moon, 2001) provides an overview of the terminology commonly used in critical reading practices. Originally published in 1992, it was revised in 2001 to explicate the terms used in literary theory, and especially poststructuralist theory, that had become “part of the mainstream of study in subject English” (2001, p. vii). The revisions were a response to the perception that students needed to become “effective users of critical

terminology by understanding the goals and practices associated with particular ways of reading” (2001, p. vii).

What Does it Mean? Discourse, Text and Culture: An Introduction (Robinson & Robinson, 2003) was written in response to a perceived need of senior English teachers for a comprehensive introductory text to complement the new Senior Syllabus in English as put forward by the Queensland Studies Authority. It covers topics such as discourse, denotation, connotation, intertextuality, deconstruction, dominant/resistant readings and the respective ideologies within texts, including for example, feminism, sexism and racism.

Queensland Senior English: Theory-practice connection (M. Miller & Colwill, 2004) is a text designed for Years 11 and 12 English students to develop their theoretical understanding of the “constructed nature of texts, with particular emphasis on how discourses shape and are shaped by language choices” (2004, p. v). It examines representations, discourse and intertextuality and seeks to provide an “understanding of how textual representations and meanings in texts are constructed” (M. Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. v).

Textual Journeys: Exploring Senior English (Herrett, Kelliher, & Simon, 2003) is not a Queensland publication but it is a text I have seen used in many Queensland schools. The authors endeavour to unpack the often sophisticated academic language of literary criticism and to explicate the various theories in a way that renders them intelligible.

Nelson Queensland English Book 3 (Yaxley, et al., 2005) is part of a series written by teachers who are experienced practitioners in both state and independent Queensland secondary education systems. It maintains an “unequivocal commitment to critical literacy practices.” Although this series (Books 1, 2 and 3) are mostly utilized in the lower levels of secondary education, I have seen Book 3 used in years 11 and 12 in Queensland schools.

Reading Fictions (Mellor, et al., 1991) is designed to introduce some of the ideas suggested by recent literary theory about reading, readers and texts. The authors hope that students will become aware of plural meanings or interpretations, be able to analyze *how* they produce particular readings, consider what is at stake in the differences among competing readings and ask on whose behalf particular readings are made (Mellor, et al., 1991, p. 96).

I also read, but made less analytical use of, a number of other sources that covered similar issues but were less used by the teachers (Appleman, 2000; Jones, 2001; Lemon, 2001; Linn, 1996; Luke, et al., 1994a; Mellor, et al., 1987; Mellor, O'Neill, & Patterson, 1992; Mellor & Patterson, 2001a, 2001b; Misson, 1998a, 1998b; Misson & Morgan, 2006; Morgan, 1992, 1997, 1998a; Morgan, et al., 1996; Thomson, 1992b).

Examination of Support Materials

I read the support texts with a view to establishing whether there was evidence of poststructuralist or Marxist theories and I looked for practical exercises within the texts that I thought might instantiate some of the philosophical/theological ideas behind critical literacy. Given that Christians construed some of these ideas as disabling it was important to establish in what ways these ideas were embedded in the materials. I did confirm these theories as present in various ways and to different degrees within the texts, and this is demonstrated in Chapters 4, 7 and 10. I observed that while some of the support materials provide the qualification that many of the positions taken on author, text and subject are currently theoretically contested areas (Herrett, et al., 2003; Misson, 1998b) in many cases these notions are presented as a given. For instance, even though the support texts provided practical exercises that encouraged a multiplication of possible significations on any sign, they did not explain whether signification ceases at some point or how this might be achieved. It was overlooked or silenced, even though there was considerable concern as explicated in Chapters 3 and 6 that infinite signification might produce disabling results. Generally the support materials present an anti realist epistemological position as a given and readers are not exposed to the possibility that the necessary refutation of naïve realism does not overthrow realism altogether. Alternative realist positions, such as critical realism, are silenced.

Contradictions in Support Materials

I also observed an inconsistency in the support materials in that they referred to their own constructions as “books,” and then proceeded to call the other writings that they provided for examination, “texts.” This suggests more than a simple exchange of terminology because a book, as opposed to the text, connotes substantial presence, authorial control, boundedness and textual authority. It is a metaphysical entity backed by its authors and their presence (Vanhoozer, 1998). When Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. v - ix) make claims about what their book is designed to achieve they assert that “this *book* has been written,” and “the aim of this *book* is” and, “this *book* is designed as.” A text on the other hand, connotes a shifting discursive field and multiple intertextual references without any stable core or authorial determination. When they refer to the work of others included for critical examination they say, “working with a wide range of *texts*”, “to aid you in deconstructing *texts*” and “we need to analyze the overall ‘meaning’ or dominant ideology of the *text*” (cf Mellor, et al., 1991, p. 4; Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. v). Whether consciously or not their own books are presented as authoritative, while the articles and books used to demonstrate a critical analysis are used as texts that the reader can play with and bestow with multiple meanings. Their own book

establishes an anti realist stance that is presented without any visible interrogation of its own discursive traces although this is not the case with all the support materials (see Herrett, et al., 2003; Mellor, et al., 1991). Generally speaking, the self conscious writing is directed towards the text of the other, not their own.

Third Data set: The Interviews

I initially began doing all the transcription of data myself. I wanted to do my own transcribing so that I had some control over the interpretational character of transcription, and also so that I became familiar with the data early on. My plan was to do the transcripts as soon after the interview as possible. That way, I remembered reasonably well what the nervous laughter, the silences, the frustration and the facial expressions (included in the transcripts) were about. Half way through I realized that I would not have time to transcribe all the data and passed it on to a kind friend. She included as many things as she could hear, but obviously not what she was unable to see. With these interviews there was also a longer gap between my doing the interviews and seeing these transcripts. I was very much aware of Mishler's (1986) comment that when an interview is transcribed the text becomes data, and the physical non-verbal aspects of communication disappear. I felt a little removed from these transcripts, in a way I had not with the others. The words became somewhat de-contextualized because variation in tone and intensity, as well as pauses and rhythm, all disappeared, whereas this was something that I had heard and could remember in the earlier interviews.

It became clear to me from the questions that the transcriber asked me during her typing that transcription itself is, to a small extent, an interpretive process. It is not just a simple clerical task. The practical problems of transcription raise theoretical and methodological issues about the differences between oral and written language. I began to think about what a faithful transcription of the teachers' oral statements should look like. I could literally see Ong's (2002) account of the nature and importance of the change from the oral, situational, empathetic and participatory nature of the interview itself to a written transcript that was analytic, abstract and objectively distanced. Some of the teachers I knew personally, and I felt that in a sense the inflections, body language, emotions and facial expressions, the things that marked them as people I knew, were sanitized out of the interview transcripts. The transcripts became verbal data rather than a personal interaction between two people. They were abstracted from their base in a social interaction, and in a way I felt I had lost the teachers in the transcripts and some of the richness of their presence and their ideas.

Reliability of Interview Data

There will always be questions about the reliability and the validity of interview data because of the nature of the process, because of human interpretations and the complexities of language not

being mimetic (J. J. Scheurich, 1995). This is exacerbated when the interpretive process necessitates an abstraction from the original oral discourse in the interview situation to the abstracted written discourse of the transcription (Poland, 1995). Having been immersed into poststructuralist notions some years before, I found I could not innocently examine the data as if there were a stable, non contextual and transparent relation between representation and reality and between language and meaning. This provided an interesting tension, writing from a Christian faith position, and yet remaining open to what the data was actually saying, especially when it did not confirm my presuppositions. I could see a minefield of difficult theoretical and methodological problems attached to interviews, bearing in mind the slipperiness of language to ascertain knowledge of something (Mishler, 1991). Was I presenting them correctly? Is this really what they meant? Did that word have the same meaning for them as it did for me? These were all questions that worried me at times as I read and re-read the transcripts.

I do not regard the transcriptions as perfectly accurate empirical data. I accept that they are interpretive constructions to a certain extent, primarily from my part but also from my transcriber. However, I believe that there are still great knowledge potentials in human conversation (Kvale, 1996, p. 9). Christian teachers will have attitudes or beliefs about critical literacy that they have taken up through their exposure to it in classrooms, through its cultural products, and also by the particular professional development offered by the schools. I assume epistemologically that these attitudes and beliefs about critical literacy are knowable, and that it is possible to generate knowledge about them and evidence of them from the interviews, although not with absolute certainty, and that it is possible to procure evidence of these attitudes and generate knowledge about them. I take as a given, even given the suspicion now directed towards consciousness and language, that the teachers can express to me, using language, what their concerns or joys might be and that I can ascertain with a reasonable amount of certainty what they were saying. I acknowledge the situatedness of all knowledge production and that I work within my own discursive history and culture, but I am cautiously confident that this project can go some way toward generating knowledge about how Christian teachers respond to critical literacy.

How I Interpreted the Interviews

I read the transcripts through twice to begin with, and then did a word search on them. I began by scanning through them looking for recurring themes. I worked through the data with an inner tension most of the time, aware that I needed to be careful not to let my theological perspectives overly determine what I 'saw' (Seale, 1999, p. 12). I could see the danger of prioritizing political goals, or in my case theological goals, in research because they would come to dominate my interpretations of the social world being investigated. I worked to clarify during the interview the meanings of the answers with respect to the categories used later, mainly

because I was going to categorize the answers so I wanted to be sure about their meaning. I experienced a degree of methodological anxiety that was actually a bit paralyzing at times, but I took heart from Seale (1999) who says that the textual and political awareness promoted by critical theorists and the postmodern critique need not involve the abandonment of a strong authorial voice. He recommends that although claims to have one correct version of research are dubious we must still “play it loud” (Seale, 1999, p. 16). In fact Hammersley, cited in Seale, cautions against too much introspection and says that if we abandon a strong authorial voice we have abandoned our responsibilities as a researcher.

Mason (2002) and Seale (1999) both argue that the best way for researchers to proceed with research is to use what we can from postmodernist, modernist, realist or humanist perspectives and not try to denigrate other traditions or to assert the ultimate authority of our own paradigm. While I acknowledge the tenuous nature of definitive and universal knowledge claims there also seems to be something puerile about a radical relativism. I think research can produce more than linguistically mediated social constructions. Otherwise why bother engaging in it? While I find the constant poststructuralist hostility towards allegedly authoritative claims of representation and their denial of the possibility of truth at times limiting, I do have a degree of respect for some sort of critical epistemology. I work from the view, and find the view defensible, that I can be reasonably confident that this project goes some way towards indicating the meaning that these particular Christian teachers give to critical literacy and what they make of it in relation to their faith.

Overall then, the study takes a qualitative approach, using interviews with the teachers to explore the ways they understand critical literacy, and contexting those understandings against both the support materials most used and the broader understandings of the interface of Christianity, poststructuralism and Marxism articulated in a substantial body of literature by Christian theologians and philosophers. While recognising the limitations of both the actual conduct of the interviews, and the selection of literature, and of the confidence which may be placed in any interpretation of such data, I suggest that this approach, and the specific methods used offer a reasonable basis for understanding how Christian teachers understand and to some extent address tensions between their faith and the understandings of truth and authority embedded in the subject they teach. I now proceed to an analysis of the broadest context within which I situate their understandings: the understandings of the relations between Christian faith and Marxism and poststructuralism in the writings of a range of Christian theologians and philosophers.

Chapter 3

Self and the Literature

Two things have always fascinated me: people's stories, and reading. In the 1980's and 90's, as a secondary English and history teacher, I began to grapple with the research that explicated reading as a social practice, in which the stories we tell are identified as structuring the meanings by which a culture lives and vice versa (Cohen & Shires, 1988; Gilbert, 1992, p. 229; Solsken & Bloome, 1993). Haug's (1987) work, that made visible how stories fundamentally define us as persons, how they construct our moral commitments, patterns of desire and ways of knowing, was intriguing. I began to accept the notion that we live much of our lives in the power of stories (Freebody, et al., 1991; Gilbert, 1989, 1992, 1993), and that as we retell them, they construct not only our psycho-social identity but also our physical identity as well (Wex, 1979). Stories do not *capture* a discreet reality, but actually *constitute* the reality that we speak of. This provided a new way of approaching reading and texts for me. This chapter explores a range of views, including Christian views, of how subjectivity – the self – might be understood.

Language Fundamental in Construction of Subjectivity

Increasingly, literary practices have been posited as key elements in the formation of individual agency and subjectivity (Muspratt, et al., 1997). Viewed this way, the human self is seen largely as residing within the rhetorical dimensions of language, which itself is embedded in the political and linguistic processes by which it is summoned into being. Althusser (1971, pp. 162-163) used the concept of interpellation to describe a process whereby individuals mistakenly take themselves to be the authors of the ideological discourse through which various state apparatuses take them over. In this economy, personal identity, and even the very contents of one's thoughts, is conceived as a social construction (Cixous, 1981; Walkerdine, 1987, 1990; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). In the Lacanian sense, identity is conceived as imaginary, and, as many feminists pointed out, the construction of the female self is invariably and unavoidably male (Irigaray in Flax, 1990; Whitford, 1988). Feminist researchers demonstrated that reading and writing research was male-circumscribed (Moi, 1987; Walkerdine, 1985, 1987, 1990) and so the content of any text was never politically irrelevant (Henriques, Holloway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984; Walkerdine, 1981; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). This work revealed that language, reading and a sense of self are deeply entwined.

The genesis for this theorizing emerges through the work of Foucault and Derrida, who, following Nietzsche, reject the Cartesian-Kantian humanistic conception that the individual is an autonomous, free and transparently self-conscious subject. The self is reconfigured "not as self possessed," but as "constituted through language" (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 23), and removed from any role as the foundation of reality or knowledge of it (Gutting, 1998). It is

interpreted as decentred within the language system, discursively constituted and positioned at the intersection of libidinal forces and cultural practices (Peters & Burbules, 2004). There is nothing deep down inside the human being, except what they themselves have put there (Rorty, 1987). The idea of a fixed essence in human beings, according to Foucault, is no more than a pious fiction. Strengthening this thinking is also the work of Freud, who undermined self consciousness by suggesting deep psychological drives that hide behind our reason, and Marx, who exposed the socio-political factors that shape subjectivity. In this view consciousness is overturned by situating the individual in a network of institutional forces, ideological relations and unconscious psychological and historical forces (Vanhoozer, 1998). It is impossible for human subjects to extricate themselves from the effects of culture and history to a place of pure reasoning. Or as Vanhoozer (1998, p. 67) explains, “We are more mastered *by* than masters *of* our situation.” The person cannot trust in their consciousness or their reasoning because reasoning is never either neutral or transparent.

Suspicious of self-knowledge, and drawing on Heidegger’s thought, poststructuralists suggest that socio-cultural structures play an important role in forming self consciousness (Denzin, 1991; Harvey, 1989). Humanism’s emphasis on absolute self consciousness and its alleged universalism is considered by poststructuralist thinkers to be socially exclusive and ultimately oppressive of the Other (Derrida, 1978b; Levinas, 1996). To demonstrate this condition, Foucault’s (1972a, 1977, 1980, 1984a, 1994) genealogy/archaeology explores the historical condition that makes possible certain kinds of subjectivity and agency and makes visible the production of modern individualized subjects in institutions such as prisons and schools. Derrida’s (1974) deconstruction challenges the possibility of making any definitive meaning, whether of self or of text, and according to Foucault any sense of an essential nature is nothing more than an effect of technologies of selfhood. Students, in this view, simply effect a number of operations on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct and ways of being, in order to construct their identities (Martin, 1988).

In poststructuralist thinking, the idealized picture of human nature is deconstructed by proclaiming the death of the subject, and rejecting the notion that humans possess any innate essence that teachers have a responsibility to identify, preserve and bring to maturity (Wright, 2004). Individuals are conceived as a decentred flux of subject positions, highly dependent upon discourse, social structure, repetition, memory and affective investment (Peters & Burbules, 2004). The notion of an essential identity is not something that is inherent in humanity, but is rather something that is imposed from outside, as we are made subject to the discourses of the culture. People’s thinking, their ideologies, their argumentation, their social actions and attitudes, and even their sense of self, are construed as being shaped by discourses (Morgan, 1997; Weedon, 1987). Poststructuralist thinkers explain how texts work to constitute

unstable subjectivities, and they posit a poststructuralist critical practice that they envisage will have profound and liberating implications for all of life (Davies, 1997; Henriques, et al., 1984) .

The strategy to locate individuals in discursive space is construed as a way to understand and make problematic the classificatory criteria through which individuals are disciplined and self-regulated (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998). Foucault's project focuses on the ontology of ourselves, and involves analysis of the limits imposed on humanity and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them (Kristeva, 1986). The idea that the self is constituted through language, and that one cannot trust consciousness, leads to a critical approach to texts. A critical practice advocates critical inquiry into what it is that constitutes us as subjects, and what defines and delimits us. It pays particular attention to literacy practices and the textual subjectification and constitution of self that occurs in the process of individuals becoming literate. The reader is provided with critical tools so they can promote new forms of subjectivity, through refusal of what has been textually imposed on them.

Critical Literacy Critiques Social Construction of Self

Critical literacy takes up these notions by questioning the social construction of the self (Shor, 1992) and by providing a meta-language and textual strategies to locate individuals in discursive space. In Foucauldian (1984b) terms, readers are taught to see that all that renders us a *subject* *subjects* us. Critical literacy proposes access to new discourses so that as human subjects enter into them, they will acquire alternative ways of being in the world; new social identities that guide students in becoming political and able to imagine ways they can change their world (Edelsky, 1996; Giroux, 1997; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Macedo, 1994). Davies' (1990, 1991, 1993) work highlights the discursive construction of subjectivities. She advocates a teaching practice where students are taught how to recognize the will to power in textual constructions, and how they can rebel against the oppressive notions of knowledge and truth. Her work on gender and education, examining the constitution of young children's subjectivities (Davies, 1989b) and her attempts to interrupt the male/female dualism (Davies, 1993), display what poststructuralist teaching might look like (Davies, 1994).

Davies (2005) does, however, posit the caveat that the original writers who influenced poststructuralism did not want to abandon the human subject altogether, but only to make that subject problematic. Foucault wanted to demonstrate *how* human beings were made subject, and Derrida claimed that he never advocated the subject be "dispensed with," only that it should be "deconstructed" and "resituated." However, in an interview with Kearney (cited in Kearney, 1984a, p. 125), Derrida still maintained that the subject is "not some meta-linguistic substance or identity;" some "pure cogito of self presence." The subject for Derrida is still always and only that which is inscribed in language.

This conception of self raises concerns for some Christians. Firstly, there are significant differences between Christian and critical anthropologies. Secondly, if one accepts that to some extent lives are shaped by the discursive power of stories, this invites a salient question: Is it possible that the rhetorical dimensions of language embedded in *critical literacy* practices might summon students into being in unwanted ways?

I now turn to the first of these two issues, whether Marxist or poststructuralist conceptions of self are viewed differently from Christian construals of self.

Christian Responses to Marxist Notions of Self

Marxism Atheistic

Marxism in its classical form is atheistic (Ferreter, 2003, p. 37). Not only does it eliminate a transcendent and immanent God from its thought, it is actually built upon a critique of religious beliefs (Feuerbach, 1957; Marx, 1977). Marx saw the economic conditions of society as that which produced the alienating forms of consciousness out of which the need for religion arose in the first place. Religion, for Marx, is the paradigm of alienated consciousness. One eliminates the false religious consciousness by remediating the inequitable economic conditions. Change the alienation in their work, and you free the person to become fully human. An ideal society, where social divisions and poverty are eliminated, will eliminate greed, competition and envy in the human heart. Humans could self-create and transform themselves through their work (Sire, 2009).

A Marxist Aligned Anthropology Limited Account of the Human Person

It is important to understand that critical literacy in its Marxist alignment does not give a full account of the human person as developed in Christian theology. John Paul (1991, p. n.13), in explicating what it is to be human, and in critiquing the anthropological error in Marxist atheism, says the denial of God deprives the person of their foundation, and consequently leads to a reorganization of the social order without reference to the person's dignity and responsibility. As an atheistic philosophy, Marxism rejects the movement and call of God in the world and in humanity. It does not recognize humans as autonomous subjects of moral decision, nor are their spiritual dimensions acknowledged (Ferreter, 2003, p. 80). Lundin (1993a) suggests that a cultural materialist view of the world tends to develop a dichotomizing habit of mind. There can be no middle ground between extremes. One is either an oppressor or oppressed, a master or a slave, a tyrant or a victim (Lundin, 1993a). Critical theorists often take the high moral ground, but Lundin (1993a) exhorts Christian teachers not to get caught up in the notion that because they reject Marxism, they are insensitive to the injustices and distortions of consumer culture and capitalism. Christianity has its own biblical resources to judge the sins of economic, gendered or racial injustice.

Marxism develops a non-Christian view that “man is the supreme being for man” (Marx cited in Sire, 2004, p. 78) and is made up of matter only. This implies that there is no transcendent power and no extra-material basis for our existence. Marxism also has faith that human history is working towards an ideal society. Its analyses of culture and history are grounded in Enlightenment and Romantic convictions about the essential innocence of the individual (Ferreter, 2003). This is something that animates the work of both Derrida and Foucault; the notion of the goodness of human beings, particularly in their unhampered freedom (Erickson, 2001). As Webster (2003, p. 229) points out, a Christian anthropology will be uneasy with the modern assumption that “human flourishing is to be equated with unrestricted emancipation.” This is in tension with Christian orthodoxy’s view of the fall, and of the human heart as sinful and in need of redemption. As Lundin (1993a) explains, the doctrine of original sin means that human beings, in control of their own lives, will profess noble-sounding ideals, but in fact oftentimes commit horrific evils such as the reign of terror in the French revolution. There is a dominant theme in radical theory that Niebuhr (cited in Lundin, 1993a, p. 170) calls the “effort to derive evil from specific historical forces.” The belief that evil is rooted in institutions and groups, and not in the heart of the individual, denies the claims of scripture that we are all at the same time both justified and sinful.

Christian Responses to the Poststructuralist Self

Christians Applaud Poststructuralist Chastening of Modernist Self

There are many Christian writers who applaud the poststructuralist chastening of the modernist self-centered Cartesian ego with its Enlightenment pretensions (MacIntyre, 1988; Thieliicke, 1974; Wolterstorff, 1976). The arrogant voice of rational man needed to be arrested in its hubris. The concept of the “end of religion” and “the death of God” are viewed by some as simply modernist, Enlightenment dogmas and the ultimate conclusion of blind faith in human autonomy (Benson, 2002; Westphal, 2001). This blind faith has drowned out the voice of God and spirituality, and consequently the postmodern limitation of imperialist self expression is construed as a positive move (Walsh, 1999, 2001; Walsh & Keesmaat, 2004; Walsh & Middleton, 1995). It might well open space for the voice of God to speak. Solomon (cited in Lundin, 1993b) calls for a “perfectly modest sense of self” as an antidote to the “overdose of self” represented in modernity. Walsh and Middleton (1995) also acknowledge the need for the autonomous self to be dismantled as a necessary corrective to the pretensions of the imperial ego, but they draw back from the more extreme postmodernists, who champion the “pulverization of the modern subject.” Many Christians applaud the postmodern critique of modernity, that humanity does not exist solely in its cognitive dimension, and that intellectual and scientific reflection alone cannot put us in touch with every dimension of reality. However, the biblical imperative of God’s concern for all, the responsibility of every person before God

and the individual orientation that lies within the salvation message precludes a complete break with the modernist view of self for some (Grenz, 1996).

Rejection of Presence is Problematic for some Christians

Critical theorists speak of subjectivity not identity. Subjectivity suggests an individual presence *without essence*, underscoring the contingency of identity. The term subjectivity is preferred because ‘self’ or ‘identity’ implies a fixed essence that exists independently of the range of discourses made available to individuals. It suggests a unitary, self-constituting, sovereign subject whose autonomous primordial characteristics are pre-discursive in nature and allegedly constituted outside of language, history or power (Giroux & McLaren, 1992).

There are Christians who reject the theorization of self as a mere confluence of discourses, claiming that the notion of presence in individual humanity is an important concept that must be retained. Derrida’s (1978b, p. 91) view that language pre-exists the individual, and that words simply create a *seeming* world of presence, is problematic for many Christian thinkers. It must be pointed out that there are deconstructionist thinkers (Biesta, 2004), as well as its detractors, who critique the loss of presence. Kraft (1996) and Erickson (2001) explain that this question of real presence is crucial because the perspective one takes on this issue has significant consequences for our foundational understandings of our identity, and indeed the world.

The concept of presence is central to an elaboration of a Christian theological anthropology. A theological picture of self and destiny will have reservations about the “residual indeterminacy and lack of a normative or teleological framework for human becoming that is characterized by radically deconstructive account of human selfhood” (Webster, 2003, p. 228). A Christian view of human being incorporates recognition of the divine calling and appointment in which humankind has its being and destiny. Webster (2003, p. 228) calls for a Christian anthropology that responds to deconstruction’s critique of its account of humankind by explicating a view of human nature as neither “leaden presence” nor “pure fabrication,” but “participating in the unfolding of God’s ways with humankind.” Webster (2003, p. 16) claims that the postmodernist eschewal of a fixed self is problematic because we cannot say “we.” This renders the self without shape, or substance. It is “stripped of commonalities and stabilities, is incapable of deep extended relations.” If the self is always shifting, transient and groundless this thwarts mutual relations (Webster, 2003). Barth (1960) crystallizes a Christian perspective, asserting that a human being does have some sort of “enduring identity,” that it cannot be “mere occurrence or mere human poiesis.” A self that has no roots or teleology does not promise a solid ground for ethics and politics.

Christian Telos

Whereas poststructuralists may see reality as having no final meaning, and our lives as just a tangled profusion of events (Foucault, 1984a), for many Christians the conception of telos provides a profound understanding of self. In the Christian telos, human life is construed as inextricably enmeshed within the cosmic story of God's dealings with humanity and the earth (Calvin, 1937; Erickson, 1998a). Fundamental to a Christian anthropology is the notion that a search for individual fulfilment is found within God's economy of grace (Ferreter, 2003). Fellowship with a "purposive creator who reconciles humanity and draws them to their true end," is "ontologically necessary and enduring, definitive of what it is to be human" (Webster, 2003, p. 232). The key question for human beings is not about their "own authorship" but about God's dealings with them (MacIntyre, 1988). An adequate account of self cannot stop with its situatedness in some instantaneous moment within processes of discursive flux. Self-hood in a Christian view discovers its identity and personhood within the larger purposes of God, which allows room for agency, responsibility and hope (Thiselton, 1995). Even if postmodernity fragments the self and society into multiple role performances, and dissolves truth into the conventions or power interests of different or competing communities, the future in God's economy still holds out the "possibility of re-integration on the basis of promise" (Thiselton in Heron & Torrance, 1995, p. ix). Without any sense of future promise, the postmodern self has a tendency towards "deeply destructive social consequences" (Thiselton, (1995, p. 153). Some Christians are calling for a hermeneutic of selfhood from a Christian theological perspective (Heron & Torrance, 1995, p. x) and an education that engages with this telos (Fiddes, 2000). It is hoped that such an education can regain a sense of hope (Garber, 1996; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2004; Newbigin, 1989; Ong, 1996; Postman, 1996).

The Self, Submission and Freedom

Theologians Take up Decentred, Deconstructed Self

The poststructuralist notion of freedom rejects anything that places constraints on its human self-expression. It must be noted at this juncture that some 'Christian' theologians such as Taylor (1987), although I am not certain whether he still identifies as such, take up a poststructuralist a/theological account of freedom. Taylor (1984, pp. 142-157) provides a description of the decentred, deconstructed self as "transitory points of intersection," "sites of passages" and "erratic markings." This self is an "errant trace," "anonymous," "rootless homeless," "purposeless and aimless and endless," where "everyone becomes no one." This "careless wanderer yearns for neither completion nor fulfilment" and therefore is "not unhappy but free from anxious searching" (cf Cupitt, 1980, 1987, 2001). This is a self that embraces a radical carelessness and situationlessness. Many Christian theologians critique not only

poststructuralist notions of self but also these poststructuralist theologians. Ferreter (2003) argues that while it is the case that a Christian anthropology impinges on the poststructuralist notions of freedom of the human being, submission to God's calling does not spell the end of human freedom. God's call is not imposed on a resistant humanity, and the notion that freedom is authentic only to the extent that it is unsituated is a myth (cf Webster, 2003). Webster (2003) insists that this view of self as radically free from any responsibility ushers humanity into a postmodern void. Christians such as Olthuis (1995, p. 28) argue that Taylor's self, merely the "product and effect of the crossings and interfacing of impersonal cosmic forces," only abandons us to "isolation, wounds, [and] tears." He construes Taylor's erring wanderer as a "scary, sad, desolate figure, nameless, impersonal and incurably wounded." He also raises the pertinent question of whether such a postmodern person, without home and without purpose, can be called to responsibility. Olthuis (1995, p. 28) counters this postmodern self, arguing that the postmodern non-self is just as "mythical or illusory as its predecessor" and that there is still room for an agentic self that is "not absolute, with no claims to self-actualization and full presence, but a gifted/called self gifted with agency and called to co-agency by an *Other*." To be human, for a Christian, is to have one's being outside of oneself; to owe one's being to the being and activity of a triune God (Webster, 2003). Many Christians conceive self-knowledge as being inextricably tied up with knowledge of God. Barth (1960, p. 35) maintains that "without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God and without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self." For orthodox Christians, knowledge of God is a necessary prerequisite for authentic *self*-knowledge. As Wright (2004) explains, since Augustine, self-knowledge in a traditional Christian economy has been mediated by the knowledge of God. To know one's self is to understand one's relationship with God, and to grasp one's place in the divine order of things. Middleton (2005) claims that Israel's story promotes the dignity of all human beings, and posits the question of whether the actual liberation of humanity may be inextricably tied up with submission to God.

Christian Conceptions of Self

Stability in Creation / Humanity Created in God's Image

Christian writers posit humanity as created by God in His image (Middleton, 2005) which is very different to Marxist and poststructuralist notions. The view that humanity has a given, essential nature is intrinsic to orthodox Christian views on creation and regeneration. A classic formulation of this is found in the writings of Augustine (1951, 1996), who states that humanity is created in the image of God, destined for communion with God and each other and that this is the telos for humanity. Christians embrace an immortality of soul, and the human being as God's construction and the bearer of his image (Barrett, 1987; Platinga, 2002). Notions of identity are construed as determinate within the economy of God's creation, call, destiny and

purpose (Erickson, 1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2002, 2004; Erickson, Helseth, & Taylor, 2004; Webster, 2003).

While some Christian writers acknowledge a degree of human subjectification through discursive practices, they argue that this is not the whole story (Webster, 2003). While a deconstructive anthropology rejects language that speaks of fixed, pre-given and nameable identities, whether of God or of creature, Webster (2003, p. 213) argues that human nature and destiny does not refer to “abstract a-historical entities” but to the “identity acquired by subjects” as they “act and are acted upon in the reciprocities of relation to God and others.” Christians must still speak of human nature, and while they agree that humans are extraordinarily complex, mobile and malleable, they insist that they nevertheless are still distinct and determinate. To be human is not simply to be a product of “discursive controversy and negotiation,” or to be an “assemblage of disjointed fragments” without depth or substrate (Webster, 2003, p. 227). Humankind is construed as from God in that they are absolutely derivative and brought into being by an action which precedes the creature unconditionally (Ingraffia, 1995; Webster, 2003). An ontology of the human must not be abandoned by espousing a non-metaphysical theology; rather, a theological ontology must be embraced whose categories are shaped by the confession of the gospel (Ingraffia, 1995; Webster, 2003).

The self-creation that Rorty (1989, p. 84) speaks of, or the Foucauldian (1984b, p. 351) notion that “we create ourselves as a work of art,” is not how Christian theology posits humanity’s origins or its teleology. Within the Christian view of discipleship and life is the notion of a transcendent creator to whom one must give an account. Life in a Christian frame is not so much an aesthetic enterprise as a moral one (Hinkson & Ganssle, 2000). Of course Rorty and Foucault have moral commitments but they are more likely to be self chosen where the self is the only creator recognized. They choose their moral commitments and they are answerable only to themselves. Christians have someone beyond themselves to whom they are answerable. Lundin (1997b) insists that a failure to ground faith in a Truth outside the desiring self may leave Christians with few options but to appropriate the deconstructive view of self and language. The emphasis on individualism (Marsden, 1980), the vast invested in self (Rieff, 1966) and the displacement of truth by psychological effectiveness (MacIntyre, 1985) is merely a caricature of the essence of Christianity. Christianity and its theorisation of self is much more than individualistic, temporal therapy (cf Lundin, 1993a).

For Christian educators who acknowledge a degree of discursive formation, the question of whether we conceive of humanity as a “node” in a social construct, a piece of complex matter that disappears at death, or an “eternal soul” caught in a body become important issues (Freadman & Miller, 1992). Many Christian writers critique aspects of literary theory that repudiate substantial conceptions of the human subject, be it of authors or of social beings in

general. As Thiselton (1995, p. 153) eloquently puts it, the Christian self is “transformed into the image of Christ,” and to become like Him “constitutes the heart of the divine promise” which “lifts the self out of its predefined situatedness and beckons from ‘beyond’ to a new future.”

Stability in Regeneration

What happens in the life of a believer in regeneration creates a stability of presence. The message of the gospel is always embodied in a culture; there is no sense in which the message has some pure, culture-free form. However what happens *in the believer* on receiving the Christ of that Gospel *is* culture-free, and remains the same for all believers (Erickson, 1998a). The receiving of Christ is a universal event in the life of all believers, and this occurs independently of culture, class, race, gender or sexual preference. The message itself is culturally prefigured, but the impartation of God to the believer is not. How that person then lives out this new life in Christ is culturally embedded, but the impartation of Christ’s life within the believer is not (Newbiggin, 1989, p. 28). God’s word of judgment and grace comes to each person in unique and often mysterious ways. The gospel text has a unique sovereignty of its own. The Holy Spirit, by whose secret work the gospel comes alive in a person, is not under the control of the bearer of the message or the culture of that person. When Christians proclaim an issue-oriented gospel and think they understand what the situation is for humanity the gospel becomes ancillary to the program (Newbiggin, 1989). When, however, the gospel truly comes alive in a person, the one for whom this happens knows that sovereignty now lies elsewhere. As Erickson (1998a, 1998b) says, the ‘Here I am God’ exists outside even the master discourse for Christianity. This necessitates an understanding of the Holy Spirit and His work as transcendent, existing beyond textual representations and cultural contingencies. As Ricoeur (1992) clearly shows, notions of history, memory, promise and accountability indicate aspects of a stable continuity of identity and selfhood amidst empirical change.

Vanhoozer (email communication 15/08/09) argues that the self is a “who,” a responsible agent about whom a story can be told (cf Ricoeur, 1992; Thiselton, 1995). He explains the notion of regeneration, in juxtaposition with Foucault’s episteme clearly, so I will include it here:

What God does in renewing someone's life is qualitatively different than, say, what Foucault calls an episteme. That is, God does more than "overwrite" our text by adding one more discourse. What happens in the believer upon regeneration is something transcultural precisely because it involves ontology. This is not to suggest that regeneration changes us to something other than human. On the contrary, it enables us to be fully human for the first time (here I mean something like: an answerable subject who actually images God by using his freedom to correspond to God's will rather than

reject it). What happens in regeneration is that we are united to Christ. Our story corresponds to his (Gal 2:20). One of the key categories, I think, is "participation" (this picks up the vine and branches imagery from Jn 15). I think union with Christ so changes the communicative agent (us) that our communicative action (in word and deed) begins to glorify God and exemplify the mind of Christ, no matter the cultural setting we're in or the language we happen to speak. What is more fundamental than culture and language is participating in what I call the Theo-drama: the great drama of redemption. The Spirit who unites us to Christ gives us the right words to say and empowers us to act fittingly so that we display the mind of Christ in new cultural scenes. So instead of decentred selves who have no speech agency of their own the person in union with Christ has communicative agency because of his or her communion with the triune God and is thus able to witness and worship.

Some Congruence between Critical Theories and Christianity

Derridean Alterity / Christian Call to Love Neighbour.

The Derridean notion of respect for the Other is in keeping with the Christian view of the Other as a unique and loved person. This openness to love the Other stands at the heart of the Christian Gospel (Wright, 2004). People that have been constructed as Other to the dominant discourses, or who have been pushed to the margins have been given a voice by Derrida. Manipulation and coercion of the Other is considered wrong, and the Christian disciple is called to genuinely respect and love those constructed as Other in their own right (Brummer, 1984, pp. 1-15, 74-113; 1992). Downing (2006) takes the view that Christ became Other to himself by taking on the positionality of human limitation. He did not align himself with the powerful but related to the most radically Other of first century culture, such as tax collectors, women and sinners. The example of Jesus, formalized by Christian doctrine, thus fulfils what is written on the hearts of postmodern theorists, that ethics must be based on openness to the Other. Derrida seeks to undo any reading that represses otherness of the text or difference for the sake of a totalizing interpretation. Readers are exhorted not to privilege any one context.

Organizational Christianity and Relations of Power

Historically there has always been a shaky tension between organizational Christianity, with all its relations of power and attempted dominations, and a life of true discipleship. Disciples of Christ are called beyond dominating power relations, and their ultimate allegiance lies not with the State, not with church dogma, not with the high cultural capital of the latest fashionable church theology, but with a truthful relationship with Jesus Christ. In this, disciples are called to account for the thoughts and the intents of their hearts as a mark of true discipleship. However, the Christian account of human nature accepts the capacity of the self for self-deception and its

readiness to use strategies of manipulation (Parry, 2005). The term *Kardie* used in the Pauline letters closely approaches the Freudian notion of the hidden depths which lie below the threshold of conscious awareness. The things of the heart need not penetrate into the field of consciousness at all, but may indicate the hidden tendency of the self (Bultmann, 1955, p. 225). Christian theology, drawing especially on Pauline writings, particularly Galatians, acknowledges that there may be a human self in pursuit of self-interests. Bultmann (1955, p. 224) says that Galatians 6:12 may “allude to a secret motive,” hidden even from the person themselves. Romans 1:21 explains that the motivations of the heart can remain darkened (Thiselton, 1995, pp. 12-13). However this self-deception and manipulation is incompatible in principle with the *new creation*, and is subject to *change and transformation*. Maturity to the measure of the full stature of Christ entails an abandonment of ‘immature’ strategies of “trickery... craftiness in deceitful scheming in favour of speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:13). Loving respect for the personhood of the Other by truthful speech is part of growing up into Christ.

Tensions at the Interface of Christianity with Critical Theories

Poststructuralism at Odds with Emancipatory Aspirations

There are many who suggest that poststructuralism is in tension with emancipatory practices and human agency. Freadman and Miller (1992) challenge the alliance of Marxist liberation and poststructuralism as contradictory. They contend that if we observe selves as possessing no stable qualities, limits, needs or particular potentialities, the question is then rightly posed as to what end, and to whom, is an emancipated politics addressing itself if the stable subject does not really exist? While many poststructuralists find the “free-floating lack of fixed identity” to be the ultimate liberation, many Christians view this differently. They argue that when the concept of universal humanity is eliminated, the “basis for empathy, common understanding and moral action is also eliminated” (Veith, 1994, 1995). The loss of universal humanness might actually diminish respect for other cultures, and the rejection of universal principles might frustrate moral action toward others. The poststructuralist perspective cannot sustain any so called “human values” (Veith, 1994, p. 79). When differences are valorised to the extreme, the possibility of a natural or cultural community among peoples can be destroyed. Any philosophy that renders mutual understanding between groups impossible has done nothing to reconcile them or to lessen alienation and misunderstandings. According to some thinkers, when poststructural thought dispenses with totalizing metanarratives it is left without the conceptual resources to understand the voice of the Other (Groothuis, 2000). If there is no human nature, if language is merely a social construction unrelated to objective reality, and if there is no God-given meaning or value in the world, then the basis for ethical action towards the Other is eroded (Groothuis, 2000). In wanting to rehabilitate the foreigner, they abolish any

sense of commonality among people (Finkelkraut, 1995). As Connor (1997) insists when we eliminate the horizon of universal value this fosters either a might is right ethic or equally disturbing for some, the complacency of pragmatism. Veith (1994, p. 83) insists that belief in individual integrity, truth and objective morality “were traditional ideals that once could limit power.” These thinkers suggest that ethics and moral action in the world require a horizon of universal value.

Walsh and Middleton (1995) assert that whether we agree with replacing the autonomous self of modernity with an even more abstract autonomous “language” or not, we must see that the belief that the autonomous self is a fiction can throw us into apocalyptic doubt about all “previous beliefs about humanness” and what this means. They contend that the loss of our secure modern self-image, even if it was misplaced, arrogant hubris, submerges us into an identity crisis of immense proportions and this has implications for agency. Thiselton (1995) similarly makes the point that the postmodern view of self as free to create, is actually unequally yoked to the view that the self is endlessly decentred by language and unconscious forces. He sees the carnivalesque self of postmodernity not as an active agent but as a passive victim, doomed to be tossed this way and that by conflicting ideological forces and vocabularies. He maintains that the self will ultimately be unable to reach understanding of texts or of the world of others if the truth-stating function of language cannot be taken seriously, and if all argument is simply reduced to rhetoric. Vanhoozer (1998, p. 435) also worries that participation in the Derridean disruption of transcendence leaves people “free only to negate not to create meaningful form,” and that this has consequences on our sense of self and a sense of agency.

Kraft (1996) similarly insists there is a self-defeating irony in poststructuralist theorizing about the self. It challenges and deconstructs everything monolithic, all orthodox views, official words, dogmas of any kind, every voice of authority and thus all claims to certainty, so that it can valorize difference and liberate the individual. He comments on the irony of poststructuralist theory that has been quick to deconstruct and disable the very thing that it says it wants to affirm and liberate. He claims that since poststructuralism is conceived of as a liberatory practice, it makes a consequential difference whether or not one conceives of people as merely entities of the text or as also beings present in a world outside the text. He argues that while the “I” may not be an innocent subject it is also not just a plurality of texts. If poststructuralism seeks to retain a radical edge it requires a strong sense of the individual. Vanhoozer (1998, p. 137) suggests that the “deconstructive notion that God, substance and self are only playgrounds” and that there is nothing deep down inside humanity except what we have put there ourselves has had detrimental side effects on individual agency. Kraft (1996) accuses poststructuralist theorizing of being so wholly bent on anti-humanism as to seem

suicidal, and emphatically argues that if we go the way of the deconstructors we *gain* a sense of the ubiquity of language but we *lose* even more. He asks what the consequences are of our identity, and indeed the world, vanishing into textuality? He says that, defined in this way, “we are not likely to break down any walls of oppression” we can “only sit and acquiesce” (1996, p. 241). He asks whether this is the image of ourselves that should emerge from a theory and method “promising to undermine authority, to displace the totalitarian” and to put into its place a “principle of play and differences” (1996, p. 241). Similarly Veith (1994, 1995) claims that if we continue to tell stories of individual identity only as a social construct, and of our lives as merely a nexus point of competing discourses shaped by our language codes, then we may come to understand our individuality as only an illusion. He maintains that this will have an effect on our sense of moral responsibility and also on our understanding of individual agency.

Poststructuralism / Diminished Basis for Ethics and Morality

Kung (1980, p. 439) suggests that belief in identity, meaning and value, what he construes as a fundamental trust in reality, is needful for humans; that it is the basis for ethics and morality. For students to be active politically, and to be transformative on behalf of the oppressed, they need to know who they are and clearly what their strengths and gifts are. Hirsch (1991, p. 165) says the “purveyors of postmodern ideologies must consider whether it is possible to diminish human beings in theory without at the same time making individual lives worthless in the real world.” He argues that a strong sense of self is required for a sustained moral and ethical action in the world. Vanhoozer (1998, p. 395) claims that the ethics of the interpretive realist are characterized by “responsibility *to* another, not freedom *from* them.” He views the self not as the modernist subject “in conscious control” or the poststructuralist self in a “textually induced coma,” not “sovereign” but not “slave” either (1998, pp. 203-204). He sees the self as a citizen of language with hermeneutical responsibilities. The subject is a communicative agent.

The Christian view of self says something about how we view our vocation as humanbeings. We are not an absolute will to power, or simply the site of conflict of discourse but “communicative agents in covenantal relation with God and others” (Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 204). He argues that poststructuralist notions of self that attack the very concept of an individual have led to a diminishment of human beings. As he sees it, the trouble with the deconstructive form of liberation is that it fails to “free readers from themselves” (Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 394). Freadman and Miller (1992) express concern that the postmodern decentred self may thwart hope in students, lead to a sense of despair and diminish a sense of agency. They assume a strong sense of self is required for sustained moral and ethical action in the world. Belief in truth, individual integrity and objective morality were traditional ideals that could *limit* power. With the rejection of these universals, postmodernists may “engage in a ruthless brand of politics” (Veith, 1994, p. 83).

Derridean Openness to Other / Tension with Human Need for Boundaries

There are Christian thinkers who explicate a point of tension at the interface of the Derridean openness to Otherness with the human need for boundaries. While notions of "personal space" are culturally constructed and differ throughout the world, it seems to be a universal human requirement that some sense of personal space is necessary for all people (Walsh & Bouma-Prediger, 2002). Boundaries, in this view, are constitutive to identity, and unless we can draw a line and say that something lies outside its domain, then "we can speak about nothing that lies inside with deep meaning" (Westerhoff, 1999, p. xi). Boundaries are "that which defines and gives identity to all kinds of systems." They are constitutive to life. This is contrary to the postmodern ethical impulse to overcome a suspicious reaction to Others: what deconstructionists conceive as a violent marginalization. Bouma-Prediger and Walsh (2002, pp. 23-25) insist that "without boundaries there is no locality, and therefore no sense of membership in a particular community, family, or neighbourhood which has an identity in distinction from others." They claim that without boundaries identity is impossible because borders provide "the kind of ordering necessary to life." This concern raises the possibility that Giroux's (1992) call for a transgressive border crossing to challenge the exclusionary and dominating borders, will not be apprehended in the way that he envisaged because of the deep need of humans to actually create borders. The pertinent question that Bouma and Walsh (2001; 2002) raise, given the human need for boundaries, is whether we can make space which is bounded and yet more hospitable, boundaries that do *not* violently exclude?

Poststructuralist Self Leads to Disconnection and Displacement

Bouma and Walsh (2001; 2002), drawing on Orr and Berry, assert that education influenced by poststructuralist notions of self is often now infused with a pedagogy of disconnection and an ethos of displacement. They construe this sort of education as a process of forming people who will be residents, not inhabitants, because it is an education for homelessness. Schrag's (1997, p. 8) question becomes significant here, when he asks whether the postmodern identity highlighted by "multiplicity, heterogeneity, difference and ceaseless becoming" has "displaced a unity of consciousness with a self bereft of origin or purpose." Bonnycastle (1996, p. 115) also sees deconstruction as "destabilizing," proposing that it will not provide a person with any values. He argues that deconstruction creates a world in which each person is "essentially alone, and social groups fall apart because they have no coherence." Consequently, he views this as an "almost impossible world to live in." Middleton and Walsh (1995, p. 145) describe postmodernity as a culture of radical homelessness. It is no surprise then, that the postmodern condition is so often described in terms of homelessness. Postmodern a/theologian Mark Taylor (1984) describes the postmodern self as a "wanderer," a "drifter," "attached to no home," and "always suspicious of stopping, staying and dwelling." Bouma-Prediger and Walsh (2008) posit

the indwelling God and the sojourning community that embraces the love of God and creation as Other as a corrective to the postmodern homelessness,

Humans Need Normative Clarity on Self

While there are those that raise ethical concerns about whether humans can live without normative clarity on questions of self, others such as Taylor (1982a, 1987) and Cupitt (1980, 1987, 1994a, 2001) do not see this as problematic. The poststructuralist self, capable of taking on an “indefinite array of imprinted identities,” might not be cause for celebration (Walsh & Middleton, 1995, p. 52). Lyon (1994, pp. 64-65) maintains that the “postmodern context with its emphasis on individual choice and consumer preferences, when mixed with epistemological doubt and pluralism creates a heady cocktail that seems quickly to befuddle and paralyze people.” Veith (1994, p. 72) similarly insists that the postmodern mind set can have a devastating impact on the human personality. If students come to understand that reality and their sense of self is only socially constructed, and that moral guidelines are masks for oppressive power, they will understand their individual identity as only an illusion. As this postmodern culture becomes more impersonal, he says, the human becomes lost.

Deconstruction Psychologically Problematic for Adolescents

Appleman (2000) argues that while the privileging of the personal in reader response, and the anti-ideology stances of feminism and Marxism, seem to be developmentally appropriate for adolescents, deconstruction is “intellectually more challenging and psychologically more frightening for them.” It could even prove to be a somewhat “dangerous tool” for literary analysis and “one that called into question the foundations of their personal identities and core beliefs” (2000, p. 114). The loss of an identifiable and unitary self could lead to an anthropological confusion that leaves adolescents in particular, inundated with a multiplicity of clamouring voices (cf Bonnycastle, 1996). When students are bombarded with so many choices it leads to confusion and an inability to choose (Percesepe, 1990). This is a saturation of the self where all that seemed right before is now subverted and a fully saturated self is really no self at all (Gergen, 1991). Confusion is not considered a valuable characteristic by many Christians, and many argue that if humans understand the question of who they are and why they are here, they will be able to live more stable and purposeful lives (Sire, 2004). Appleman (2000) affirms this, arguing that the adolescent desire to construct an identity is actually a developmental imperative. The poststructural fragility and instability of identity construction during adolescence makes the nihilistic nature of deconstruction too painful for adolescence to integrate.

Deconstruction Leads to Deep Uncertainty

Others raise concern that introducing students to the power of deconstruction may indeed put them at intellectual risk as they call *everything* into question. Morgan (1992, p. 88) raises the question whether a critical reading practice might produce “demythologizing skeptics who see nothing in seeing through everything.” We all make fundamental decisions about reality; a choice about what the self, others and the world mean. We all have an unimpeachable ground or some foundation that we consciously or otherwise consider to be unassailable. This ground can, and does, shift over time of course. These metaphysical first principles ground our subsequent actions and convictions. Some even argue we are not capable of a sustained functioning if we hold purely arbitrary opinions or make unprincipled decisions (Wolters, 1985). Veith (1994, p. 82) cites Kroker, who elucidates the psychological mood of postmodernism as a culture of panic, a “free fall” that comes from the “disappearance of external standard of public conduct” and the “dissolution of the internal foundations of identity.” A postmodernist himself, Harvey (1989, p. 59) asserts that the most problematic facet of postmodernism is its “psychological presuppositions with respect to personality, motivation and behaviour.” Miller and Freadman (1992, p. 4) express concern that a “continual repudiation of substantial conceptions of the human subject, whether it be of authors or of social beings generally, will be viewed as all meaningless in the end.” Walsh and Keesmaat (2004) worry that an unstable, unfixed sense of self may well cause a “vertigo of relativity” and an “abyss of uncertainty” rather than an active sense of agency, and Scott (cited in Vanhoozer, 1998) similarly that the dismissal of the subject and the loss of authorship entails the loss of freedom and responsibility as well.

Hermeneutics of Suspicion

Critical literacy establishes a reading practice that encourages a suspicious attitude to reading and interpretation. The “hermeneutics of suspicion”, a term coined by Ricoeur (1970, p. 30), generates a reading practice that reads against the grain of the text. Resistant readers expose texts’ strategies of persuasion, or manipulation, so that their agendas, values and ideologies are exposed. The masters of suspicion, Nietzsche, Marx and Freud, and more recently Foucault and Derrida, have sought to demystify language and to expose the ways in which linguistic and cultural systems are constructed by ideologies that further the interests of those who hold power.

Relationship with Christianity / the Doctrine of Sin

Before I examine the tensions in reading with suspicion, I think it important to point out that there are Christian thinkers who argue that Christians should not dismiss the hermeneutic of suspicion too quickly because it finds its analogue in the doctrine of sin (Parry, 2005). In Christian thinking, the human heart is deceitful, and often a person’s real motivations are

hidden even from themselves. A hermeneutic of suspicion therefore has its role in a fallen world. Parry (2005) says, however, that it must not dominate interpretations, because that move would undermine the cry for justice that called forth ideological readings in the first place. Veith (1994, pp. 63-64) explains that although Christians might reject the assumptions of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, they can “formulate a hermeneutics of suspicion” of their own because they hold a view that sin lurks beneath human consciousness that is even more determining and more sinister than money, sex and power. Fallen human beings are motivated and disabled by a primal rebellion against God and so Paul in the scripture calls for a kind of deconstruction of the culture’s knowledge systems. Westphal (1998) calls Christians to be more open to the hermeneutic of suspicion because it finds its true home, and Nietzsche acknowledged this, in the Old testament prophets, the words of Jesus, and the teaching of Paul and James (cf Lundin, 1997b, p. 211). Christians are called to use them for personal and corporate self examination. The deep structural effects of sin means that most Christians would already be operating from a hermeneutic of suspicion, although with the caveat that suspicion does not get the last word (Smith, 2006c; Westphal, 1998).

Readers Need to be Open to the Text as Other

However, while a limited and specific hermeneutic of suspicion is valued by some Christians, a default suspicious reading position causes a degree of concern, and not just with reference to scripture reading. Some argue that the entire Western culture now faces life and society with suspicion rather than trust (Thiselton, 1995), and that knowledge itself could be destroyed by the policing relativism of a hermeneutic of suspicion (Jennings, 1997). Zimmerman (2004) rebuffs the excess of suspicion that turns everything into ideology (cf Cunningham, 2002; Good, 2001) and others argue that making doubt fashionable and encouraging a non-judgemental and relativistic conception of ethics institutes a pervasive cultural cynicism (Folks, 2006). Maintaining a systematic attitude of distrust or suspicion is equivalent to doing violence to the readers’ constitution. Platinga (1993) insists that it is against humanity’s design-plan to disbelieve what we are told by others. One of the most important sources of basic belief is testimony (Reid cited in Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 291). If readers are trained to become suspicious of testimony, and they approach texts with an attitude that does not seek determinate meaning, it removes a reliable source of knowledge (Coady, 1992). The reader’s trust in the word of others is fundamental to the very idea of serious cognitive activity, so when suspicion is the default reading position it devalues any witness, report or confession (Coady, 1992). Belief that there is meaning in a text, and that readers can read to discover it, is properly basic (Vanhoozer, 1998). When people prefer their own observations to the written testimony of others they will ‘create’ a reading rather than attempt to ‘discover’ textual meaning (Coady, 1992). Niebuhr (1951) insists that a responsible self is an answerer; that reading is an ethical activity, and that

we need to think carefully about what type of reading practices we teach our students. As Vanhoozer (1998, p. 395) explains, to be a “responsible reader is to be engaged in a dialogue with one who is not oneself.” He therefore suggests we read midway between “slavishly repeating and freely interpreting.” According to many, a systematic hermeneutic of suspicion leaves the reader epistemologically impoverished.

The first hermeneutical impulse should be charity towards the author (Jacobs, 2001; Smith & Venema, 2004; Vanhoozer, 1998), so the believing reader does not violate the text but venerates the Other (Reinhart, 2000). Vanhoozer (1998) claims that all texts, not just the Bible, have a claim on the reader, and that readers must, at least initially, approach them with trust. Reading is an I-thou encounter (Buber, 1970) and readers must not suppress the voice of the text with their own political issues. Vanhoozer (2006) views openness to an encounter with something that transcends the text as a theological matter, and this approach to texts as a spiritual virtue that needs cultivating in the current suspicious environment. Reading this way provides an encounter with something that has the capacity to transform the reader. Without openness to transcendence, readers only find their own creation or their own reflection. Lewis (1961, p. 94) addressed these issues when he said that readers must risk being taken in if they are going to get anything from a text. The text will “not yield its secret to a reader who enters it regarding the writer as a potential deceiver.” This, I believe, is an essentially Gadamerian (1979) position, that when reading the world or a text, one must be open to its revelatory and transformational potential. A person trying to understand a text must exercise a humility that is ready to learn; that is prepared for it to tell him or her something (cf Derrick, 2001).

Suspicious Hermeneutic Negative / Reading Scripture

Peterson (2006) expresses a general concern found amongst many Christians that the way readers approach books in general affects the way they particularly approach scripture and communicating with others. For Christians in the Evangelical traditions, the Bible is the “revelatory, identity-defining text of the Christian community” (Hays, 2009, p. 2) so if it is portrayed as oppressive, or if a suspicious reading is advocated, it encourages a distrustful reading position. In response to an age that views interpretation in terms of coercion and violence many Christians take up the Augustinian (1996) call to faith and charity when reading. Jacobs (2001) explicates a theology of reading that construes reading as a gift and argues that the reader must discern what sort of gift the text is. He says that when a reader exercises a universal suspicion of gifts and givers, like an indiscriminate acceptance of all gifts, they abdicate discernment in favour of a simplistic *a priorism* that smothers the spirit. Vanhoozer (1998) claims that Christians need to decide how they should read so that it is both moral and faithful, critical and Christian. In response to a thorough going hermeneutics of suspicion some advocate a hermeneutic of trust (Hays, 2005, 2007, 2009; Hays & Davis, 2003), love (Jacobs,

2001; Vanhoozer, 1998; Wright, 1992), charity (Smith & Venema, 2004) and consent (Stuhlmacher, 1977).

Christians Recommend a Hermeneutic of Humility

A theological approach to reading and interpretation will give centrality to the covenant of discourse, and will define the text and reader not in terms of “rival power centres” but rather as “centres of communication” (Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 395). Reading is having “more than a dialogue partner but a pedagogue that illumines and opens up new ways of thinking and living.” As Wright (1992) explains, whether we love or we interpret, we must not seek to collapse the beloved, or the text, into ourselves. Readers need to approach a text in such a way that they expect to find something about its nature (Eco, 1990b). Eco (1992, p. 23) argues that the “rights of the interpreter have been stressed too much.” As Cunningham (2002, p. 169) suggests, a degree of “hermeneutical humility” or at least “readerly tact” would not go astray when a reader examines the text of another. Instead of readers taking their own pleasure of the text (Barthes, 1975) or *creating* rather than *discovering* (Leitch, 1983), Lewis (cited in Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 374) views the necessary condition of all good reading is to “get ourselves out of the way.” The first demand any work of art makes upon us is to “Surrender. Look. Listen. Receive” (Lewis, 1961, p. 19). Vanhoozer (1998, p. 32) explains it this way, the “golden rule for hermeneutics and ethics alike” is to treat “significant others,” that is “texts, persons, and God with love and respect.”

Hermeneutic of Trust to Temper Suspicion

Some argue for a healthy mixture of a hermeneutic of trust with an adequate amount of doubt or suspicion in relation to one’s tradition. Too much trust leads to “blind obedience,” and too much doubt and suspicion can lead to “nihilism” (Naugle, 2002, p. 320). This measured approach is also adopted by Sayre (1993), who explains that suspicion or trust are two different attitudes that one can choose in the face of contingency, and even though a Christian hermeneutic would be characterized by a primordial trust, this would not be without some suspicion (cf Smith, 2000). Jasper (2004) emphasizes the necessary tension between a hermeneutic of faith and a hermeneutic of suspicion, suggesting that readers always strive for balance between the two. He suggests that the reading of all literature has an underlying theological concern, in the sense that reading incorporates epistemological and ontological modalities simultaneously. Jesus himself is actually presented by Lyon (1997, p. 110) as the master of suspicion in his deconstructing of the self-serving Pharisaic law (cf Caputo, 2007). Drawing on Lash’s “hermeneutic of retrieval,” he argues, that Jesus, however “never rested with suspicion but always sought to retrieve.” With respect to the scripture, Hays (2009, p. 6) argues that many practitioners of the hermeneutic of suspicion are remarkably credulous about

the claims of experience. As a result, they endlessly critique the biblical texts, but rarely get around to hearing scripture's critique of themselves or hearing its message of grace. A trusting hermeneutic is essential for those who believe the word of God and the resurrection, but do not yet see death made subject to God (Hays, 2007, 2009). These thinkers advocate a renewed theological interpretation of scripture, grounded in a hermeneutic of trust rather than suspicion (Sayre, 1993; Smith, 2000).

Christians hold to the notion of presence in self, they raise concerns that a repudiation of self will produce negative material effects and they point out that deconstruction in particular might well lead to a diminishment of human beings. They draw on Christian doctrines to support the view that there is a given presence in creation and that stability in the Christian self is sustained through regeneration and sanctification. Although they posit a correlation between a suspicious hermeneutic and the doctrine of sin they insist that suspicion must be tempered with trust and a degree of humility and respect for others, whether for authors or for texts.

Chapter 4

Support Materials' Treatment of Self

An examination of the critical literacy support materials provided for teachers in Queensland Senior English, reveals three ideas that are pertinent to self. First, the self is constituted through language. Both Marxist and poststructuralist views of subjectivity emerge here, because they both, in different ways, deny that selfhood is lodged in a transparent and self-aware consciousness. Readers are caught up in the socio-cultural, economic and linguistic forces of their culture. There is no pre-socio-economic or pre-linguistic subject that is free from the constitutive effects of economics or language. Second, they articulate a hermeneutic of suspicion, teaching the notion of positioning so that students can resist being made subject in unwanted ways. And third, also a suspicious approach to texts, they teach the practice of reading for gaps and silences and those marginalised, as a way to avoid unwanted subjectification.

Language Constitutes the Self

The support materials present a self that is assembled, or discursively constituted, through language. They teach students a Foucauldian, critical analysis of discourse, so that they will “develop a politicized awareness” of the ways in which the discourses of the society are “producing subjectivities” and therefore “implicating us all in particular ideologies” (Misson, 1998a, p. 83). This represents a significant change from a humanistic view, such as underlies traditional understandings embedded in many Christian views that perceive the self as unique and stable at the core, to one where it changes because of the practices, values, and language of the culture. In this view of self, identity largely resides within the rhetorical dimensions of language, where literary practices are key elements in the formation of individual subjectivity and agency (Muspratt, et al., 1997). Herrett et al. (2003, p. 49) explain the central tenet of poststructuralist thought, that “texts construct us rather than the other way around,” while Queitzsch (2001, p. 4) claims that, “student identity formations are not static,” but are being “continually constituted and actualized through discourses.” According to Lankshear (1994, p. 10), “it is through participation in these language practices that we take up positions that other human beings identify as meaningful and it is on this basis that personal identities are constituted.” He says that we are “formed discursively as givers and receivers of textual meaning,” as we experience discourses. Similarly, in explaining critical discourse analysis, Herrett et al. (2003, p. 61) attempt to “show how discourse is shaped by ideology and relations of power,” and how “it in turn constructs identity, relationships, systems of knowledge and belief.” Reading now involves, among other things, examining the “dominant ideas in a text” and “how responders have been constructed as subjects.”

In a chapter called *Discourse and Ideology*, Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 21) contend that it is the “different points of view presented in the text” that “shape the identity of the individual or group that receives the text,” and that these discourses are “cultural and social practices through which individuals and groups use language and establish their identities” (2003, p. 1). In a chapter titled *Discourses*, Miller and Colwill (2004, pp. 17-43) explain that discourses operate not only in the “shaping of identity at individual and group” level but also at the “national level” (2004, p. 22), as they provide ways of “being, thinking [and] acting in the world” (2004, p. 18). Hannay (2001, p. 1) seeks to “heighten [the students’] awareness” of the “role discourses play in the formation of their own subjectivity” because they need to become aware of the “role discourses play in the formation of [themselves] as subjects. She also cites Lankshear (1994, pp. 6-7), explaining discourses as:

socially constructed and recognised ways of doing and being in the world, which integrate and regulate ways of acting, thinking, feeling, using language, believing and valuing .

These discourses are posited as deeply pervasive (Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 61; Moon, 2001, pp. 36-37; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 10-20, 22-13, 68). They “constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, [the] unconscious and conscious mind, and [the] emotional life of people subject to them” (Weedon cited in Morgan, 1997, p. 4). It is therefore crucial to recognise discourse, according to Hannay (2001), because

We are always operating within particular discourse or discourses and so all our cognitive processes operate through them. It is discourses that make us what we are, because they create our subjectivity, our ways of thinking, feeling and valuing.

Morgan (1997, p. 78) explains that “if subjectivities are determined only to the extent that certain discourses prevail,” it is important that “students explore the discourses through which they and others become selves.” This will “provide possibilities of changing the subject in and of literacy” (cf Foster, 2001, p. 1; Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 61). Discourse is construed as shaped by ideology and relations of power, hence the critical drive to interrogate how discourses work to shape identity and to provide tools for critical resistance.

Thus the support materials demonstrate a commitment to the notion that language constitutes the human person. Indeed, some view the poststructuralist changes in understandings of what “constitutes a student reader” and the “very notion of the human subject” as actually *reformational* in Queensland English (Mellor & Patterson, 2004, p. 1).

Marxism, Consciousness and Self

The support materials do not overtly lay out a Marxist anthropology, but they do promote the notion that the human self is never pure reason, immune from the effects of history, culture and ideology. Meaning never resides unproblematically within human consciousness, because consciousness is governed by, and made subject to, economic relations, via its cultural products such as texts. It is therefore crucial to make visible to the reader that consciousness is governed by socio-political factors and language. Consciousness, as the home of meaning, cannot be trusted (Vanhoozer, 1998). If one concludes that these positions are correct, then it is imperative that these factors are laid bare in the reading process.

Queitzsch (2001, p. 2) explains that texts work to “gain power over their readers and viewers,” and explains that it is therefore imperative that students develop a “critical competence” to “see through and act against texts” and their “affiliated institutions.” She lists a number of questions that a student can put to any text so that they might expose the circumstances of its production (2001, p. 10).

Who produced the texts? Were they produced by public bodies, commercial enterprises, or local authorities? For whom were they produced? Who are the consumers or the expected readers of the material? Why has the text been produced? What are the political or economic intents and consequences of its production?

Most of the support texts require students to engage with similar starter questions for interrogating the production and vested interests behind a text’s production (Hannay, 2001, p. 5; Lemon, 2001, p. 2; Pappalardo, 2001, p. 1). These are often drawn from Peim (1993), Luke, O’Brien and Comber (1994a) and Freebody and Luke (1990). Moon (2001, pp. 82-83) explains that a Marxist criticism will examine the “role played by literature in maintaining the values and beliefs that support the ruling classes in society.” This is achieved by exploring both the “features of the texts and the historical background in which the text is created, circulated and read.” This is crucial, according to Salk (2001, p. 1), because texts reinforce certain kinds of “culturally stereotypical ideas about identity, reality and meaning” and about the “fundamental issues of social life.” The “meanings, or readings produced by readers, aren’t just thought up by individuals, but are ways of thinking that are available in a particular culture at certain times and places” (cf M. Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 52-59). In critical literacy it is not just the power of the text’s meanings that must be exposed but also the organizations that sustain that power.

As Vanhoozer (1998) explains, the self in this view is never master of its own home. The self, in the Marxist sense, collapses the notion of self-consciousness by exposing the socio-political factors that shape it. Asking questions about the production of a text and its vested interests highlights the notion that it is social existence that shapes consciousness, rather than the reverse.

The self, viewed this way, is caught up in and subject to economic, psychological, social and historical factors that operate at a level below consciousness.

Poststructuralism, Consciousness and Self

Poststructuralists also take the view that consciousness is never transparent to itself. The only way to achieve self-knowledge is through a critique of consciousness. This is achieved through a suspicious hermeneutic, that reads guardedly against final truths or fixed meaning in language. Hannay (2001, p. 1) presents students as being “passively shaped by the discourses of their culture,” and argues that this is something that “English should remediate.” To achieve this, students need to be given access to a “more critical practice of reading and writing and viewing” so they are able to make “more conscious and democratic decisions about the way texts should, and can be, read, used and written.” While many people think that their ideas originate within themselves, Morgan (1997, pp. 2-4), a critical literacy advocate, explains that she is “not a self-sufficient individual whose ideas originate with [her] self.” *She* does not speak; it is the discourses of her culture that speak *through* her. When she speaks, it is really “discourses about texts, reading, teaching texts and education outcomes” having a “conversation with each other through [her].” She is not the originator of these ideas, but simply a pawn of political forces, ideologies and discourses.

Free Agentic Self / Illusory

According to Moon (2001, pp. 150-153), whatever sense we have of ourselves as a “free agent” is “illusory” because our sense of selfhood is really “assembled from our language resources [ways of speaking and acting] that are already supplied in our culture.” He explains that traditionally we have understood ourselves as “controlled from within,” as having something within ourselves that stays the same over time, “an inner essence,” or a “self that motivates our actions and defines who we are.” As he says, “the body is born,” but the person is “installed later.” He maintains that this concept of self, or what he calls subjectivity, is powerful because it implies that the “texts we read and view, might play a role in shaping the scripts we follow and the people we become.” In a poststructuralist view, the self is shaped by linguistic factors. The person takes up various discourses that are part of the dominant ideologies of that culture, without realising that they are being co-opted by language, which in turn is driven by the dominant discourses of the day. As Barthes (cited in Cunningham, 2002, p. 54) says, “It’s not the man who writes the language but the language that writes the man.”

Both Marxists and poststructuralists reject any innocent confidence that the reader is in conscious control of meaning, in either its production or its reception. The human self is not viewed as self-conscious or self-present, and consciousness is construed as socially constructed. In a critical reading practice the dominant readings and discourses in a culture are examined,

and tools are provided, to resist these dominances and avoid subjectification to the text's ideologies. Both Marxist and poststructuralist influences in a critical reading practice involve a reorientation of the understanding of self away from a transcendent self, standing neutrally, objectively, and disinterestedly as an observer of reality. In the Marxist economy the individual is situated within a network of institutional forces and ideological relations, and in Derrida's deconstruction, in a sea of linguistic forces. The individual is not even aware of these factors unless they are made visible. Vanhoozer (1998) comments on this position:

Once the conscious subject is deprived of its role as a source of meaning and once meaning is explained in terms of conventional systems which may escape the grasp of the conscious subject the self can no longer be identified with consciousness.

Rejection of Presence / Essential Identity

The critical approach to reading embraces this notion that there is no inner essence or givenness in human identity. This is a shift from the modernist concept of self that humans are controlled from within, or have an inner essence, or a self that motivates actions and defines who we are. According to Denzin (1991), poststructuralist theories have shattered this innocent confidence in the capacity of the self to control its own destiny. In the poststructuralist notion of self, any idea that we have an inner essence is repudiated.

If we take up the notion that we have an inner essence or presence, what we are really doing, according to Derrida (1978b), is embracing a logocentric presumption that language is the product of human beings. He, on the other hand, construes language as pre-existing the individual. There is no unique presence within a person that stands outside of language. Language is a system unto itself that determines subjectivities, and any extra-linguistic reality is simply an illusion. It is language that speaks the world into existence. Humanity is caught in a prison house of language (Jameson, 1972), functioning as a mere nexus point of competing discourses. Poststructuralist writer Davies (2000, p. 64) explains it this way,

The theorization of a person as constituted afresh through each discursive act appears to contradict the sense we have of ourselves as continuous, but this sense of continuity of self is actually created through discourses in which we have come to understand ourselves as having an essential self.

Davies (1989b, 1993) posits "not an essential self with some innate and unique substance," but a self that is "always discursively constituted through the consistent positioning within frequently used discourse." She argues that it just appears to a person and others that what comes from them emanates from an essential self.

Importantly, Misson (1998b, p. 152) acknowledges that there is a “great deal of suspicion around about poststructuralism” precisely because it radically “throws into doubt a lot of former beliefs that people live by,” such as the “determinacy of language” and the “existence of a core self outside society and language.” He argues, however, that it is extremely important to understand this discursive construction of self because it “does give an urgency to work in examining how texts work to position us.” Texts may not only be “creating us” but also “our belief systems” (1998b, p. 149). If this is true of the human condition, then one can understand critical literacy’s imperative to interrogate texts and language so as to avoid being made subject in unwanted ways.

Misson (1998b, p. 149) explains the poststructuralist notion of subjectivity in the following way:

Rather than conceiving us as putting these different ways of speaking on as a covering to a stable, essential self, rather like putting on clothes to dress ourselves appropriately for particular situations, poststructuralism radically argues that there is no self apart from these ways of talking.

He says that poststructuralism sees the “process of the creation of the individual human being” and their “positioning within ideology, as largely happening through language.” Thus, when Derrida says there is “nothing outside texts, humans are included in this,” so that “human beings do not have an essential being that lies behind the textual practices” (1998b, pp. 148-149). While this is clearly a key notion in poststructuralist theory and in the support materials, it is worth noting that the teachers did not pick this up.

Hermeneutics of Suspicion

A Suspicious Hermeneutic the Default Reading Position

The support materials endorse a reading strategy that unpicks a text’s strategies of persuasion and manipulation, so that its rhetoric, values, and ideologies are exposed (Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 17; Moon, 2001, pp. 101-104). This suspicious attitude to reading and interpretation is conceived as emancipatory, because it works to demystify language and expose the ways in which linguistic and cultural systems are constructed by ideologies that further the interests of those who hold power. The reader can then resist being made subject to the text’s ideologies in ways that they do not want. To read with a hermeneutic of suspicion is to read and interpret guided by guardedness. A reader does not have to take up the invited reading of any text because what is presented is not a given or a truth. Unless students are introduced to the idea that they can challenge a dominant or invited reading, they may read the text as if what is contained in it is simply a given. This is an interpretive imperative that emanates from the

masters of suspicion, Nietzsche, Freud and Marx, and more recently Foucault and Derrida, along with other critical theorists.

Suspicious Language about Language

In keeping with this suspicious hermeneutic, the support materials speak about language in a distrustful manner that connotes a degree of censure, culpability and blame. Language is never an “innocent or natural” representation of the way things are (Misson, 1998b, p. 148; Queitzsch, 2001, p. 7). Literary writing has the same “designs on a reader” as community or institutional texts (Hannay, 2001, p. 6), so students must learn how to “debunk” what language is saying, be “alert to strategies” in language (Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 52) and “resist the truths that are offered in texts” (Queitzsch, 2001, p. 1). Texts must be “questioned, disputed” (Lemon, 2001, p. 5) and “interrogated” (Lemon, 2001, p. 6), and students must learn to “manipulate and question texts” (McEwan, 2001, p. 3). Students are taught a “method of criticising texts” (Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 104), how to “destabilise meanings” (Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 52,161), how to “problematise classroom and public texts” (McEwan, 2001, p. 1) and ways to “demystify texts” (Lemon, 2001, p. 2). Almost every support text provides, either directly, or a variation, of the Luke, O'Brien and Comber (1994a) questions that suggest some critical questions to use with texts (cf Jones, 2001; Pappalardo, 2001). They are taught to “critically reflect on how meanings are made” (McEwan, 2001, p. 1).

I need to include a caveat here. Morgan (1994, p. 36) says that she is not suggesting that “all texts are deliberately, wickedly, misleading misrepresentations,” but only that they lead the reader to “see in certain ways.” She raises the possibility that resistant readers might become “cynics who refuse to believe anything” and who do “not get positive hope and good value” from reading. Nonetheless, she claims that critical literacy does “not mean putting students on guard against being affected by texts and language.” It is not about promoting just a “cynical distrust or political correctness” (Morgan, 1994, p. 41). She very definitely does not “want alienated, cynical students to have those tendencies confirmed,” and argues that critical literacy goes “beyond sceptical distrust” or vacuous “political correctness” because it seeks to develop in students those “moral and ethical dispositions” such as “compassionate understanding and concern for a more just and equitable society.”

Positioning

The support materials teach the notion of positioning, where readers are taught to see how they are being positioned by a text and to resist being made subject in unwanted ways (Mellor, et al., 1991, pp. 20-28). Misson and Morgan (2006, p. 70) explain the notion of positioning:

Texts put us into certain subject positions. Many people see this as the reader taking on the subject position as something that is superimposed on a pre-existent self. We take

on the subject position and then afterwards we go back into neutral-the default mode of our identity when we have finished reading. Maybe the default mode is slightly changed from what it was before the reading but basically that is a kind of overlay to the underlying identity. Poststructuralist thinking does not accept this. Poststructuralism asks the radical question, What if there is no underlying identity, but rather, what we are is simply the sum of all the subject positions we have taken up, all the discourses that we have produced or received?

This reading practice is part of a suspicious hermeneutic that requires the student to read a text with the explicit aim of understanding how textuality works to position them, and how it thus constructs their identities (Moon, 2001). The notion of teaching students about positioning derives from the desire to make visible the ideological prefigurement embedded in texts, and the way a reader is positioned to unconsciously take that up as a truth or a natural given (Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 17; Miller & Colwill, 2004). The concentration on how discourses do ideological work through positioning the reader or viewer of a text is a precursor to the possibility of resistance (Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 14, 22-23, 68-19).

As Lemon (2001, p. 2) points out, there is always a connection between language and power. A critical interrogation of texts will seek to ascertain “how the reader may have been positioned by the makers of the text” and “how meaning and power relationships may change if this positioning is resisted or altered” (cf Hannay, 2001, p. 4). Or, as Misson (1998b, p. 149) explains, “texts put us into subject positions (that is the way we see the world implied by the text).” Explaining the importance of Foucauldian theories of “how we are made the subject of ideology,” he says, we “experience human being with a particular configuration of attitudes and beliefs, through being positioned this way.” Salk (2001) explains that when students are given the skills of critical literacy they “will be aware of how texts, and particularly popular cultural texts, are positioning them.” Hannay (2001) says that when her students began to see that they were “being positioned as readers” and when they discovered “how texts work” they were able to “resist the ‘truths’ offered” in the texts.

Thus, the support materials take up aspects of poststructuralist thought that provide a strong theorization of what is happening in the subtle interplay between text and reader that can change the way the reader sees the world, and change the reader. They endorse the view that subjectivity is simply built up by participation in a range of discourses and that texts are implicated as they invite readers to take up particular subject positions. Although the support materials do not articulate this view as clearly as the Misson and Morgan (2006) statement above, they do indicate a firm commitment to this view by teaching students to engage in sceptical reading practices, to unmask textuality to see how positioning works and to intervene into the work of texts so that the texts do not change or make them in unwanted ways.

Texts Construct Identities in Inequitable Ways

A suspicious approach to texts is a requirement of critical literacy because language is implicated in instantiating inequitable power relations. Moon (2001, p. 68) makes the point that “texts construct identities in a variety of ways, dividing people into categories on the basis of features such as physical appearance, gender, class position, sexual preference or some other quality.” These cultural identities become an issue in studies of literature, film and other texts because representations of characters “often encode and also promote stereotypical views of identity” (cf Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 103-104,183; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 22,42-23,77; Yaxley, et al., 2005, pp. 104-127). Moon (2001, p. 129) explains that one of the ways to resist and liberate people from these representations is to learn to read resistantly, so the narrow or harmful representations of gender, class, sexual preference and race are not necessarily taken up as natural (cf Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 52; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 7, 21-25). A suspicious hermeneutic will enable the receiver of the text to refuse to take up the textual subject positions offered, especially in the case where they are unwanted or unfair representations.

Gaps and Silences

Moon (2001, p. 52) explains that gaps in the texts are where the text does not bother to “stitch things together,” but is reliant on the “common sense” assumptions from the reader. These “common sense” assumptions are “naturalized dominances that appear simply as the way things are” (cf Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 157; Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 52; Moon, 2001, p. 28). In order to construct a dominant or invited reading of any text, the reader must “fill the gaps with conventional assumptions” (cf M. Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 46; Moon, 2001, p. 24). Silences, according to Moon (2001, p. 52), result from the fact that textual gaps enable readers to avoid questioning certain values. When the textual gaps are left unquestioned and simply glossed over, this enables readers to “avoid questioning certain cultural values that dominate in the shared community of readers.” When readers do not question the values and attitudes that are valorised in the text, they innocently take up the subject positions that are made available for them without even understanding this subjectification process. As Queitzsch (2001, p. 3) maintains, looking for gaps and silences “enables students to detect the ideological dimension in texts and therefore make a “conscious resistance to the positioning in the text.” Mellor, Patterson and O’Neill (1991, p. 4) elaborate on how gaps and silences work to position the reader as subject to the text’s ideologies. They present texts as always “incomplete and fragmentary” and, while it seems that all the meaning is on the page, it is only because readers have learnt to produce “detailed readings from only bits of text.” There are forms of incompleteness in texts that the “reader unconsciously fills in to make the invited reading.” The “automatic and almost unconscious filling of these gaps becomes part of the positioning

process” if the reader does not question the values that underlie this process. They become positioned by the dominant readings of the texts and they take up the subject positions without even realizing what has been accomplished.

Miller and Colwill (2004, p. 161) similarly refer to gaps as “spaces in the text that the author expects readers to be able to fill because of their prior knowledge and cultural understanding.” They point out that these gaps are not to be confused with silences, which are “authorial omissions or absences in a text that may be either deliberate or unconscious.” These silences, when deliberate, also work to “position the reader so that they feel compelled to supply the needed information to create a particular invited reading.” They (2004, p. 70) provide a number of texts in which students are asked to search for some of the gaps and silences that they are able to “see” because of their “familiarity with discourses operating in the culture.” Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 59) affirm this perspective, also maintaining that the “dominant ideology of a text” is actually “created by the omissions of the text,” which are based on the “prevailing cultural assumptions at the time of the text’s production and reception.” They argue that reading involves a negotiation between “what we read as being present in the text” and what we read “as being absent from the text.” As readers, we always infer meaning from other sources “external to the text.”

It is important for students to understand how gaps and silences work, because unconsciously reading to fill those gaps tends to “reinforce the dominant reading” and instantiate “values, attitudes and preferences of the ideology propagated in the text” (Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 59). This is done at the expense of other ideologies that are silenced in the text. They argue that this may well lead to a distorted picture of reality, and encourage some individuals and groups to “participate in the propagation of the overall ideology of the text at the expense of other groups.” When a reader unconsciously or uncritically takes up the dominant reading of a text, they are taking up its dominant discursive positioning whereas the critical reading practice of reading for absences seeks to make that positioning visible as a precursor to resistance. Moon (2001, p. 126) maintains that when people read, they are actually being inserted into the reading rules and procedures normally shared by members of a community. The reader engages in reading practices which “tend to decode words and phrases according to accepted meanings,” which “invent connections between words and phrases so as to build a ‘complete’ picture from the limited details of the text,” and which “pay attention to some features of the text and ignore others.”

Oppositional or Resistant Readings

The support materials teach the notion of oppositional or resistant reading so that students do not unconsciously, or consciously, accept or reproduce the reading a text appears to invite. They are able to “resist the position offered and construct alternative and resistant readings” (Mellor, et al., 1991, p. 21). Mellor et al. (1991) devote Chapter 2 of their text to the notion of different

reading positions, and similarly Miller and Colwill (2004, pp. 67-101) devote Chapter 4 of their work to explicating reading with, across and against a text, including a section on “reading textual subversions” (cf Moon, 2001, p. 127; Yaxley, et al., 2005, p. 37).

As one example of this approach to reading practice, Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 22) dedicate their Chapter 3 to *Reading Positions*. They divide readings into “invited, alternative and resistant.” They explain that the way a text is read has powerful effects, not only in the creation of meaning but also on an individual’s subjectivity and the divisions between those who are included and those who are excluded by the text’s ideology. Readings determine the “way in which ideologies are received” so it is important to consider the “reading position or reading practices adopted by that individual reader” in determining the meaning of the text. They explain “resistant or oppositional readings” as those where the “reader refuses to accept the ideology in the text.” They refuse to take up the subject positions being offered them. The authors provide a “good example” of an oppositional reading practice where a “feminist reading of texts” challenges a “sexist ideology,” or where a “homosexual reading” challenges “heterosexuality as the norm.” They tell students that they are “performing a resistant reading of popular culture” each time they “use deconstruction to critique texts in their Senior English course” (2003, p. 22).

Resistant reading is presented as a practice which would enable students to reject the limited subject positions offered in a text, and push the boundaries of unwanted subjectification. Moon (2001, p. 129) explains it as a way of reading which “changes the rules and works against the grain of the text.” It takes a “sceptical approach” to reading and its aim is to “highlight beliefs and values which would be taken for granted in the dominant readings.” Miller and Colwill (2004, p. 4) propose that it is important to “identify the values, attitudes, beliefs and cultural assumptions underpinning texts,” and the “ways in which texts work to perpetuate particular discourses and representations as being normal and natural.” When readers “interrogate and contest textual representations of individuals, groups, times, places and concepts” they will “discover the ideological work being done by the text.” For instance, they explain that sometimes binaries are implicit in the “stereotypical gender representations that restrict masculinity to strength and mental acuity” and “femininity to appearance.” These are very restrictive subject positions for students to take up, and a resistant reading would foreground that males may possess “sensitivity, consideration, and charm” and women “intellect, courage and strength.” In this way students can resist the subject positions offered in the text, they can refuse to take them up as a given, a truth or as natural.

Derridean Openness to the Other

Reading to Valorise the Marginalized

Another way that students are taught to detect textual positioning, and this is part of critical literacy’s commitment to a hermeneutic of suspicion, is to read for that which is marginalised

(Mellor, et al., 1991, pp. 10,76; Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 26; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 12). Miller and Colwill (2004, p. 26) explain that discourses are “never neutral” and they always “exclude or marginalise those who do not share the same culture, attitudes and beliefs.” They operate to “empower some and disempower others” (cf Queitzsch, 2001, pp. 7,18; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 12). Critical literacy seeks to bring those that are located at the margins or “on the edge,” those that have been “relegated to a position of non importance,” to the centre (McEwan, 2001, p. 2; Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 26). This sounds very much like the Derridean imperative to be open to the Other.

An examination of the support materials demonstrates a number of things about the theorisation of identity that underpin critical literacy. They take up the poststructuralist notion that the subject has no pre-linguistic self that precedes its social construction through the agency of language. Identities are constitutive of the literacies we have at our disposal, and because subjectivity is understood as an effect of discursive practices, the support materials teach students to recognise and to resist unwanted subject positioning. Although not delineated clearly, the materials also take up the Marxist view that texts are part of a larger discursive logic that is entrenched in pre-existing socio-economic forces. Because language has ideological dimensions, readers are domesticated into reproducing hierarchies of inequality and injustice. A critical reading practice seeks to make this process visible and to make space for resistance. The materials develop the Derridean notion of alterity in their valorisation of those that are marginalised, and in reading for gaps and silences. They posit reading for differences, for absences or for the marginalised as possibly liberating for the reading subject.

Chapter 5

Self: What the Teachers Say

In critical literacy the students develop reading practices to make textual subjectification visible, and to expose how language works to constitute subjectivity. This is construed as an empowering imperative that frees individuals from the tyranny of their own subjection and it is indeed crucial work, especially if one construes individual identity only as a decentred flux of competing subject positions.

While the support materials developed this notion of subjectivity, the Christian theological and philosophical literature demonstrated a degree of resistance to any theorization of self that denied at least some notion of presence. There was resistance to viewing the self as simply swamped by economic systems or language unable to express anything other than what the economic or language system allowed. They argued for a self that, while not completely immune from discursive influence, has something unique and given at the core. The teachers however did not view the lack of presence in notions of subjectivity as problematic because, for them it was not apparent in critical literacy.

The teachers insisted that the idea of readers being made subject to language was not apparent in critical literacy. AA explained this more fully,

The concept of the self being formed by language does not come through in critical literacy because the teachers are not that knowledgeable in it; they are not trained in it. I do not think students pick up on this either, although they may get a glimpse of it in the notion of positioning. It depends on the teacher really.

FF spoke for many when she said that she did “not teach the notion of subjectification at all.” She said, “We teach that we *relate* through discourses, but we do not teach that we are *made* by them.” The majority of the teachers agreed with FF, that they had “never heard of the term subjectification.” With respect to the students, EE explained that they do “not understand themselves as being constituted through discourses,” and AA agrees that they are “not aware of the notion of being made subject to a text.” One teacher felt that I was “reading much more into critical literacy than is actually there,” and that the “notion of subjectification is not part of the thinking in critical literacy” (LL).

Masters of Language or Mastered by Language?

The teachers that did take up any notion that language had at least some constitutive effect saw its efficacy as limited. While language might influence identity in certain ways, it does not fully constitute the person. They posit language as something that humans use rather than it using the person. AA explained this in the following way, “I understand discourses as more of a vehicle that we use rather than a creative force,” and similarly in the words of BB, “We use language

but we are not made by it. If this is the view of identity within critical literacy then this is a limited notion of self and it would be one of its big weaknesses.” KK also supports this view:

Language might have some influence over our selves but it does not fully determinate it. The self is always more than what is inscribed in language, more than a conglomeration of discourses. Language was given to us as a gift, as a way of communication. Language is just a medium, it does not control who we are. We are not the products of the language system but we are using the language through which we communicate to other people what we actually mean.

JJ similarly articulated what many others said:

Language has some power in forming us but it is not the be all and end all. It gives us a means of communicating but it does not create us. There are some things that language cannot explain – belief, faith, whatever you want to call it. It doesn’t matter whether it is Christian or otherwise. Some things are not constituted by language. Language is not all there is.

A number of the teachers expressed the view that the students would not have picked up notions of subjectivity in critical literacy. CC explained that “the students understand the discursive power of language but not that it has that much power to change them from the inside out which is what God does.” GG however thought it is possible that

They might get this idea [that the self is made subject to language] when we expose them to advertisements and persuasive television but I am not sure they get how pervasive this might be. A lot depends on the teacher to some extent; whether they see it like this.

CC articulated a vision of language and thought as inextricably linked, but with a caveat:

It’s marvellous... the interaction... how the development of thought and language go together. We could not possibly tease out what is what, but the self is always more than just language. When it is made exclusive... that the self is only ever what is inscribed in language... then that is not correct. It is far too narrow. It is sad really.

As AA said, “in terms of a notion of self we need to understand who we are as children of God rather than that we are almost just robots that are affected by discourses that speak themselves into existence through us.” There was a unanimous response that language does influence identities to a small extent, but that human being is much more than what is constituted in language. There certainly appeared to be no articulation of the poststructuralist death of the subject submerged in an endless flow of discourses, nor did they construe the self as a constituted by State apparatuses.

Reasonable Confidence in Consciousness

All teachers presented the view that some part of the self remains stable, an essence that remains fixed, from which the person lives out their life and makes decisions about what discourses to take up. Not one of the teachers took the view that the subject was not in conscious control of their thoughts, values and attitudes, or that their speech was not uniquely theirs. LL explicated this position with respect to reading practices. She said that “students first must see what they can find in the text themselves” so they can “get their own perspective.” The notion of their “own perspective” is presented as one that is an innocent reading space where the reader’s “pure views” will be presented before they “are coerced by teacher-imposed reading theories” (AA). Or, similarly, the “student will want to know what they think about the text before they do a feminist reading or anything like that” (FF). Some took the view that “the student has free will, so they can reject or accept what is written. They do not have to believe the ideologies that are there” (EE). While BB said that, “Students are not sucked in that easily; they will decide for themselves what to believe in.”

It appeared, at least in the initial response to my questions, that the teachers still had a degree of assurance that autonomous human consciousness was directly accessible. They retained confidence in rationality and self-transparency of the subject to make decisions about discourse from an inner core that remained relatively stable. They had not embraced the view that unconscious and hidden structures of socio-historical forces are instantiated in consciousness, and that this constrains, governs, or constitutes behaviour and selves.

Subjectification to Texts Not Apparent to Teachers

In the early stages of this project, since the teachers did not have a strong awareness of the poststructuralist notion of subjectivity, it appeared that I might have reached a stalemate. The teachers were certain that the notion of the human being made subject to textual, and therefore ideological subjectification, was not apparent in critical literacy. This was initially problematic for my research, because one of the tensions delineated in Chapter 3 was that the poststructuralist construal of the self was a disabling notion to take up. When I pressed this issue further, and asked them to explain the notion of positioning and why they taught it, what became apparent was that while they had gleaned the notion of positioning and the idea of making ideologies visible in texts, most did not move those ideas further into the area of textual subjectification. They acknowledged that discourse was shaped by ideology, but they did not extend this thought further to the notion that these discourses in turn construct identity. They did not see that critical literacy sought to locate the *self* in discursive space. They saw critical literacy as an inquiry into the ideological prefigurement of texts, not as an inquiry into what constitutes the reader as subject. The work texts perform, and the effects they are likely to

produce, were seen as occurring outside the person. The text was construed as an outside object which the individual may respond to in certain ways, but which does not enter into any sort of process of reshaping or remaking of their being. This response appears all the more significant given that it remained even when I pressed the issue. They understood positioning to be something that occurs on the outside of an already established identity, more like a temporary influence. Or, as FF puts it, “we speak about how we relate through using discourses, we speak about how we are influenced by discourses, but we do not teach that our identity is formed through discursive practices.”

Subsequent to this realization, and in further discussion about positioning, I presented the teachers with three short sections from the support materials. The first was Herrett’s (2003, p. 49) comment that “texts construct us rather than the other way around.” The second was Moon’s (2001, pp. 150-153) statement that the sense we have of self is “illusory” and an “effect of social forces;” that the “body is born” and “the person is installed later,” as humanity is inserted into the society’s discourses. The third was Morgan (1997, p. 4):

I am not a self sufficient individual whose ideas and views originate with myself. I am actually spoken into being by ways I am spoken or written about within such a discourse and thus the ways I speak and think about myself. And by such means I would be given an identity. It could be said that discourses about texts, reading, teaching and educational outcomes were having a conversation with each other through me.

The teachers’ responses to the above notions of human formation demonstrated two salient points of tension between Christian views of the self and those presented in critical literacy. They posit human being as uniquely created by God and much more than simply a confluence of competing discourses. They also present self as retaining something stable at the core, contrary to the flux and malleability of the poststructuralist self, and this was buttressed by drawing on the Christian doctrines of creation, regeneration, and sanctification.

Rejection of Presence Problematic

Only three teachers spoke specifically about the notion of presence; however, the following three comments clearly speak to the poststructuralist denial of presence. CC said,

The bible says we are hemmed in behind and before; there is that sense that we are fully known as in Psalm 139. He knit us together in our mother’s womb. [She quotes from the scripture]. That reflects on there being a true presence in each person in that they are already fully known and created by God.

JJ spoke about the tensions implicit in the poststructuralist notion of self for a Christian,

I think critical literacy might see the human person as a blank space with no presence until it is filled with something, and what they are being filled with depends on what is around them, what discourses are in operation and what they choose to take in. There is much tension here. God is telling us that we are completely made in his image and our nature, our personality and everything that makes us up is a gift from God, as opposed to the notion that our being can change every day depending on the influences and discourses that we take up.

And GG affirmed this view, explaining that the notion of presence, or its absence, is always a matter of faith:

The problem with poststructuralism is that basically it argues that there is no absolute, no given essence or presence. I reject that categorically [very emphatic here]. You know the question of presence is really a matter of faith but not just for believers in the Christian God but for those who do not believe in presence as well.

The teachers maintained the notion of presence, and expressed concern about the residual indeterminacy and lack of normative or teleological framework for human becoming in the poststructuralist account of self.

Human Being Created before Insertion into History, Culture and Language

Teachers expressed the view that humanity has something innate at the core; a created identity that is not just something imposed from outside as the person is made subject to the discourses of the culture. They posited self existing prior to discourse and in speaking of this, many addressed the issue of which came first, the person or language, the person or socio-economic circumstances.

AA explained that “we *are* before language influences us. There is something unique from God that was placed in us through our creation by God.” And similarly FF insisted that, “God created us first before we started to use language and live in the culture. Read the creation story.” GG explained it this way:

There is an essence in humanity that God created and placed there. Humans are a unique creation of His mind and purpose. This has been given to us prior to our entry into language, discourses, texts and culture.

KK provided an explanation about the difference she saw between what she called a biblical account of the self and the poststructuralist account. She said,

I do not believe we are only being shaped by discourses. I believe we *are* something first. All human beings have been created in the image of God. This poststructuralist

account of human being is not a biblical account because there's no transcendent being that actually designed us to communicate with his creation.

Or as FF simply put it, "We are formed before we come into language and culture."

The teachers appear to have addressed Vanhoozer's (1998) concern, delineated in Chapter 3, that it is crucial for Christian thinkers and educators to understand which came first, the human subject or the historical situation.

Self created in the Image of God / a Given Core

Every teacher took the view that humanity has a unique givenness or soul or essence, created by God. This is taken from a biblical view that God created humanity in his own image, Imago Dei. Identity is construed as a gift from God at creation, and not merely that which accrues through the discursive practices and values of a culture. A typical response came from HH who said,

Language does influence us but it is not everything. We were created by God first and something unique from God was placed in us through our creation by Him. He breathed life into all humanity. Just look at Psalm 139, and Ephesians.

HH, also drawing on the scripture, explained it this way:

When I was reading this from Moon about illusory identities I thought of Ephesians 1. We have identity and we have had identity since before the creation of the world... in Christ. So how could they think that we have no identity until we are in the confluence of language? I would never see identity as Moon describes it and I do not think most people in our society think that way. Our students know they have an identity that is not dependent on language; that there is something unique and given to them.

FF, highlighting Sovereign intention in creation, explicated this viewpoint:

God created humanity in his own image and there was intention in our creation. We are not random, purposeless events in the world tossed about by every wind and doctrine or philosophy. We are not just a meeting point for the expression of discourses. There is definitely something continuous and given in all creation. This is given by God and He is a God of order not chaos or confusion.

BB expressed his concerns about the poststructuralist view of subjectivity. "It would be a very transient existence if, every time you read a text or saw a visual text, your identity shifted or your understanding of the world shifted."

I include the following very emphatic comment by GG because it echoes the expressed thought of many of the teachers on the notion of human being. In response to Moon's notion that illusory identity is only the effect of social forces he said,

I absolutely reject that notion that there is nothing given to the human prior to their insertion into language. There is a larger purpose in life than just out of nothing going to nothing. We actually come out of something from a Christian perspective. We come out of the dreams, passions and desires of a creative God who wanted us, designed us, purposed us and knew us before we were born. That is a challenge to poststructuralist and Marxist thinking I would think. Our creation is not just a biologically random event. The idea that unique identity is illusory and an effect of social forces can only be accepted if there is no real purpose beyond that which exists within the bounds of life. I absolutely reject Moon's comment [*very passionate here*]. I reject the notion that there is no essence... that nothing is given prior to language. The subject is more than what is inscribed in language. I think the subject is way beyond that!

Self / Stability / Regeneration

The other doctrine, particular to the Christian believer, that teachers drew on to explicate self with some stability, was regeneration, or being born from above. The receiving of the indwelling presence of Christ, at the moment of belief, was presented by every teacher as one that occurred irrespective of historical and cultural specificities and something that instantiates stability in the Christian believer. FF explained this as follows:

It is the regeneration that actually stabilises us. Our identity is based in Christ. In Him we live and move and have our being... not in language. We become a new creation in Christ. The old has passed away and the new has come [*she quotes the scripture here*]. It is only then that we come into our real identity because it is locked in with God and what he has done for us. We are entering into our eternal heritage in Christ.

BB similarly explained the notion of constancy in regeneration linked with the biblical notion of God's presence dwelling within:

Christians become new creations [*he quotes scripture here*] if we are in Christ. It gives you the only stability as far as I am concerned until our death and even after that. The particular rock that Christians lean on is completely stable... [*He cites the bible here 'He is the same yesterday, today and forever'*] and this is absolutely vital to understand. The Christian that accepts Christ has Him dwelling within. He does not change. God never changes... not like the world with all its different fashions and changes over time... different philosophies. Our being is created by the indwelling Spirit. The

presence of an indwelling God gives me a stable core which I build on through obedience to His word.

CC similarly commented that,

Regeneration happens to people everywhere irrespective of nationality, gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual preference, colour and so on. The message of the gospel itself might be told with some culture attached to it... in the language I mean... but the impartation of God to the believer does not. When the person lives out their life as a Christian in their culture that will have its own cultural marks but the impartation of Christ's life to the believer does not.

The gospel was construed here as culturally configured, but what happens to a believer on receiving the Christ of the gospel was viewed as the same for all believers. JJ explained, that

It is not discourse... It is not even how long you have been exposed to it. It is really an internal process that happens and it has nothing to do with language. This is an experience that comes from outside all human realities. I suppose that once that change has occurred then you start filtering everything else that comes into your life by it. You know, God exists outside our language and our constructions of reality, however we have to use language to speak of God and to communicate about God.

GG endeavoured to separate this experience of regeneration from a notion of simply taking up a Christian discourse:

It is true obviously that for someone to disciple someone else in the word of God there has to be a connection to their culture otherwise there is no recognition, but when true belief in the gospel of Christ happens for that person it does not matter what culture they are in. Something transcendent comes to you. This is God Himself. When people are first exposed to it [the Christian message] they do choose to listen, they choose to attend church, they might take up the Christian discourse and culture, but there is a time when they have that ultimate epiphany and impartation themselves. They have received the same grace, the same love, the same God.

I initially thought poststructuralist theories that reject the notion of a unique, fixed and stable individual identity would pose theoretical problems for Christian teachers. The overall response indicated, however, that this poststructuralist view of subjectivity does not come through in critical literacy. And even if it did, the teachers drew a boundary at that point based on the biblical view of creation and redemption. As FF said, "in other schools they might teach the idea that we have fragmented unstable identities but it does not happen here because we teach creation as foundational to the Christian world view." And, "we make it very clear that we are

teaching from a biblical world view so creation and regeneration give stability to the individual even as they work to deconstruct a text” (AA).

Sanctification – Stability

Most of the teachers spoke about stability in identity being established over time through the process of sanctification. Sanctification is the continuing work of God in the believer, by which their moral condition is brought into conformity with their status established before God in regeneration (Erickson, 1998a). They spoke about the notion of being conformed to Christ by being obedient to his word, and the Word. This was viewed as an important part of ongoing discipleship. JJ explained it this way:

Because we are given explicit ways to live in the Scriptures... how to treat humanity... the scripture we are told is profitable for us in many ways to teach, instruct, reprove, and train in righteousness. We are told we must hear and obey, not just hear. This is fundamental for Christians in terms of their discipleship. So obedience is a large part of it but it is not like an enforcer saying you will obey or else. We submit because we were first loved. We want to please him not in the sense of appeasement but just out of love for what he has done for us.

GG explained this further while raising the idea of revelation:

A significant agent in the formation of my Christian identity would be prayerful engagement with the Bible and the operation of revelation in that engagement. I can't say that it is the main agent in the formation of my identity because I am aware that there are so many other factors, but it is a major one.

As I listened to the teachers, I realised that what informed their notions of self were the Christian scriptures. Most of them quoted various passages to shore up their notion of self as a unique and purposeful gift from God. They also used the scripture to explain what was expected of them in their life of discipleship to Christ. It became quite obvious that in their consistent drawing from the scriptures to establish Christian identity they were very much evidencing the Foucauldian notion of the technology of selfhood. They were being made subject to the biblical text. Surely this is indicative of the fact that the notion of subjectification does indeed work in the way that poststructuralists say it does? As they read the scriptures, they take up the biblical discourse on humanity. They acknowledged openly that the Christian self was very much that which was subject to the biblical text; in fact, most indicated that they felt they ought to be even more so.

It struck me that it was somewhat of a contradiction to take a strong position that humanity is *not* only what is inscribed in language, and yet openly acknowledge that one's views of the self

were consciously formed and shaped around textual language, in this case the bible's language. This appeared to support the Foucauldian notion of the human being made subject to textuality. At first glance, this appeared to strengthen the poststructuralist position. When I pressed for further clarity on this point, two themes emerged.

Subjectification to the Bible is willing

First, they maintained that their subjection to the biblical text was a willing one, and not something achieved by coercive force or unconscious manipulation. They explained that "the disciple willingly submits to the text in an expectation and desire to be transformed by the renewing of their mind according to the word in Romans" (DD). Explained another way: "It is love that makes the reader willing to be made subject to the text" (JJ). Or, as BB put it, "What is liberating is when a person sees themselves as they truly are and is a doer of the word in response to it." According to CC, "The Bible is a textual mirror in which we see our true selves. Look at James 1: 22-23," and GG, "The Christian submits out of love. They choose to make themselves subject to the revelation that is given them in the text."

Revelation: God Speaks through the Scripture

Second, all the teachers spoke of revelation, in which God speaks to the person. GG, speaking of revelation, explained that God speaks through the scripture, among other ways, to the reader:

The difference here is that Christians hold to a subject position as revealed by God. When I receive revelation from the scriptures about who I really am, I know that the Creator, via the scriptures, has spoken to me truly about my condition, and that I am to respond in the way indicated.

Others claimed that "the Bible is different from other texts in that it is a living word" (HH), and that "God is behind the text so that it is Him that speaks truly to the reader through it" (DD). As AA explained, "When God speaks through the word to his creation then what he says is true. He speaks truth to his creation."

Scriptural Reading Shapes and Transforms the Christian Believer

There was also an acknowledgment amongst the teachers that scriptural reading is meant to shape the reader. They acknowledged that the Bible definitely works to constitute the subject, and that formation of the Christian mind around biblical themes and motifs is the most important aspect of ongoing discipleship. This point is made by Vanhoozer (1998) that the Bible definitely is ideological literature in that it (or the One behind it) seeks, through its rhetoric, to shape readers' minds and hearts to bring them into alignment with itself. Secondly, they take the view that when they read the Bible; God speaks to their human condition in a

qualitatively different way than what is supposed in Foucauldian terms. First, because it is God that speaks, and second, because what he says to their heart is truth.

All teachers echoed MM when he said, “over the years I have learnt that God often speaks to me when I read the scriptures.” They claimed that reading the bible brought them in contact with a transcendent presence who is also an immanent God who speaks through the written word of the bible and desires their transformation. As Vanhoozer explains, “For a Christian it is not a matter of finding some kind of subjectivity that is not textually positioned, but of finding one’s true subject position in front of the biblical text” (email correspondence from Vanhoozer 30/08/09).

When I suggested that the poststructuralists would argue that this is just people effecting a number of operations on their own bodies, souls, conduct and ways of being in order to construct their identity in conformity with the expectations of the Christian community (Martin, 1988), they responded by saying that “what comes into the core of the believer at regeneration exists outside any cultural contextualization” (KL); there is an “impartation of the Spirit of God into the believer at regeneration” (HH); and this is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (DD). They present the initial regeneration as not dependent on the individual’s subjectification to Christian culture or discourse, but on the impartation of God to the one who believes.

Philosophy Should Get Out of English

A few of the teachers, in response to Herret et al’s (2003) comment that texts construct us rather than the other way around, argued that subject English had been unnecessarily co-opted by philosophical theories. Referring to Herret’s comment LL complains that “this sort of philosophical theory should not come into English at all. English should just leave philosophy out of it and let English teachers get on with teaching students to read.” When I asked her if she thought there was an innocent reading practice that does not have any theory behind it she claimed that there was. In her estimation a reading is theory-free when it “does not presuppose a reading framework.” There appeared to be a blind spot to the notion that all reading practices are prefigured ideologically, and are serving some interests over and against others. This is manifest in the comment by FF, “Why can’t we just leave them alone to read?” Only a few of the teachers were aware that theories about reading also carried implicit theories about reality. With this idea in mind, BB raised a concern that was flagged in Chapter 3 that,

You cannot present these philosophical notions to students without being aware of what you are dealing with. They are theories about reality, meaning and existence. These are fundamental questions here.

How Might Critical Literacy Language Summon a Person into Being?

Hermeneutic of Suspicion and Notions of Self

Critical literacy, according to the teachers, establishes a reading practice that encourages a suspicious attitude to reading and interpretation. Resistant or suspicious readers seek to make visible the text's strategies of persuasion, or manipulation, so that the text's agendas, values and ideologies are exposed. They seek to demystify language and to expose the way in which ideology, through linguistic and cultural systems, furthers the interests of those who hold the power. Every teacher deemed critical literacy to be an approach to texts that creates suspicion as a default reading position.

Half of the teachers thought that the creation of a suspicious attitude to texts might not be an enabling notion, in that it might lead to a disabling suspicion about everything. Those that expressed concern, explained that it might lead to suspicion and scepticism about all texts and knowledge claims, distrust in language in general, and an ultimate disillusionment with language and reading. They also raised the concern that deconstruction might be frightening for students.

Leads to Suspicion and Scepticism

FF expressed her concerns in the following way: "The students might become quite suspicious about everything. They will not be able to trust anything and they will approach all texts suspiciously with a desire to deconstruct them. This might not end up producing a good result."

JJ advanced a similar view saying,

I think it creates in our students' suspicion and scepticism. I do not see this as ever coming out in a positive light in a lot of ways, because it leaves the students with no foundations. It leaves them with nothingness. They have the critical literacy language, but their identities are lost because they are never able to fix a meaning for themselves.

CC also built on this idea with the notion that a constant deferral of meaning and rejection of totalised conclusions was psychologically harmful. She raised the question of how a suspicious hermeneutic might form the reading subject:

We need to think that if language does influence our identities, then how might the language of critical literacy, with its sustained suspicion to texts, change or form us? This may not be liberating in the way that it is intended. As Director of Studies I have had a number of years' contact with students who have become very angry about critical literacy. There has been a large level of anxiety there, with parents and students. They have the tools, but can never really arrive at a satisfactory answer. There is no closure over answer. All they learn is that they have to get the language right. It is never

closed at some point, for them to say “yes, I understand.” Students need to know that they can approximate the truth of the matter. It is not satisfying for them psychologically. It is not, after all, *all* suspicion and postponement of arrival.

KK said that as well as psychological effects, critical literacy could possibly generate detrimental spiritual effects:

Even the questions “what does a text mean anymore?”, or “what does an author mean, or intend here?” are out the door. While I can see benefits in the practices of critical literacy, I can also see that it might make a student anxious about truth claims, or wary about any authoritative meaning, and I am not sure whether that will have good results, both psychologically, or spiritually.

One teacher raised ethical concerns about establishing a default position of suspicion in students. In response to her comments, I read Morgan’s (1997) statement about critical literacy, that it is a practice of scepticism, but within an ethics of care for others. HH responded to this with the following comment:

Once you get rid of the idea that they will find meaning *in* a text, once you thoroughly teach a sceptical practice to approaching texts, what you might be left with is the idea that there are no absolutes, there are no universals, there is no real objective knowledge, and it is all social construction. The knowledge we have is only what the community agrees on. There is no given knowledge out there apart from language. If a child gets hold of that, how do you have an ethics of care? What do you base this care on and how does one decide what is ethical? When the universals have gone how do you decide on your ethics? What does ‘care’ mean in a culture that does not have foundations?

Distrust in Language

A number of teachers thought that trust in language might be frustrated as a direct result of a critical reading practice. This concern was raised by Henry (1976b): that words are now viewed suspiciously, as a cover. Rather than a revelation of truth, words are viewed as that which are used to “cover up, misrepresent and betray.” KK asks, “Well what happens when you spend your life constantly questioning all texts? You cannot trust that at some point you can simply receive some information on trust.” HH similarly claimed that “we do not want to make our students so suspicious of language that they always see it as hiding something.” A number of teachers voiced considerable concerns over this possibility. “I want my students to be able to trust language. I see language as a gift to us from God, and we are to use this gift responsibly” (KK). With this concern in mind, HH describes a professional development session:

Someone brought up in the session the question of where a suspicious attitude to texts is going to lead us. Are we just going to raise a whole generation of cynics who have

nothing to believe in? And the answer of the workshop leader was that they had no idea. They had no solution for that problem, and the teachers present saw this as a genuine problem. They of course were not all Christians at that conference. Some felt there might be a resultant sense of angst that there was nothing to believe because you are debunking everything.

Similarly, DD said that something important is lost when a sustained suspicious attitude to texts is promoted:

If we teach students to deconstruct language all the time, it is possible that they will not be confident that language takes us to something that is real. Is it possible that students might come to seriously distrust language and only see it as something that seeks to manipulate or trick the reader into believing something that is detrimental?

And similarly, JJ asked teachers to consider what the legacy of this practice will be:

Critical literacy is basically asking them to pull everything apart that has been taught to them. You know it almost has an ominous element to it. Why haven't they given me that side of things? What are they trying to hide from me? We need to ask what the end result of this sort of reading will be. I do not want them to believe everything they read as true, but teachers need to ask what a distrust of language will leave us with.

LL construed a default hermeneutic of suspicion as intellectually flawed. She explained,

All you have to do is throw in the what if, the what about the others; what about these people; what about that, who is left out, who is silenced? So you never really have to sustain an intellectual argument because all you have to do is throw in suspicion. It's like establishing reasonable doubt. You can get off everything with a good lawyer who can establish reasonable doubt. It is a balance though because you do not want them to be sucked into everything, but also you don't want them to arrogantly override what is there in the text simply to impose the new literary orthodoxy.

Deconstruction Frightening for Students

Some teachers raised the concern that if humans do live their lives in the power of language and stories, is it possible that the language of critical literacy summoned students into being in negative ways? As DD said, "What might the material effects be if we teach a generation of students to approach texts with suspicion and distrust?"

Some envisaged the process of deconstruction to be frightening for students. JJ said,

For teenagers I think deconstruction would scare the living daylights out of them because it drops all barriers. They never have any truth. They never have something that they can accept as being true or final without any ulterior motive. They are not

emotionally or psychologically stable enough or developed enough to even handle that concept.

FF said, “If students get hold of the idea that truth should always be viewed suspiciously,” or if they “lose confidence that they can really find truth in a text, this can be disabling, especially if the school labours that reading practice.” LL asks what effect a sustained suspicion towards texts might have on a student with respect to any knowledge claims:

It is not such a problem in English, but I can imagine it could flow over into other subject areas where you are dealing with more factual things. You know some things are facts and there could be that potential. Certainly I think critical literacy has brought postmodernism to the everyday person such that whereas before, who I am, and what is relative, and what is real, were philosophical questions discussed by philosophers. Now they are an impediment often to conversation and communication everywhere, and I would suggest an impediment to English at times.

Disillusionment with Reading

Others claim that the end result could be disillusionment with reading. FF said that,

Behind critical literacy is the notion that texts will have power over you if you take them up innocently, without understanding what’s behind them. My question is, if you take up the view that everything you read is going to exercise harmful power over you and we teach our kids that, and I’m suggesting to a certain extent, that’s what we do when we keep pushing critical literacy, what are the results of that? They will never read a thing again. They will never read for enjoyment. You’ll turn them off reading. If you’re constantly picking something to pieces, you just give up and walk away. We don’t want students to be disillusioned with reading and language.

Value in a Hermeneutic of Suspicion

Half the teachers felt that a suspicious hermeneutic was important to establish in the students. A typical response was GG’s:

If we can teach students the principles of critical literacy, they will resist what they need to. Students are able to have a discerning approach to the culture and to recognize when manipulative techniques are being used. They are able to make a critical judgment on whether or not that is something they choose to respond to in the way offered to them. We need to teach them, so they are not gullibly pulled in.

By far the majority of responses that emphasised the value of a suspicious hermeneutic did so only as it applied to the protection of Christian identity. They saw a reading practice that sides

with the marginalized as providing particular benefits for the Christian community. As HH explained,

You want your students to be critically literate. You want them to be able to read below the surface of any text that they are approaching. You want them to understand the ideologies behind a text because so many of those ideologies are godless. You want them to be able to discern that they are godless.

AA also spoke of how a suspicious hermeneutic could be affirming for the Christian,

We need to understand that the things we do, the things we take up, do change our identities to some extent. We do become what we practice. A lot of critical literacy looks at the feminist way of reading. Has this person been marginalized or has the text marginalized a homosexual man's interpretation of sexuality or something like that. We don't go in to lots of those things. We look at how these different views sit with Christian ones. If there were a whole lot of texts that represented Christians negatively, which there are, then I do want my students to be able to see that selections are made to represent Christians that way. This is important for all people who feel that they are represented erroneously.

Christians Always Read Suspiciously

Some teachers, such as LL, explained that a suspicious attitude to texts has always been an important part of Christian reading:

Christians are taught early on in their life to examine all cultural influences and see where they stand on them. Often the reigning culture is in tension with the values and beliefs of a Christian culture, so we are taught to be suspicious of texts or even to avoid some altogether.

Many of the teachers agreed with KK that:

Christians have been examining texts critically for eons because they have to know what the world view is in the texts that they are examining. The Christian world view is not the dominant world view anymore, and they need to read and ascertain what underlies any text to look for its dominances.

I wondered at this point about the tension that Walsh (2000) raises of whether suspicious reading from this perspective is only instantiating "protective custody" and a shoring up of Christian identity rather than an empathetic social conscience that wants to maintain an open and merciful embrace of difference. While there was general agreement that the Church was not meant to be complicit with oppressive regimes, there did not appear to be an understanding that Christian schooling itself could possibly work as a cover for an imposed ideological orthodoxy.

Christianity / Derridean Alterity / Share Openness to the Other

Chapter 4 demonstrated a commitment in the support materials to the notion that an ethical reading practice valorises the textually marginalized. Critical literacy seeks to bring those that are located at the margins or “on the edge,” those that have been “relegated to a position of non-importance,” to the centre (McEwan, 2001, p. 2; M. Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 26). This is an outworking of the Derridean imperative to be open to the Other.

A number of Christian thinkers cited in Chapter 3 construed congruence between a Christian love of neighbour and a Derridean openness to the Other. However, the teachers did not articulate this correspondence because they were not aware of the particulars of Derridean thinking. They did, however, explain Christianity as a call to love one’s neighbour, whoever that might be. This was posited as a distinguishing mark of a true disciple of Christ. CC’s comment demonstrated this:

Lived rightly, the Christian life is meant to be open to the Other, and in particular the downcast and the downtrodden. The Christian life is not about self but is held in a much larger picture of God’s work. It is about other-centredness. The whole notion of self-focus is not the central way of living the Christian life.

BB described the Christian life of discipleship as a “call away from a life of self. Jesus said to his followers, deny yourself and come follow me. Love your neighbour as yourself.” And GG explained that:

The entire emphasis on self is not what living as a Christian is about. Jesus calls his disciples to deny themselves pick up their cross and follow him. The whole call is to love others, not to push them to the margins. This of course sits in tension with Christian notions of morality for some, but the original call was always to love. Love God and people. So there is a call towards others, not to a spiritual ghetto that isolates itself from others.

The literature outlined in Chapter 3 highlighted that Christians delineated a number of tensions between Christianity and, in particular, poststructuralist conceptions of human identity. Many thought that a deconstructive anthropology that dismantles notions of God, substance and self would have detrimental effects on a sense of self, and that deconstruction might lead to a radical sense of disconnection, a diminishment of the foundation for ethics, and might well be in tension with emancipatory practices and human agency. Others explicated tension between the Derridean openness to the Other and the human need for boundaries, and tension between deconstruction’s free-floating lack of fixed identity and the human need to have normative clarity on questions of self. It was these tensions that I expected to explore in the interviews with the teachers. What I found, however, was that teachers were not aware that

poststructuralist notions underpinned critical literacy, and consequently I was unable to explore these questions in any depth.

The teachers had not only not taken up the poststructuralist notion that the subject has no pre-linguistic self prior to its insertion into language and culture but they also did not think this notion was evident in critical literacy. They construed human being as created before insertion into history culture and language, they maintained a degree of confidence in consciousness and they saw language as influential, but not constitutive at the core. They did not view the self as merely an effect of discursive practices even though they taught students to recognise and to resist unwanted subject positioning. A few of the teachers articulated an awareness that texts are part of a larger discursive logic entrenched in pre-existing socio-economic forces however they did not link this to critical literacy's critique of the social construction of self. They saw it more as a critique of texts and their persuasive power more than the idea that the reader themselves is domesticated into reproducing hierarchies of inequality and injustice. They maintained a degree of given presence in the self, drawing on Christian doctrine to support such a position, while still acknowledging some discursive influence. They were in concert with some of the tensions raised in Chapter 3, insisting that a default hermeneutic of suspicion might produce distrust in language and disillusionment with reading, however they were not concerned about the poststructuralist denial of presence because they thought it was not present in critical literacy and if it was, it not apparent to the students. We now turn to the different theorisations of emancipation within Christianity, poststructuralism and Marxism.

Chapter 6

Emancipation and the Literature

A number of tensions exist between Marxist, poststructuralist and Christian views of emancipation. I recognize that there are different forms of Marxism (cf Schmitt, 1987, p. 204) and poststructuralism (. Peters & Burbules, 2004), just as Christianity is not unitary (McGrath, 2001). However the purpose of this chapter is not to develop the differences within each, but to examine them at their interface in a very broad sense, as they can be evidenced in theological and philosophical discussions of the issues. These broad brush strokes will establish whether there are theoretical tensions at this interface.

Marxist Notions of Emancipation Present in Critical Literacy

Marxists envisage the human being as in need of emancipation. The need for emancipation arises, fundamentally from unequal and oppressive relations of power grounded in classic formulations derived from *Capital*, in capitalist relations of production (traditionally understood as ‘the base’; see R William *Base and Superstructure in Marxist theory*, 1974) with ramifications as explored in Chapter 3, for the formation of alienated selves. In this, the role of ideology (traditionally understood as part of the social superstructure), formulated crucially in *The German Ideology* (1846) is critical. Ideology, as embedded in texts as well as in a wide range of other material practices, draws subjects who live under objectively alienating and oppressive conditions into understandings of self and the world which naturalise and thus help maintain the conditions and state of oppression.

Texts, therefore, as part of superstructure, are potentially instruments of domination that are already co-opted by the economic system (Lentricchia, 1983; Williams, 1977). Textual production and reading are construed as ideological practices, deeply implicated in power relations and embedded in specific cultural meanings and practices (Street, 1995). Supposedly neutral readings simply shore up the existing political power bases (Belsey, 2002b; Green, 1991) because signification and meaning are always in the service of power (Thompson, 1990). This explains the requirement for the critical reader to look for deeper and hidden political assumptions within texts. Readers who are taught to unmask ideology and to read against the sense of a text are seen as serving emancipatory ends, because they can detect, and potentially disrupt, significations that instantiate relations of domination (Thompson, 1984). The English teacher thus becomes the liberator of the oppressed; the “one who frees those who are enslaved to the insidious ideologies of capitalist societies” (Lentricchia, 1983, p. 11).

Marxist literary theorists claim that instead of just transmitting culture, education must be transformative of culture (Eagleton, 1983; Jameson, 1971). Critical literary advocates construe themselves as activists on behalf of the oppressed, the suffering and the marginalised. Their

desire is to alleviate human suffering and cultivate a more just world (Cox, 1990; Freire, 1970, 1973; Horton & Freire, 1990; Shor & Freire, 1987). They believe that social inequities can be made visible through critique and can be reconstructed, in part, through language (Lankshear, 1994). A critical approach to texts will help students understand and critique their personal realities (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gilbert, 1992, 1993) and will empower them to become active questioners of the social reality around them (Gee, 1989; Muspratt, et al., 1997). Students are taught to constantly challenge the values, beliefs and judgments presented to them in the course of literary instruction (Baker & Freebody, 1993; Freebody, et al., 1991; Gilbert, 1992, 1993, 1994) so that they can be active in a more democratic social reality.

Critical Reading: Will it Change Socio-Economic Conditions?

Former Literary Theorists Change Position

It is important to note, as a way of contextualising this present work, that a number of key literary theorists who formerly embraced the emancipatory possibilities inherent in critical reading practices have shifted position (Culler, 2003; Eagleton, 2004; Fish, 1999; Kermode, 2001; Lentricchia, 1996; Said, 2004). Eagleton (2004) accuses critical literary theory of toying with the esoteric while ignoring the real issues of life that literature could and does deal with. Kermode (2001) returns to the “neglected text of Shakespeare” because of impatience with “modes of criticism sponsored by theory that sink questions of literary value in the context of political oppression and resistance.” Fish (1999) complains that elements of literary theory, while intended to produce social-political change, lack any role in government and commerce, and asserts that no matter how politically oriented it might be, it will make no practical or political difference. He strongly argues that literary study should be an autonomous discipline and not linked with public action at all. Lentricchia (1983), in the *Last Will and Testament of a Literary Critic*, admits that although in his early career he championed the view that a literary critic could be an “agent of social transformation,” he now believes with “unshakeable conviction,” that the study of literature serves “no socially valuable purpose” (1996, pp. 60-65).

The literature demonstrates a growing doubt as to whether Marxist criticism or deconstruction does actually work in emancipatory ways. There are those who deride literary theorists who claim to be involved in revolutionary action against patriarchy and capitalism through their writing. Fromm (2005) argues that while critical theorists might engage in the verbal trappings of Marxist renunciation, their writings do not achieve truly emancipatory ends, and Bloom (1994) rejects any notion that literature is a program for social salvation. Eagleton (2004) argues, more recently, that critical reading is just not political enough, and he blames postmodernist theories, that make deviancy the norm, as responsible for disengaging it from political conflicts. According to Wallen (2005), the moral superiority that the resistant reader

assumes is thoroughly unwarranted, because *exposing* ideological oppression in texts is not the same as actually *fighting* it. A critical reading stance simply assumes complicity, bad consciousness and subjection as the norm. This requires the ignorance of others for its own insights, and perpetuates a system that discounts most people's ideas but does not bring us any closer to reversing inequalities (Wallen, 2005). Literacy criticism, dominated by recent theories, actually displaces debate away from the issues that most require it, and Wallen asks whether the criticism embedded in theory can ever move beyond the inner circle of experts to involve the wider reading public. Hawley (2000) ironically points out that absences, aporias and deferrals, made by well-fed, clothed and housed critics, simply aids and abets indifference and violence to an obviously present neighbour in real need and distress.

Critical Theories / Displaced Religion?

Eagleton (1983) suggests that several literary theorists offer literature as a displaced version of religion. Unable to break the structures of State power, poststructuralists found it possible instead to subvert the structures of language. The notion that subject English could "save our souls" (Baldick, 1983, p. 156) is also recognised by Felperin (1985, p. 204), who explains that since the death of the godlike author, "diverse theoretical schools promise their own version of salvation" through their "correct interpretation" of texts. As Handelsmann (1982) insists since the book of books has lost its status as divine, and the notion of the text has taken its place, literary criticism has become a kind of substitute theology. Certainly historically, both Arnold and Trilling (cited in Abrams & Greenblatt, 2000) considered that both literature, and its interpreters, ought to try to fill the void created by the demise of religious belief.

In keeping with this notion of salvation through literature is Rousseau's concomitant notion that the Fall is reversible, and that redemption is possible through the political efforts of man alone (May, 1976; Tinder, 1995, p. 198-199). This is challenged by many Christians (Walsh & Middleton, 1984; Wright, 2004). Naugle (1999a) explains that from a Christian perspective the fall could never be reversed by sinful man, by politics, by emancipatory teaching, or by any other human efforts to right the world's wrongs (cf Moseley, 2003; Sire, 2009; Wolters, 1985).

Emancipatory View of Christian Education Rooted in Biblical Worldview

Some Christians have pointed out that if emancipatory education stems from a secularized and politicized view of redemption (Tinder, 1995), then Christian teachers might want to clarify that the biblical position on emancipation or redemption is something else entirely (Naugle, 2002). Christian educators also argue that education must be emancipatory or transformative, both of the individual and of the culture, (Platinga, 2002; Walsh & Middleton, 1984; Wolters, 1985; Wolterstorff & Joldersma, 2004). However they root their transformational view of education in a biblical worldview (Edlin, 2006; Edlin & Ireland, 2006; Fennema, 2006). They concern

themselves with transformation not because a modernist narrative of the inevitable progress of humanity animates their work, but because they believe that in Christ all things are made new (Walsh & Middleton, 1984). A distinctly Christian transformation views Bible reading as pivotal for exposure to the gospel of redemptive salvation and also for an ongoing life of faith and discipleship. Christian disciples are called to be transformed by the Word of God.

Scripture Reading Intended to Shape the Reader

The critical approach to resisting unwanted ideologies is not at odds at all with a Christian approach to literacy, which also accepts that linguistic practices shape the readers' realities. What *is* at odds is the Christian insistence that at least one text is the plumb line, and ultimate authority, for a disciple's thought life and actions in the world, and that is the Bible. Rather than the reigning cultural orthodoxies, including those that underpin critical reading practices, scriptural reading is *meant* to shape the reader (Mulholland, 1985). Christians are called to break free from cultural captivity (Colson & Pearcey, 1999; Pearcey, 2004) and consciously develop a Christian mind conformed to biblical principles (Sire, 1990, 2000; Sproul, 1986). The Bible is definitely ideological literature, in that it seeks through its rhetoric to shape readers' minds and hearts in order to bring the reader's attitude in alignment with its own (Vanhoozer, 1998). The freedom, explicated in Christianity, becomes visible as disciples are regenerated through the new birth and then as they are progressively transformed by the renewing of their minds *through* the scriptures and the work of the Spirit. This is part of an ongoing transformation that forms the new being in Christ, which was begun at regeneration. The formation of the Christian mind around biblical themes and motifs is possibly the most important aspect of ongoing discipleship. The scriptural injunction is that the disciple will develop biblical thinking, so that at any time in history they can engage with the reigning cultural ideologies without being co-opted by them (Blamires, 1964; Moseley, 2003; Walsh & Keesmaat, 2004).

Many Christians draw a bold boundary against cultural ideologies if they are in conflict with biblical themes. Griffiths (2005, pp. 661-662) explains how many, though not all, Christians view the reading of the Bible:

For Christians the Bible is not the same as any other kind of book. It is God's word in a sense that no other book is, and this means that it must be read with different expectations and in a different way than is the case for any other book. Biblical reading is a transformative spiritual discipline practiced by the community and all other reading would be considered ancillary to it. There is a moral relation between the reader and the text, a relation in which the text is the main agent and the reader a humble, patient and

reverential recipient of a gift. The biblical text is to be read re-read and inscribed on the tablets of memory, mediated upon and thereby incorporated into its readers.

Many Christians actually embrace the notion that the Bible works to constitute its subjects (Vanhoozer, 1998).

Biblical Formation is Positive

Some Christians raise the issue of whether textual discipline is always negative. Smith (2005b) argues that while Foucault is right in his analysis of the way in which mechanisms of discipline serve to form individuals, he is wrong to cast all such discipline and formation in a negative light. He exhorts Christians to eschew the liberal notion of an autonomous agent who resists any form of control, but understand discipline, and in particular biblical discipline and formation, positively (Smith, 2006c). Deconstruction's challenge, that there is nothing there in the text, but institutional ideologies and practices, is a liberating insight only if you want to avoid the text making any claim on your life (Vanhoozer, 1998). Christians challenge this rejection of authority, with particular reference to the scriptures, and Henry (1988) suggests that the reason atheistic commitments dominate in Western culture is precisely because of the stultification of a biblical conscience in humanity, and in Christians in particular (cf Moseley, 2003; Wells, 1993).

Marxist and Christian Views of Emancipation

Similarities

It is very difficult to analyse Marxism succinctly, because there appear to be many different sub-sets of Marxism (Schmitt, 1987). However there are a few Christian writers that posit at least some similarities between Marxism and Christianity (Collier, 2001; Ferreter, 2003; Garaudy, 1976; Lyon, 1979; MacIntyre, 1968; Miranda, 1974; Thiselton, 1995). Harris (2009) actually envisages a Marxist turn to Christianity, even given their significantly different world views. While Zizek (2009) argues that Marxists must ally themselves with Christianity in order to ensure the survival of the materialist critique, claiming that there is a direct lineage from Christianity to Marxism. MacIntyre (1968) supports this, demonstrating that Marx borrowed heavily from the messianic traditions of Judaism and Christianity for his vision of human liberation and redemption. He calls the Marxist view of justice and historical destiny secularized forms of ancient Christian hope (cf Lundin, 1993a, p. 170). Ferreter (2003, p. 82) posits parallels between the Marxist Utopia and the Kingdom of God, and suggests that a Christian literary theory can, and should, incorporate some of the principles of Marxist literary theory. He says that literary texts are determined by socio-economic relations, and therefore Christians should recognise the Marxist category of ideology or discourse which promotes the interests of powerful social groups, but with the caveat that texts be judged from a biblical

social ethics. Frye (1982) claims that both Marxism and Christianity are revolutionary, raise eschatological challenges to the existing cultures and entail prophetic '*kerygma*' or proclamation. Miranda (1974) argues that whilst the Bible cannot be reduced to Marxist concerns for social justice, it nevertheless systematically describes such concerns as the will of God and as the duty of Christians. Marxism recognizes the historical rootedness of literature, so there is a certain affinity with Christians who adhere to a faith rooted and revealed in history. Also, they both reject any claims of disinterestedness made on behalf of the literary experience, and share significant convictions about the nature of action and commitment in the world (Lundin, 1993a). Lundin (1993a) claims that the Marxist critique of capitalist society appeals to some Christians who question the premises of the post-Enlightenment societies of the West. In fact, Lyon (1979) suggests that Marxism is really a human response to the Christian failure to live their beliefs faithfully, and that Marxist theories work to highlight the inescapable deficiencies which have too often characterized Christian commitment.

Ideological Critique

Critical theorists urge a reading practice that detects ideology, so that the reader can save themselves from its pernicious effects in texts (Morgan, 1997) even though there is disagreement over how far the structures of a society, including educational systems, determine and reproduce class, culture and subjectivities (Althusser, 1971; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). The assumption is that language has power to constitute the individual (Berlin, 1993; Muspratt, et al., 1997). It is important therefore that educators work to liberate the self by deconstructing how it has been the unwitting victim of linguistic oppression (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). Part of this agenda is accomplished by teaching students to detect ideological presuppositions in their reading of texts (Freire, 1970, 1973; Shor, 1984, 1992).

The question that immediately arises for Christians is the implication of such a reading practice with respect to the Bible, especially given that many view it not only as a divinely given and inspired text, but as one that, when the core message is believed, transforms the believer. There are in fact Christians who urge people to read the Bible critically by examining the text for entrenched ideologies (Castelli, Moore, Phillips, & Schwartz, 1995). The Bible reader's task, from this perspective, is to read in such a way that it unmask the power relations and makes visible whose interests are served by the text. As Moore (1989) posits, it is not so much the biblical texts that need demythologizing but the way they are read. Marxist ideological critique has had considerable influence in theology, especially in the Latin American liberation theologies and in Moltmann's (1993) theology of hope. Christians who engage in ideological critique of the Bible develop liberation theologies which are grounded in analysing the condition of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized (Gonzalez & Gonzalez, 1980;

Gutierrez, 1988; Rowland, 1990; Segundo, 1976). Liberation theologies seek to free the subject by exposing entrenched ideologies and securing more emancipatory theological practices. Justice lies at the root of these theologies, and freedom lies in ameliorating socio-economic circumstances. They understand God's preference to be for the outcast and impoverished, and that the most fundamental problem of society is the oppression and exploitation of the powerless classes by the powerful. Salvation is understood as liberation from such oppression, and within this framework Christians are called to actively participate in the struggle. A liberationist reader of scripture, guided by a critical hermeneutic, will seek out the biases of official biblical interpretations thus undermining their claimed neutrality and truth status. Feminist (Fiorenza, 1983, 1984, 1988; Handelmann, 1982; Schneiders, 1993), postcolonial (Keller, Nausner, & Rivera, 2004; Pui-lan, 2005; Segovia, 2000; Sigirtharajah, 1995; Warrior, 1991), black (Cone, 1970, 1989; Mosala, 1991) and queer (Althaus-Reid, 2003, 2005; Stone, 2005; Stuart, 2003) theologies all begin their theological reflection with their respective cultural marginality and difference. Ideological criticism of the Bible seeks to critique not only the scripture itself, but also those who have in the past interpreted it (Guest, Goss, West, & Bohache, 2006; Loughlin, 2007; Ruether, 1993). In this view there is no such thing as a neutral interpretation of the scripture (Clines, 1995). All interpretations are ideologically loaded (Segovia, 2000) and in need of exposure. Some, whom we might call post-Christian feminists, even argue that the Bible is so sexist and patriarchal, and such a primary source of human oppression, that women must be completely liberated from it (Daly, 1993; Hampson, 1994, 1996, 1997, 2000).

Irreconcilable Differences

Other Christians however, see significant and irreconcilable differences between Marxism and Christianity. Marxism in its classical form is atheistic, in that it draws from Feuerbach's (1957) notion that religion is simply a human invention. Religion is construed as a product of social and economic alienation (McGrath, 2001) that simply comforts and enables oppressed humanity to tolerate and become anaesthetized to its economic alienation. Belief in any religion is seen as a dangerous form of ideological control and hence the Marxian critique of religion is the presupposition of all critique (Marx, 1977, p. 14). In the broadest construal, an emancipated subject in the Marxist sense would be liberated from the ideological control of Christianity, while an emancipated subject in the Christian sense is one that knows what it is to be lost and then truly found by Christ.

Different Moralities Animate Each

Each system of thought carries divergent views of emancipation because each has a different vision of human nature, different analyses of the human problem and different views on how to

fix it. While Christians accept materialism as being regionally true of fallen nature, Marxists do not accept the Christian view that God is Spirit and that he preceded and made matter (Collier, 2001). For Marx the evils afflicting this world are social in nature and must be removed, even by revolution, whereas for Christians evil is a product of the fall, and cannot be abolished through human actions, even if some material conditions can be improved (Collier, 2001). In Marxism human beings are conceived as self-creating through their labour. When their labour is alienated so are they, but when their work becomes truly human they experience emancipation. Greed, competition and envy all arise because of social divisions and poverty, not because of any innate weakness within the person. An ideal society will eliminate the social determinants of inequality, and this in turn will emancipate the person. Marxist literary theory is therefore aimed at exposing dominant ideologies in texts so that readers can resist domination and co-optation by the State apparatuses.

Sire (2004) raises the pertinent question of whether Marx's removal of any moral values as the driving force for humanity striving for a better society will ultimately be self-defeating. If notions such as justice and fairness are simply ideological inventions, how do we motivate for change? As a naturalist, Marx views morality as simply a product of human culture and not connected to any transcendent values that can be used as a basis for critically evaluating culture. Vanhoozer (1998, p. 166), speaking about Eagleton's (1983, p. 211) neo-Marxist vision for the liberation of humanity, points out that while he desires to see "better people" through a "socialist transformation of society," we might well ask "who gets to decide on and define the 'better people' and how do we get there?" Lundin (1993a, p. 183) warns the Christian student of culture to maintain a crucial distance from the claims of Marxist cultural analysis because their assessment of texts and events is inevitably implicated in a series of "larger metaphysical claims that are irreconcilable with core beliefs of the Christian faith."

Material Conditions or Sin?

Marxism proffers the notion that it is inequities in power and property that determine human behaviour, and thus the removal of the inequities will remove the occasion of sin as well. They, in the same way as the liberation theologians, reject the "privatisation of sin," and understand it as arising from economic oppression (Gonzalez & Gonzalez, 1980, p. 23). However Sire (2004) explicated a typically Christian view that the Marxist analysis of the problem of evil does not go deep enough. Selfishness and greed are not simply products of scarcity and class divisions, and it is not possible to make human beings fundamentally good by creating the right economic environment (cf Erickson, 1998a; McGrath, 2001). Lundin (1993a) points out that a new classless society, and the new socialist individual, will not automatically, with no heart change, become less individualistic, less competitive and find fulfilment in working for the good of others. Erickson (1998a) argues that history demonstrates that this is not the case, and Sire

(2004) asks how a system committed to humanistic liberation could produce the dehumanization and oppression of Stalinism? Sire (2004) claims that new people do not appear spontaneously, and that socio-economic change will not produce them. The orthodox Christian view of sin is that it is a matter of an individual's broken relationship with God (Erickson, 1998a). Individual conversion and regeneration is what cleanses a person, brings them into a restored relationship with God, and causes transformation. Niebuhr (1941, p. 50) claims that Marxism's denial of the "depth of the spirit in the human personality" renders it unable to understand the "real character of human evil." Lyon (1979) views the idea that man can remake himself, or that the person can self-create through their work, as seriously limited and inescapably opposed to Christianity. Sire (2009) challenges the notion that competitiveness and envy will be eliminated in humanity where a new society is formed where social divisions and poverty are eliminated. It is just not the case that once alienation of work is remediated, the person is freed to become fully human. In a Christian view, selfishness and greed are not just the product of scarcity and class divisions.

Oppressors and Oppressed Forgiven

The Marxist reading of human experience, texts and history engages a use of dichotomies such as the oppressor and the oppressed that oversimplifies the complexity of evil, and bypasses the powerful understanding of sin given in the scriptures and developed over the course of Christian history (Lundin, 1993a). In what Groothuis (2000) calls the "biblical vision," both the oppressed and the oppressors are sinners in need of forgiveness. Christians perceive the forgiveness received in Christ as the true emancipation of the subject. The biblical vision sees God as creator of all people, and all genders and races are seen similarly in regards to sin. God has not placed one race, class or gender above another (Newbigin, 1986). Groothuis (1997) explains that God's spiritual order of the new covenant allows for no privileging of one group over another. St. Paul enunciates this in his biblical charter of Christian freedom. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus (Ingraffia, 1995).

Both the New Testament and the Communist Manifesto express the hope that someday human beings will be able to love and take care of the needs of others, but they differ radically concerning how this condition will be achieved (Griesinger & Eaton, 2006). Marxist criticism construes the past almost exclusively in terms of a history of limitation and injustice. It seeks to "free the self from the supposed bondage of all pasts and all cultures." But the Christian critic views history not just as a record of "repression and sublimation" but also "sublime sacrifice and redemptive suffering" (Lundin, 1993a, p. 179). As Lundin (1993a, p. 179) explains, Christians construe texts and cultural traditions as those which have the power to "heal and reveal" as well as "wound and deceive."

Granting Epistemological Privilege to the Marginalised is Problematic

Ideological criticism directed towards the scripture is problematic for many Christians. It rests the interpretive norm with the oppressed group, and negates any sense that the scripture sets its own interpretive standard. When a contemporary context is made the arbiter of textual interpretation, a situation arises where the interpretive authority of the scripture is outside the text and in only those practices that promote the liberation of specific groups (Newbigin, 1989; Vanhoozer, 1998). This claim is unsustainable from a Christian point of view because belief in the epistemological privilege of the oppressed is prior to, and therefore independent of, the belief in the authority of the scripture (Newbigin, 1989). If Bible readers learn that interpretive authority is not found *within* a text, but that it lies outside the text and is to be found within the social practices that facilitate and encourage the liberation of various groups, this negates the scripture setting its own authority (Vanhoozer, 1998). The primary text is not the scripture but the condition of the oppressed or poor community that reads it. This is what Briggs calls a move from “orthodoxy to orthopraxis” (cited in K. Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 181). For example, feminists who place biblical texts under the authority of women’s experience do not just offer alternative interpretations, but also engage in a written *revision* of biblical texts where they see the need (Fiorenza, 1983, 1984, 1988; Handelsmann, 1982; Schneiders, 1993). The critical reader becomes judge and master of that text, so that what was once an epistemological matter becomes an ideological matter that reveals the role of power and privilege in the text (Lundin, 1993a, 1993b; K. Vanhoozer, 1998). Granting epistemological privilege to the marginalised takes no account of the notion that the interpretive community itself might be corrupt (Vanhoozer, 1998), or the notion that the text itself has rights.

Pragmatic Use of Scripture Facilitates Self-Justification

The critical reader claims to enjoy a privileged position from which the text may be evaluated, but according to Nordling (2005, p. 229) these critical readings often fail to recognise their “own interested interpretations and dominating potential.” When the particular social situation becomes normative, this pragmatic use of the scripture has the status of exercising self-justification (Thiselton, 1995). Newbigin (1989) claims that to take the view that what serves the cause of the oppressed is the real kernel of the scripture, and that it functions only within this more fundamental scheme, is flawed. The Bible message proclaims liberty to all captives, whether oppressed or oppressor. It is where *all* are guilty and *all* are forgiven and therefore it cannot be converted into a banner for a fight of some against others (Newbigin, 1989). Reading the Bible to satisfy political or ideological impulses creates a danger of examining the text from the outside. We examine it, “but it does not examine us” (Nordling, 2005, p. 229). Newbigin (1989) speaks for many when he questions an issue-oriented gospel, because the gospel becomes ancillary to the cultural situation. The gospel message, and its efficacy, becomes

sidelined. Erickson (1998a) argues that if one adopts the assumption that is inherent in liberation theology, one takes up a different gospel. Christian educators need to consider whether they teach their students to adjust their lives into the Bible's world (Sternberg, 1985), or whether they engage in ideological critique that will undo its authority at certain points (Jobling, 1990). When the context of particular groups becomes the arbiter of interpretive accuracy, it drains the Bible of any authority and disallows the scripture to set its own interpretative standard.

Authentic Christianity Challenges Oppressive Regimes

Christianity, properly understood, does not keep victims of oppression anesthetized to their own suffering, but provides a call to Christians to live out the gospel in ways that challenge the status quo (Moltmann, 1993). The Christian church is never meant to be complicit with oppressive regimes and their dominant ideologies (Walsh & Keesmaat, 2004). While Ferreter (2003, p. 56) acknowledges the truth of Marx's claim that at times "Christianity has served to defend the interests of the ruling classes," he says it must be acknowledged that it has also "inspired efforts to bring about greater justice in social situations." The gospel is a call to full humanity, to a faith that enriches life individually, but also socially (cf Garaudy, 1976; Kung, 1980). According to Brueggemann (1978), a true biblical faith is always subversive and preached in the shadow of the ruling empire. Not all discussions of oppressive social structures are Marxist; some are rooted deeply in the biblical story, and especially in the prophetic texts and the Gospels (cf Skillen, 1991; Walsh & Keesmaat, 2004). The church, construed thus, should acknowledge its domestication and accommodation to ruling empires with their dominant ideologies, and refuse to fly the flag of any oppressive ruling regime, especially ecclesiastical ones (Walsh & Keesmaat, 2004). Christian faith is "not static," not "inflexible and committed to the status quo," but "subversive and revolutionary" (Knight, 2005). For many Christian thinkers, the church is a community in refusal of existing empires, especially oppressive ones. It bears the image of another Lord in its daily life (Wright, 1999). In that sense it has some parallel with Marxist challenges to any oppressive status quo.

Christian Education: Closed Ideology or Dynamic Transformation?

There are some Christian educators who raise concerns that the rhetoric of education and scholarship directed by a Christian worldview (Naugle, 2001, 2004a, 2008; Platinga, 2002; Wolters, 1985) might itself work as a cover for an imposed ideological orthodoxy (Walsh, 2000); that repressive acts of power might occur under cover of either common sense or biblical sanction. He urges Christian educators to see how the imposition of a Christian world view might work ideologically to produce schools of "protective custody" rather than "dynamic transformation" (Walsh, 2000, p. 6). A transformational worldview, even one that is deeply

rooted in scripture, might become a “repressive, closed-in-on-itself ideology” (Walsh, 2000, p. 6). He proposes a Christian view of transformation that takes seriously the postmodern critique of repressive worldviews (Walsh & Middleton, 1984). Breuggemann (1993) posits preaching that builds a counter, *biblical* imagination to free the subject from the monopolizing ideologies of their culture (cf Walsh, 2001), and this would include any ideological prefiguration embedded in the underpinnings of critical literacy.

Concerns about Theory’s Dominance

Current Literary Criticism: Exclusions and Ruling Regimes of Thought

Current literary discourse takes up a plethora of social oppressions and distortions, but in a curiously narrow way according to Taylor (2004). Respect for open-minded inquiry has been tossed aside where Theory reigns, and what we have now, according to some, is blatant political rhetoric. While purporting to be multivalent and impartial, in reality it is narrow and driven by its own selected ideological precepts (Folks, 2006). McCrea (2006) says that the poststructuralist heterodoxies of the 1980’s and 90’s have become canonical in English, while Snyder (2006) asks whether the feminist, Marxist, gay and lesbian, ethnic and post-colonial approach to reading texts has simply become the new ruling empire (cf Patai & Corral, 2005). Even Eagleton (2004) now asks whether readers who are taught to seek, highlight and favour previously-suppressed interests within literature might simply instantiate a new ruling orthodoxy, with its own exclusions, no matter how unintentionally. If discourses are indeed inextricably linked to power and subjugation, then so too is Foucauldian and Derridean discourse about emancipation (Hinkson & Ganssle, 2000). Reading literature uniquely for signs of racism or sexism can simply become a mouthpiece for the readers own politics (Marks, 2005), in what Felperin (1985, p. 33) calls a “textual harassment.” Ellis (1997) agrees that what has triumphed in the academy is an institutionally entrenched orthodoxy that represents a shutting down of theoretical reflection. The concern with race, gender, class and sexuality makes this mode of reading seem a just cause, but it has perpetuated a rigid prescription for criticism that insists it be only of a certain character and have a specific content and concern. He argues that educators must not make their students serve political and social ends.

Critical Literacy Carries its Own Essentialisms

Snyder (2006) stresses that all academic inquiry needs to be cautious of foreclosing on the very thing it valorises. The new identity politics in literary criticism has led to a censorship of what can be said in the public sphere, but it needs to remain open to critical reflection, otherwise it only operates within its own furtive form of intellectual hubris or imperialism. Taylor (2004) affirms this, arguing that this is the most judgmental era of literary criticism, and yet also an era in which the right to make judgments is routinely denied. This move away from essentialism

and universals to the foregrounding of difference may well just be a prelude to other more generalizing gestures. Sinfield and Dollimore's (1985) complaint about personal response pedagogies being tyrannical, because they are really inviting a learned response, could easily be applied to current critical readings. This is a point trenchantly made in Golsby-Smith's (2007) PhD thesis, that a reading practice that expects particular answers to the questions it asks cannot be emancipatory. As she says (in telephone conversation July, 2010):

It always knows the answer to the question, which is, that we are going to find the oppressor. If a reader is always looking to do this on every text, then it does not leave a reader flexible enough to be critical.

A practice initially generated by an emancipatory imperative to be open to the Other, might well have ossified into its own exclusive orthodoxies.

"Glorious Non-Reading"- How is that Emancipatory?

Cunningham (2002, pp. 87-121), in his chapter on *Textual Abuse*, exposes what he sees as "Theory gone mad." Drawing on works of Sedgwick, Cohen and Miller, he clearly demonstrates readings that are "replete with purposeful distortion to suit their political agenda." In a similar vein, Siegel (2004, pp. 424-440) argues that literary critics now produce obstinate over-interpretations, and readings so full of prejudices and prejudgements that the interpretations go "way beyond some very plain senses of the words." He views this reading as damaging because it "tears up literature" into a "glorious sort of non-reading" and a "set of irrelevancies." This is a deeply forced reading practice, in that students are instructed in the classroom to begin with a theoretical conception, which naturally orients and determines their responses and perceptions while reading (Crews, 2002; Tanner, 1999). Richards (1956, pp. 16-17) long ago warned of this kind of reading that damages literature when the "doctrinalist seeks to make it go their own way." Unable to simply read the text in front of them, they are "held back, distracted and even blinded" because of "doctrinal adhesions" that call forth "stock responses." For example, Pooley (1995, p. 19) asks whether the strident call from hooks (1984, 1990), for instance, might simply represent a "trans-historical feminism" that is "equally oppressive?"

Transcendence Marginalized

A number of Christians raise the concern that it is possible that something even more fundamental than gender, race, class and sexuality has been suppressed without people realizing it. They argue that contemporary cultures are engaged in rigid suppression, or marginalisation, of a humbling awareness of the transcendent (Moseley, 2003). Many people in the Western culture have lost confidence in any transcendent vision of the future, whether this is commitment to Christianity or not (Gay, 1998; Jenson, 1993). Thieliicke (1974) notes that it is

odd that there is such a concentration on the notion of suppression in the interpretation of states of consciousness and modes of conduct in current theories, and yet it seldom seems to have occurred to anyone to investigate the element of suppression in the irrelevance of the transcendent. Naugle (2008, p. 4) insists that to “exclude the Maker and Redeemer of all things from educational consciousness and practice is the greatest possible reductionism, and the most egregious interpretive or hermeneutic error.” Brueggemann (1993) similarly insists that a Christian preacher’s (and some might suggest teacher’s) primary responsibility is to invite, empower and equip the community to re-imagine the world in ways that recognise God as a key and decisive player.

According to Delbanco (1999), this suppression of a transcendent vision, and suspicion of any meta-narrative, has led to a loss of hope and a gathering sense of despair. Postman (1996, pp. 4-5), a Jewish scholar, is adamant that if education itself is going to survive, it must have an end, a “transcendent, spiritual idea, that gives purpose and clarity to learning” (cf Fiddes, 2000). For Moseley (2003), the loss of transcendence in the postmodern mind is linked to a jettisoning of ethical values. He argues that the implications of this loss of transcendence are evident in society, and the result is nothing short of anarchy.

Deconstruction as Therapeutic Liberation

In this section I will explore only one aspect of deconstruction: the notion of interpretation and multiple meanings. Other aspects of deconstruction will be explored in Chapter 9. Deconstruction is presented by Derrida as a therapeutic project with the ethical drive of justice for the Other. Multiple interpretations are conceived as emancipatory in that they seek to restore that which was omitted by dominant readings (Phillips, 1994). The prime responsibility is to keep the play of meaning going and to resist closure, which necessarily marginalizes (Caputo, 2007). Deconstructors posit their work as having an ethical and political purpose (Critchley, 1992; Miller, 1989), to eschew the dominant reading, expose and avoid interpretive dominance, and recover what is suppressed. Derrida sees the futile approach of seeking to decipher the one true meaning of texts as the manifestation of the metaphysics of presence. Deconstruction, by resisting the urge for singular interpretations, is considered by some a powerful tool for exposing and avoiding interpretive violence. Responsible and ethical reading, in the Derridean (1978c) sense, seeks to deliver the text from captivity to one single, correct interpretation. Claims about reading for *the* meaning are viewed as covert strategies for pursuing one’s interest to the exclusion of others’ (Vanhoozer, 1998). As Cupitt (1992, p. 38) explains, the “closure of meaning is the enemy of freedom... the sign moves on.”

Hermeneutics is Everybody's Business

Hermeneutics was once a discipline that was associated exclusively with the study of biblical texts. It has now become a common idiom of Western culture, and the notion of interpretation is now so broad, that each experience of truth is now seen as an experience of interpretation (Vattimo, 1997). Historically, biblical interpretation has been a serious and sometimes dangerous business, because differing interpretations of scripture could produce heresies, schisms, persecutions, wars and even martyrdom (Wright, 2004). Caputo (1997a) argues that, in the name of interpretive unity and immediacy of interpretation, we are faced with horrendous universals that are intent on excluding (or even executing) those on the margins (cf Volf, 1996a).

Kantian epistemology and the new authority given to perception and interpretation has expanded the scope of modern hermeneutical reflection (Westphal, 1997), which now goes far beyond its theological origins (see Jennings, 1997; Lyon, 1997). The ubiquity of interpretation has become an important consideration for everyone involved in knowledge claims, not just for biblical exegetes. Subsequent to the work of Kuhn (1962), Feyerabend (1975), Habermas (1985), Gadamer (1979) and Ricoeur (1974, 1976, 1985), Foucault (1972a, 1972b, 1980), and Derrida (1974, 1978b, 1978c), have expanded the influence of a hermeneutic approach to all knowledge. In biblical hermeneutics now, one finds not only a myriad of conflictual (Benson, 2006) interpretations but also multiple interpretive theories as well (Ricoeur, 1974).

Multiple Interpretations of Scripture

There is a crisis within the church over discussions about hermeneutics (Lundin, 1997a, p. 1). Many Christians seem worried about the stability of meaning and the pressing need to defend specific views of inspiration and interpretation of the Scriptures. This is also evident in the culture at large, where disputes about interpretation attract widespread attention and arouse considerable anxiety (cf Snyder, 2008; Wolterstorff, 1997). Vanhoozer (1998, p. 46) raises what I think is the salient issue for Bible readers. He says,

The authentic interpretation of the scriptures is religiously extremely significant because the correct understanding of them is constitutive of one's identity and authentic Christianity depends on one's ability to recover the author's intention and though them perhaps the mind of God.

Since many Christians believe that a saving encounter with Christ, through reading the scriptures, is the ultimate emancipation (read here redemption) of the human being, the attitude that a reader takes to interpretation of the scriptures is crucial.

The literature reveals two very broad responses from Christian theologians and philosophers on the notion of biblical interpretation. Those that take up Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1979) argue that what really regulates interpretive practice are views that are passed on through tradition, and developed over time through interpretation and dispute. Those who are critical of this tradition argue that a commitment to truth requires an attentive concern for the role of factual references and confessional beliefs. They seek to secure and defend a foundational set of doctrinal assertions and epistemological assumptions (Koivisto, 1993; Lints, 1993). The two ends of the polarity are that one either reads to locate a stable determinate meaning (Hirsch, 1967, 1976), or one affirms the free-play of signs and gives up on the search for meaning or some vantage point outside language (Taylor, 1982a, 1982b). As Vanhoozer (1998) puts it, one seeks understanding while the other tries to avoid being taken in.

There are, of course, many contemporary Christian hermeneutical theories that sit somewhere in between absolute certainty and interpretive license. These are teased out in texts such as *Disciplining Hermeneutics: Interpretation in Christian Perspective* (Lundin, 1997b), and while they all acknowledge the situated nature of discourse and interpretation, they still hold a passion for truth and the belief in the reader's ability to overcome illusions and know reality. While they disagree on how much to embrace the postmodern epistemological revolution, they all hold to a basic realism that undergirds interpretive endeavours (Charry, 1997; Jennings, 1997; Lyon, 1997; D. Marshall, 1997; Marshall, 1997; Vanhoozer, 1997; Wolterstorff, 1997). While there is much difference in Christianity between disparate theological traditions, I think it fair to say that all Christians concerned with orthodoxy agree that truth is revealed to human beings through scripture and the history of God's dealings with his people (Lundin, 1993a).

Christians Nervous about Multiple Interpretations

Smith (2000) perceives anxiety for many Christians regarding interpretation and he views this as a residual result of the Cartesian and rationalistic Enlightenment that requires eradication of prejudices and assumptions before truth claims can be made. He (2000, p. 17) elaborates on why, for both secular and Christian theorists, "interpretation has long been a sin", because it is understood as a postlapsarian (post-Fall) occurrence from which humanity must be redeemed (cf Koivisto, 1993; Lints, 1993). Many Christian readers assume that they can overcome creaturehood and that they can read purely, without interpretation. Smith (2000) however says, that everything is a matter of interpretation, including those interpretations that some describe as core orthodoxy. He develops what appears to be an essentially Gadamerian (1974, p. 259) theme, that interpretation is the original, universal and unavoidable characteristic of human orientation to the world. Or similarly, the Heideggerean (1962, p. 32) view, that interpretation is never presuppositionless but is built into the very structures that make human understanding possible. He views the Christian claims to immediacy or objectivity as an unconscious drive to

escape interpretation and overcome creature hood. Wolterstorff (1997) also agrees that interpretation does not have to be agonized over because it is a universal, natural phenomenon, and Marion (1995) calls this desire for immediacy and clarity of comprehension the 'domain of the idol' (cf Benson, 2002). Lyon (1997) agrees that Christians must acknowledge the hermeneutics of suspicion, because they have had important things to say to the church; however, he also cautions that what began in hermeneutics for better understanding ended as a pretext for doubting or even discarding the text.

Vanhoozer (1998) suggests an alternative to the interpretive violence that deconstruction wreaks upon a text. He advocates a hermeneutics of humility which is willing to receive something from the other, from the text, and from other interpreters. He argues that although our knowledge may not be absolute it is sufficient to equip us to respond to the word of God. Vanhoozer (1998, p. 435) argues that freedom with no constraints is empty, and that "true creativity requires certain forms and boundaries." He says that what is required instead is a "covenant of discourse" where the conscientious reader is neither "slave" nor "master of the text." The reader walks "midway between conformity and creativity," neither "slavishly repeating nor freely inventing." He argues that when we read, there is a communicative action that takes place between the author, text and reader so it is not merely creative play from the reader. One requires a responsible attitude to texts and reading that sits somewhere between hermeneutical realism and non-realism.

Some Deconstruction in Theology not Liberating

Multiple Interpretations of the Bible an Evasion of Authority

Vanhoozer (1998) suggests that the way individuals and communities interpret the Bible is arguably the most important barometer of larger intellectual and cultural trends. If this is the case, then the following theological perspectives of Cupitt and Taylor are crucial indicators of a culture that refuses textual authority. They are not representative of all theologies that contain Derridean themes (Lindbeck, 1984, 1988), but they do represent the more anti-authoritarian drive in deconstruction. Vanhoozer (1998, p. 73) claims that the work of deconstructive theologians Cupitt and Taylor (Cupitt, 1987, p. ch 15 & 16; Taylor, 1987) celebrates the end of authority. He says that they see any sense of stable order in reality, or in meaning, as simply that which "hinders human freedom." As Cupitt (cited in K. Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 73) puts it:

For the anti-realist we are the only makers of meanings, truths, and values and our theoretical postulates such as God, gravity and justice have no being apart from the language in which we speak of them and the practical uses to which we put it.

Taylor (1982a, 1987) also endeavours to rewrite God and self, to debunk any metaphysical realist allusions. He denies the "moral viability of objective theism" and rejects any notion of

searching for external truth, encouraging Christians to see that this opens up a “brave new world of spiritual potential and possibility” (1982a; 1982b, p. 117; 1987). His theology seeks to “invert established meaning and subvert everything once deemed holy” (1987, p. 6). He rejoices that we are now free to understand the incarnate logos as writing, and treat language itself as the authentic divine milieu and true location of divinity (cf Cupitt, 1994a, 2001).

Taylor (1982a, 1987) envisages the Bible, in a Derridean sense, as an open text not a closed book. He views this as liberating (cf Caputo, 1987, 1993; Caputo, 1997b, 2007), in that the Bible can be construed as an “unending play of surfaces” that “discloses the ineradicable duplicity of knowledge, shiftiness of truth and undecidability of value.” He maintains that there is “no transcendental signified to anchor the activity of signification” and that the “freely floating signs cannot be tied down to any single meaning” because everything “inscribed within the divine milieu is thoroughly transitional and radically relative.” Segovia (1995) also advocates postmodern biblical interpretations “in which readers become as important as texts and in which there is no master narrative but many narratives in competition” (cf Aichele & Burnett, 1995; McKnight, 2000).

As Hodgson (1986) sees it, the deconstructive thought of Taylor (1982a, 1987) is not productive of true freedom and liberation. It is not about a real God who saves from sin, death and oppressive powers, but about engagement in an endless solipsistic play of words. Taylor’s (1982a, 1987) god, according to Hodgson (1986), is

a god for the children of privilege, not the children of poverty, a god for the oppressors, not the oppressed (although of course he wants to do away with all structures of domination); a god for the pleasant lawns and ivied colleges, not for the weeds and mud of the basic ecclesial communities; a god for the upwardly mobile, not for the underside of history.

Lundin (1993a, p. 195) calls this the “perfect form of thought for people who seek the thrill of subversion without the risk of dangerous confrontation.” They simply overturn the prevailing systems of value or truth, without getting wounded in the process. It is “risk free guerrilla warfare.” Kraft (1996, p. 241) agrees with this, that even though the poststructuralists promise to “undermine authority, to displace the totalitarian,” what they put into its place is just a “principle of play and differences” that leaves us not fit to “break down any walls of oppression” but simply to “sit and acquiesce.” Some actually say that poststructuralist theories in particular have ushered in a new dark age, rather than a renaissance for the reading subject (Folks, 2006).

Rewriting Biblical Texts an Evasion of Authority

For most Christians, the entire notion of rewriting texts is problematic if it is applied to the scripture. Carson (1996), commenting on the rewriting of scripture in the work of Cupitt (1994b), Schneiders (1991a) and Exum (1993b), says that what passes in the deconstructive theological milieu is often just sheer creative imagination. He takes Schneiders (1991b) and Exum (1993a) to task for writing not interpretations of the scriptures, but revisions. He charges them with telling completely different stories, dismissing the original story and positing them as alternative readings. Many Christians are nervous about these versions becoming (sub) versions (see Exum, 1993a).

McFague (1987) is another theologian who argues that Christians must redefine and rewrite how 'God' should be envisioned. She understands the language Christians use to speak of God as a human construction and something that can be changed. What lies at the heart of speaking about God is not God, but metaphor. She envisages theology as mostly fiction, so readers are free to associate God with new language that will create innovative images and metaphors such as lover or mother (McFague, 1982). She sees these metaphors as less oppressive and more appropriate for this age. Hart (1989) captures the concern that many Christians raise about a rewriting of theology based on one's own conceptions of God. He insists that they have cut themselves loose from the moorings of scripture and tradition and that they appeal only to experience. This sort of theology is dismissive of biblical and historical theology and is really what he calls anthropologising in that it is human constructions that determine what can be said about God.

Vanhoozer (1998, p. 73) views Taylor and Cupitt's theological endeavour to turn the loss of meaning into a net gain for humanity as misplaced. He asks whether the death of God, the author and any external, authoritative constraint is truly a liberating place for humanity. He asks whether Taylor's Derridean a/theology, drawn from Nietzschean deicide, and Cupitt's celebration of the emancipatory possibilities in "textual freeplay," are premature. He insists that all it might do is bring about a disintegration of the traditional theological foundations of our sense of self, truth and meaning and it may not be productive of true freedom and liberation at all. He, instead, calls readers to pay attention to a text. As Vanhoozer (1998, p. 404) sees it, "When we give attention to what is there, then fitting responsibilities for response, become apparent." We cannot respond fittingly to the text as Other, and in a way that gives significance to the Other, if we refuse to hear its communication. He claims that deconstructive interpretations lead to an indifference to the Other, because the reader does not have to really attend to the communicative action in the text. They can simply reconstruct the readings

however they wish. He calls all readers, not just readers of the Bible, to embrace the notion that “meaning is there in the text, ready to yield to those who approach the Other (the text) with respect and proper attention.” Drawing on Kierkegaard, Vanhoozer (1998, p. 16) accuses deconstructive interpretation of seeking to “evade confrontation” with the word of God, or of seeking to defend itself against God’s word. He insists (Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 40) that whether deconstruction is a genuine renaissance or rather a form of nihilism depends on whether it can make good its promise to liberate.

Harvey (1989) demonstrates what happens when Bible readers refuse the continuity of the author’s narrative, dismantle the text into its constituent parts, and recombine the fragments into whatever form they choose. The reading becomes a construction according to the ideology of the reader, with no necessary resemblance to the intention of the author, who conveniently does not exist in deconstruction. Dickstein (2005, p. 75) explains that the multiple meanings gleaned in deconstruction “draw attention to innumerable sideshows” but “we miss the main event.” The ingenious attention to “minute detail” in deconstructionist criticism brings about “remoteness from texts.” Harvey highlights this by summarizing one commentator’s interpretation, or we might say *reconstruction*, of the biblical story of Sampson. Sampson, we are told, symbolizes sexual maturity, the honey is a symbol of sex and its sweetness related to lust, and cutting the hair is related to castration, which is why men fear baldness. The pillars of the Philistine temple represent his mother’s thighs, which he pushes against to enlarge the birth canal and to reverse childbirth pain. What Harvey suggests is actually happening here is the re-writer breaking the power of the author to impose meaning. It puts me in mind of Moseley’s (2003, p. 71) complaint, that a postmodern reading of the Bible can “introduce all sorts of mischief into the process of biblical interpretation.” Vanhoozer (1998) points out that these interpreters do not work to recover or relate to the biblical message, but to avoid having to respond to the text. He (1998, p. 120) argues that when deconstructionists read for a sense other than what the texts seems to say, they are not aiming to arrive at a spiritual sense but to “multiply the carnal senses of the text.” The meaning of a text within deconstruction is not located in a system of higher truths but in a sea of indeterminacy.

Many Christians find multiple interpretations problematic, particularly if they seem to carry the reader away from truth rather than toward it (Marshall, 1997). It is little wonder that Vanhoozer (1998) says, with respect to biblical interpretation, that we need to examine the theory and practice of interpretation to see if it is “in the faith,” because some readers contrive to deprive the Bible of its authority through interpretation.

Deconstruction: Liberating or Disabling?

Deconstruction, and its engagement with infinite signification, claims to liberate the person by undoing any claims to have interpreted correctly. As Barthes (1974, p. 15) explains it, the liberated reader is one that is “unimpoverished by any constraint.” Vanhoozer (1998, p. 40) posits what I see as the salient question to this entire debate about emancipation and interpretation: does it “make good on its promise to liberate”? Vanhoozer (1998) asks readers to consider what the idols are that Derridean liberation overthrows. Is the reader simply liberated from tradition, from truth and from authority? Is s/he just liberated to make more interpretations? He says the problem with the Derridean liberation of the reader from dominant interpretations is that “it fails to free readers from themselves.” Lundin (1993a, p. 210) construes deconstruction, and its affirmation of multiple interpretations, as linked to declaring the self “innocent of any charges that might be brought against it, and free of all obligations to pursue any vision of the good.” It offers the self “freedom from any guilty striving.” The aspiration to limitlessness in deconstructive thought, according to many Christians, is not only the first temptation and original sin, but what has inspired the founding intellects of modernity (Myers, 1989).

In a quest for self fulfilment, character traits such as restraint of desire, self sacrifice and submission are now being replaced in Christian culture by a liberation of desire (Reno, 2002; Wells, 1998). Christians do not understand freedom from singular interpretations as necessarily liberating when it is linked with a deconstructive spirit that challenges all textual authority. It appears that the Western culture is now defined in terms of encouraging liberation from limits, rather than cultivating a conscientious honouring of limits (Rieff, 1966). Restriction and restraint are abandoned in the name of human freedom. A different view of wisdom animates a Christian mind. Jeffrey (1996, p. 176) posits wisdom as beginning with the fear of the Lord, and therefore independence in the casual, modern sense is not considered a virtue, and is not synonymous with integrity. Faithfulness is. Sincere pursuit of a truth which is presumed to be universal, accessible and outside the self is the activity of a proper, virtuous mind, he suggests.

Lillegard (2006) insists that excavative or archaeological curiosity is out of place when reading scripture, and that one should treat its commands, promises, warnings, assertions and offers as a medium through which the reader is addressed by God. Otherwise, he fears, Bible readers will treat it as an object of scrutiny and not as something that addresses humanity. Many Christians are asking what the long term results will be of liberating readers from the power of language by disrupting its authority (Connor, 1989). If the reader understands meaning to be simply an imposition of institutional ideologies, any notion of an independent reality with its own intrinsic

order would simply “limit a reader’s creativity and call this sort of freedom into question” (Vanhoozer, 1998). The irony of this liberation from fixed orders is that the poststructural self becomes free and responsible only by emptying everything out that opposes it (Vanhoozer, 1998). It is not surprising that Hinkson & Ganssle (2000, p. 86) see poststructuralist thought as a “rhetoric convenient to rebellion,” and Hodgson (1986, pp. 257-258) sees no real emancipatory imperative in a Derridean-inspired theology other than a “flight from authority.”

How Should the Bible be Read?

Vanhoozer (1998) asserts that Christians must reach an understanding of what stance they take as they read the scriptures. This is particularly important for teachers of critical literacy in Christian schools. Will they read the Bible as a user, critic, friend or disciple? For many, approaching scripture from a default hermeneutic of suspicion fosters endless interpretations and causes the biblical text to recede into the background. Readers are left talking about the politics of interpretation, having lost the capacity to actually perform interpretations (Hays, 2007, 2009; Hays & Davis, 2003; Stuhlmacher, 1977). Interpretation, in a deconstructive mode, is now construed as a political act, or as Vanhoozer (1998) explains, “simply a means of colonizing the mind and capturing texts and whole fields of discourse.” Vanhoozer et al. (2006) argue that much biblical interpretation now appears to be simply an attempt to busy oneself with the text so the reader does not have to respond to its real address and subject matter. This, according to Kierkegaard (1940, p. 36), is a spiritual condition rather than an intellectual condition (cf Vanhoozer, 1998). Kostenberger (2005) construes it as a hermeneutics of procrastination, where the reader is always reading and never coming to knowledge of the truth; or, as Derrida says, endlessly deferring meaning. When interpretive canons, norms and standards are based on multiple community traditions, one can never adjudicate between different good and bad interpretations and the text becomes meaningless (Vanhoozer, 1998) .

Ryken (1995) explains that despite the currently popular Bible-as-literature movement (Alter & Kermode, 1990; Moore, 1992; Ryken, 1990; Ryken & Longman, 1993), many Christians are still resistant to this notion because they revere it as a sacred book that claims to be a revelation from God to humanity. To view it as literature, and interpret it as any other book, detracts from its authority and its revelatory capacity. According to many, reading the Bible as purely literature, or reading it critically, is not attending “to the main thing that it is about” (Lewis, 1958), although some argue that discerning Christian readers can enter into dialogue with critical theorists without abandoning their allegiance to the Bible as sacred (Ryken & Longman, 1993). Hauerwas (1993), Peterson (2006) and Griffith (2005, pp. 661-662) take what appears to be a typically Christian view, that the Bible should not be read like any other book but with different emphases. Griffiths and Peterson both present Bible reading as a transformative spiritual discipline. They urge Christians to read scripture with different expectations, and in a

different way, than any other book. They argue that Christians are called to absorb, imbibe, feed, digest and *do* it. All other reading is considered ancillary to it.

All Textual Understanding is a Theological Matter

In an alternative view of reading, Vanhoozer (1998) argues that *all* textual understanding is a theological matter. The reader has an encounter with something that transcends them and this has the capacity to transform them provided they approach it in the right spirit. This interpretive practice is also considered a spiritual virtue. Without faith and openness to transcendence, the reader would never find something in the text that is not their own creation or their own reflection; what Wolterstorff (1997) calls “reflecting ourselves back to ourselves.” Cunningham (2002) describes this theological reading as akin to the receiving of the sacrament. The act of reading is construed as a slow movement towards realization, meaning, and truth, with a transformative ethical result. The reader does not reach absence or aporias but grace, blessing and presence. In Vanhoozer’s (1998) view, Christian doctrine has hermeneutical significance,

not in that we should read the Bible like any other book but that we should read all other books as we have learnt to read the Bible. That is, in a spirit of understanding, that allows the text to be what it is and what it intends. Right reading in general demands a theological, interpretive virtue that follows from a theological anthropology and an understanding of the Spirit’s work by grace through faith. There is a moral relation between the reader and the text, a relation in which the text is the main agent and the reader a humble recipient of a gift.

Is There a Limit to Significations?

Vanhoozer (1998, p. 416) contends that the present pluralistic situation calls for an “ethics of interpretation.” In the case of the Christian community, he says that this ethics of interpretation, must be “informed by the doctrine of the Spirit that avoids both absolutism and arbitrariness in interpretation.” He explains it this way:

Ethical obligations are real because God exists. To do right is to acknowledge the way things are. Biblical wisdom is a matter of fitting rightly into the created order, and this means recognizing the structures and sinews of reality. Similarly, wise interpretation is that which “fits” the ontology or “world” of the text. And this brings us back to the all-important question of the ontology of texts, and meaning. Textual meaning, I hold, is a matter of what authors said/did with their words. The fundamental idea is that we are accountable to what is there. To read a text is to render its author his or her due. The same goes for science: a scientist has an ethical, as well as an intellectual obligation, to do justice to what is there, in nature (i.e., the data). That there is a God means that there

is something/someone to whom humans are accountable and answerable. "God" implies an ethics of interpretation (email conversation 2009).

Vanhoozer (1998, p. 455) argues that implicit in the views interpreters take on the nature of the author, text and reader are beliefs that have to do with God, the world and ourselves. If deconstruction is the death of God put into culture, then the question of freeplay of interpretations is actually a theological question. He argues that deconstructive ethics "ultimately fails to engage the other despite its celebration of difference," and this is because it "does respect otherness." Behind the notion of interpretation lie "conflicting visions of what it means to be authentically human." Whether there is determinate meaning in texts is ultimately linked with the question of whether there is determinate meaning to human life (1998, p. 19). What is the reading subject freed for in this process? Is it just more interpretations? It is disabling to view all interpretations as a deception concealing someone else's interests, and this has developed to the reader's detriment (Vanhoozer, 1998). Vanhoozer (1998, p. 138) forcibly argues that behind the debates about the various theories of interpretation lurk larger philosophical issues.

Complexity of Language

A number of authors complain about the complexity of the language of deconstruction, arguing that it becomes elitist and exclusionary. Cunningham (2002, p. 13) claims that literary theorists are in "love with neologisms," and quite "desperate for a rationale for their work." They are "always on *qui vive* for "high falutin important-sounding terminologies to dazzle and confute (their) critics and opponents with." Lundin (1993a, p. 206) comments on Christian scholars who try to appropriate the habits of mind and patterns of speech of the poststructuralist and "often end up writing incomprehensively." According to Ellis (1989, p. 151), this is the major psychological appeal of deconstruction, in that initiates have a sense of belonging to an intellectual elite with a kind of secret knowledge. With respect to deconstruction, Carson, Erickson and Groothuis (1996, p. 22) speak of a certain kind of "intellectual arrogance that deploys technical language and sophisticated argumentation to keep the masses at bay, excluded from the fine tone and subtle spinning of the intellectual elite." Searle (1982, p. 637) complains that Derrida's work has promoted a number of misleading confusions. Buckingham (1998) complains that critical literacy has highly theoretical dimensions which make it complex for students, and the ex-Queensland Education Minister, Rod Welford, said he would cleanse postmodernism from English in Queensland because it engaged in highly "cryptic jargon" (each cited in Lucy & Mickler, 2008). Educators might want to question the emancipatory value of a reading practice that is bogged down with elitist language.

Many Christian, and non Christians, now challenge whether critical reading actually can change social conditions while Christian thinkers, in particular, reject the construal of critical theories as displaced religion. They posit a number of irreconcilable differences between Marxist and Christian views of emancipation, arguing that different moralities animate each. Christians ground their view of emancipation in a biblical worldview and therefore view biblical formation positively. They point out that authentic Christianity is meant to challenge all oppressive regimes and that granting epistemological privilege to the marginalised only leads to pragmatic use of the scripture and facilitates self justification. They charge critical literacy with carrying its own exclusions and ruling regimes of thought. They challenge whether deconstruction is actually liberating asking whether its implicit evasion of textual authority, complexity of language, rewriting of texts and infinite signification are really a liberating practice.

Chapter 7

Support Materials' Treatment of Emancipation

The support materials substantiate the view that critical reading can bring about a change in socio-economic conditions and liberate the reader to be an agent of social and economic reform.

Does Critical Literacy Redress Inequitable Power Relations?

There are some who make larger claims, that critical literacy will make possible socio-economic reforms that facilitate social justice, re-order inequitable social hierarchies and lead to a more just democracy. Thus for example Morgan (1998b, p. 160) claims that the work of “reconstructing texts, reading positions and meanings” is ultimately a “participation in the work of building a more equitable democracy,” although she acknowledges that it cannot be achieved by “analytical work alone.” She explains that “making ideologies available for scrutiny” is important work that revolves around the desire to attain “social justice.” Hannay (2001, p. 1) similarly comments that students in English classrooms should be given access to a critical form of literacy because all language is “irredeemably ideological and implicated in creating and maintaining social hierarchies, differences, advantages and disadvantages.” Moon (2001, pp. 82-83) explains the Marxist view that texts are products of the social economic system, and that the “way people behave in any society is determined by basic economic factors. Those that own the means of production exploit the rest of the population by forcing their own values and beliefs onto other social groups.” A disruption of the significations that instantiate dominations will “challenge oppressive beliefs and values” that “support the ruling classes is a society” (cf McEwan, 2001). Morgan (1997, p. 20) agrees, conceiving the ideal subject position that critical literacy offers to be one of “socio-political critic and agent of enlightenment.” Students are offered subjectivity as a “liberated agent of socio-political reform.” A critical reading practice will enable students to understand language as a social practice, will enable them to see it as embedded in larger economic factors, and finally will provide tools for them to resist the implicit textual ideologies so that inequity can be challenged and redressed.

Earlier Emancipatory Claims Now Diluted

One of the support materials does include a caveat here. In the introduction to the second edition of *Literary Terms*, Moon (2001, p. viii) makes the point that when his first edition was published, at the height of poststructuralist theory, it seemed self evident that “knowledge of the social determinants of reading enabled humans to escape from them.” He now says, partly because of the work of Foucault, that we “can only achieve a partial, strategic reorientation” and not a “transformation in our consciousness.” What we can hope for is only a “degree of leverage on particular problems that surround representation and meaning.” Even given the cautionary note of restraint from Moon and Morgan (1997, pp. 13-15) where they problematize

a cavalier use of the term empowerment (cf Ellsworth, 1989; P. Green, 1993), emancipatory claims are made for critical literacy in the support materials.

Marxist Notion of False Consciousness

The notion that a reader cannot trust consciousness exists in the support materials as they propose reading practices that make visible the hidden ideology and its constitutive power in texts. Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 22) flag the notion of consciousness, arguing that we are “not solely responsible for thinking or feeling as we do about social divisions.” The categories and ideologies have been “established for us through social, political and historical processes.” Similarly, Hannay (2001, p. 2) says that “students in today's English classrooms need access to teaching that demonstrates how they are being “passively shaped by the powerful discourses of their culture.” When this is accomplished they are able to make more conscious and democratic decisions about the way texts can and should be read, used and written. Gillespie (2001) agrees, explaining that she finds useful Comber's (1993) view that critical literacy involves consciousness-raising so that students can critique the dominant discourses of the culture and then take action to resist, expose, and overturn these discourses. Similarly Appleman (2000, p. 3) explains that seeking out the dominant readings and recognizing ideological prefigurement is an essential reading practice because it facilitates a discovery of “why you hold certain values unconsciously,” and also why some values are “accepted without question because they are naturalised” (Herrett, et al., 2003).

According to Thomson (1992b), in the past, the theories of reading that informed English teaching were never made explicit. He is critical of this omission because the ideologies underpinning various theories of reading were hidden or supposed as natural (cf Mellor, et al., 1991, p. 44; Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 58; Moon, 2001, pp. 28-29; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 42-43). The students or teachers never questioned whether the way they read hid underpinning ideology, and consequently they were “inevitably manipulated” (Thomson, 1992b, p. 1). Critical literacy examines the actual reading practices (Mellor, et al., 1991, pp. 12, 18, 26, 72; Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 66-68; Moon, 2001, p. 126) of a student to see what values it supports (Miller & Colwill, 2004; Moon, 2001, p. 161), and the aim is to develop the students' powers as readers and writers of texts and “makers of culture” rather than constructing them as “passive consumers of culture” (Thomson, 1992b). As Thomson (1992b) confidently asserts, if teachers want students to become “conscious learners” and “independent choice making human beings” then they must help them “control their reading, writing and learning processes” and empower them to become “decision making human beings.” If teachers “persist in socializing them into compliance with the prevailing modes of thought,” then English risks being merely an “instrument of social control.”

Language Sustains and Replicates Inequitable Networks of Power

The support materials present the poststructuralist notion that language is deeply implicated in sustaining inequitable networks of power. They present tools for students to enable them to see how language is implicated in supporting and reproducing discriminatory arrangements of power, how language works to instantiate ideology, and how it can be resisted. Because it is language, through discourses, that operates in the interests of particular people and institutions, making this process visible is the first step towards liberation.

Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 11) explain that “social meanings are produced via language through the device known as discourse.” Discourses do “not offer neutral descriptions of the world” (Moon, 2001, p. 36), but are involved in the “distribution of social power” and in the “maintenance of unequal economic and political relationships” (Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 60-61). According to Miller and Colwill (Miller & Colwill, 2004), “Discourses, by their very nature, “exclude or marginalise those who do not share the same knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and values”. In other words, language is made to operate in the interests of particular people and institutions. Hannay (2001) cites Morgan (1994, p. 6), claiming that “no discourse is ever neutral; it's always involved in circulating and promoting one form of knowledge, of values, of ways of being and living over another.” For example, Moon (2001, p. 42) explains that feminist critics demonstrate how it is that “literary texts either sustain or challenge the structure of patriarchy. Gender inequalities are reproduced through the production of texts,” in the “structure and language of texts” and through “reading practices.” Similarly, McEwan (2001, p. 7) draws on Lankshear (1994, p. 11) to explain that “language is deeply and inescapably bound up with producing, reproducing and maintaining arrangements of power which are unequal.” In explaining the work of discourses and drawing on the work of Foucault, Moon (2001, p. 36) explains that it is “discourses operating according to unwritten rules about who can speak, who is spoken to and what kinds of things can be talked about” that instantiates “certain relations of power.”

Teaching students how to make alternative or resistant readings will help them “resist the status quo” (Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 22) , “resist the construction” of selves (Salk, 2001, pp. 1-2) and “see the oppressive power relations and structures in the texts” so that they might “read differently” and “take a standpoint outside the discourse” (Lankshear in Queitzsch, 2001, p. 7). Queitzsch (2001, p. 7) provides exercises to make visible that it is texts that “assist in maintaining power differentials in society,” however she explains that “in order to contest or rewrite a cultural text, students have to be given analytical tools to “recognise and talk about the various textual elements at work and develop different ways of talking critically about the textual strategies and devices” (cf McEwan, 2001, p. 7). Critical literacy provides these tools.

A Hermeneutic of Suspicion the Default Reading Position

The support materials endorse a reading strategy that unpicks a text's strategies of persuasion and manipulation, so that its rhetoric, its values, and its ideologies are exposed (Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 17; Moon, 2001, pp. 101-104). This suspicious attitude to reading and interpretation is conceived as emancipatory because it works to demystify language and expose the ways in which linguistic and cultural systems are constructed by ideologies that further the interests of those who hold power (Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 16; Moon, 2001, p. 71; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 7, 14, 18, 22-13, 68-19). To read with a hermeneutic of suspicion is to read and interpret guided by guardedness. A reader does not have to take up the invited reading of any text because what is presented is not a given or a truth (Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 4; Moon, 2001, pp. 127-130; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 7, 21-25). Unless students are introduced to the idea that they can challenge a dominant (Mellor, et al., 1991, pp. 57, 63, 93) or invited reading (Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 6-7, 22-24, 59), they may read the text as if what is contained in it is simply a truth or a given.

Language Used About language

In keeping with this suspicious hermeneutic, the support materials speak about language in tones that connote a degree of censure and blame. For instance, when referring to language, it is never an "innocent or natural" representation of the way things are (Misson, 1998b, p. 148; Queitzsch, 2001, p. 7.) Literary writing has the same "designs on a reader" as community or institutional texts (Hannay, 2001, p. 6), so students must learn how to "debunk" what language is saying, be "alert to strategies" in language (Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 52) and "resist the truths that are offered in texts" (Queitzsch, 2001, p. 1). Texts must be "questioned, disputed" (Lemon, 2001, p. 5) and "interrogated" (Lemon, 2001, p. 6), and students must learn to "manipulate and question texts" (McEwan, 2001, p. 3). Students are taught, a "method of criticising texts" (Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 104), how to "destabilise meanings" (Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 52, 61), how to "problematise classroom and public texts" (McEwan, 2001, p. 1) and ways to "demystify texts" (Lemon, 2001, p. 2). Almost every support text provides, either directly or a variation of, the Luke, O'Brien and Comber (1994a) questions that suggest some critical questions to use with texts (Jones, 2001; Pappalardo, 2001). Through these, students are taught to "critically reflect on how meanings are made" (McEwan, 2001, p. 1).

Morgan (1994, p. 36) does qualify this imperative to an extent, when she says that she is not suggesting that "all texts are deliberately, wickedly misleading misrepresentations," but that they do lead the reader to "see in certain ways." Morgan (1994, p. 36) refutes the suggestion that resistant readers might become trained "cynics who refuse to believe anything" and who do "not get positive hope and good value" from reading. She argues that critical literacy does "not

mean putting students on guard against being affected by texts and language.” It is not about promoting just a “cynical distrust or political correctness” (Morgan, 1994, p. 41). She very definitely does not “want alienated, cynical students to have those tendencies confirmed” and argues that critical literacy goes “beyond sceptical distrust” or vacuous “political correctness” because it seeks to develop in students those “moral and ethical dispositions” such as “compassionate understanding and concern for more just and equitable society.”

Critical Literacy on the Side of the Dispossessed

Feminist, Marxist, post-colonial and queer readings are all variations on a hermeneutic of suspicion (Moon, 2001, p. 42; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 30, 42, 45, 51; Salk, 2001, pp. 1, 2, 8, 11). Critical literacy advocates argue for English whose ethics address the politics of differentially advantaged groups, and this is perceived as emancipatory in that it challenges naturalized representations of these categories and wedges open space for difference to speak. Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 23) explain that a passive acceptance of categories or social divisions such as gender, class, race and religion have been “established for us, through social, political and historical processes.” However this does not mean that these categories “are, or should be, fixed.” Rather they must remain open to negotiation and change (cf Morgan, 1998a, p. 160).

These readings are considered emancipatory in two ways. First they liberate the reader to see that others view the world differently, and second, they create a site where difference is valorised. McEwan (2001, p. 3) explains that the structure of traditional literary criticism is essentially “too rigid to allow for alternate readings” to be explored. This has the effect of “marginalising and silencing elements of history, culture, race and gender that students and teachers bring with them to the study of a text.” Morgan (1997) explains that critical literacy tries to redress the inequalities between groups of people in society. Gilbert (2001, p. 3), in the preface to *Challenging the Text*, says that the teaching units “offer ways to foreground the needs of students so that “difference and diversity can become positive classroom resources.” Hannay (2001, p. 3) argues that one of the challenges for today's English teachers is to look for strategies to help students to read differently, “to read against the grain, to give neglected texts a hearing, and allow repressed voices to speak out.” Gilbert (2001, p. 1) similarly explains, in the preface to Fraser's (2001b) fifteen critical literacy units, that the units foreground the “needs of students so that difference and diversity” can be positive in the classroom. The act of reading is fundamentally ethical and emancipatory in that when a reader interprets she does so in the best way for the colonised, women, the poor and the sexually-marginalised.

Grants Privilege to the Formerly Marginalized

The main areas of disadvantage or difference valorised in the support materials appear to be race and gender, and less substantially class and sexuality.

Race

One way of demonstrating how the textual language of race and ethnicity sustains and replicates inequitable relations of power is to make visible how they are represented in textual constructions. While the support texts do engage in exposing the textual constructedness of race and ethnicity, they do not integrate much post-colonial literature. Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 66) devote Chapter 6 to representations of race as a social and cultural practice. They establish that race carries descriptions and connotations about a person's identity that are "far from neutral," and that race is a "social category rather than a natural one." They examine racist ideologies in newspapers and current affairs television and the way race is represented as a social and cultural process. Constructions of race and identity need to be made visible because the "inclusion and exclusion of groups" of people based on race is a "crucial way in which ideology functions in society" (2003, pp. 55-66). They examine the exclusions in textual representations of race and how those that are marginalised are omitted from the story in order to create a particular social meaning, and they provide activities for students to make visible this marginalisation (2003, pp. 59-60).

Miller and Colwill (2004, pp. 26-33) also provide texts that engage with multicultural Australia and encourage students to experience the "enlarged horizons that result from the recognition of difference" (cf Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 68; Yaxley, et al., 2005, pp. 152-155). Moon (2001, pp. 101-104) explains how post-colonial thinkers work to make writers and readers aware that representations of the colonized are often constructed with the indigenous as Other to the colonizers. Texts are studied to expose the way the colonised have been represented and how literature works to challenge or redefine the colonised and their cultures. Yaxley (2005, pp. 148-151) explores the subject of the European invasion and colonisation of Australia, Herrett et al. (2003, pp. 186-194) the textual construction of people of colour as Other to the colonizers, and Miller and Colwill (2004, pp. 33-35) the impact of colonisation on indigenous experience and identity.

Gender

The support materials examine constructions of gender not as biological difference, but as constructed historically and culturally and achieved through performance (Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 121-123; McEwan, 2001, p. 6; Moon, 2001, p. 57). In Fraser's (2001b) *Challenging the Text*, teachers developed their work units by drawing on work that explores issues of gender (Gilbert, 1994; Gilbert, Gilbert, & McGinty, 1994). Gilbert (2001, pp. 1-2), in the preface to the units, explains that teachers were exposed to these texts so that they would "reposition [themselves] as English educators" able to "problematised reading and textuality" and "foreground gendered language practices." Robinson and Robinson (2003, pp. 40-54) devote an

entire chapter to gender entitled *The Battle of the Sexes*, and Yaxley 2005, pp. 102-129) also, entitled *Gender and Stereotypes*. Robinson and Robinson (2003) explore the “social categories of gender representations in media,” the “texts that seek to exclude women as readers,” the “popular representations of gender in sport” and the “role of feminism in deconstructing texts and creating resistant readings” (cf Larrazabal, 2001; Salk, 2001).

According to Miller and Colwill (2004, pp. 136-138), readers take up their gendered roles as they are “socialised within the culture,” and Moon (2001, pp. 55-57) agrees that “texts such as novels and films play a role in embedding gendered power relations” (cf Jones, 2001, p. 6; Larrazabal, 2001, pp. 2-3). Larrazabal (2001, pp. 2-3) cites Gilbert (1993, p. 326) and Fairclough (1989, p. 2), claiming that no-one can “ignore the role language plays in the construction of gender,” because it is “such a dominating set of social practices in our culture” (cf Martino & Mellor, 2000; Queitzsch, 2001; Salk, 2001). Even canonical texts, constructed hundreds of years ago, can be “influential in perpetuating such gendered identities” (Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 137).

The emancipatory imperative in this critical practice is that if one’s gender is not a given biological fact but simply a social construction, then it can be changed. As Fraser (2001a), citing Gilbert (1994) points out,

once the gendered features and conventions of texts are recognisable, it is possible to see how various texts bring certain gendered subject positions into operation and silence others.

When naturalized, gendered reading positions are exposed, it paves the way for students to “fracture” and subvert unwanted representations (Salk, 2001, p. 2). Queitzsche (2001, p. 5) insists that teachers must dismantle the construction of gender and explore the networks of power sustained, even though it means “engaging with issues that are perhaps quite volatile.”

Class

Moon (2001, pp. 11-12) explains that texts such as novels, plays, films and TV shows play a role in spreading ideologies that help to hold the class system in place, and offers a practical exercise to expose that process. Herrett (2003, p. 159) lists a number of questions that Marxist literary critics might want to ask of a text, and Foster (2001, p. 12) asks students to see whether other classes were silenced in their chosen text. Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 19) explain that a “class discourse operates as a way of grouping people according to their economic status” and social meanings are established when a reader takes up these discourses as reality. Queitzsch (2001, p. 5) draws on Walkerdine (1990, p. ch 19) and Lee (1991) to demonstrate that a student cannot effect a reading of a text without calling into play the “discourse of class

as a central resource.” However, apart from this, there is very little exploration of class in the support materials.

Sexuality

Not many of the support texts mention sexuality as an area of difference, and even when they did; it was only in a cursory manner (Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 16-17). Herrett et al. (2003), in only a small section of the total text, explain that people who read texts from the perspective of “queer theory” argue that the “heterosexual subject is constructed through the repression of the possibility of homosexuality.” They turn their attention to the cultural phenomenon of “mainstream society”, including all texts, to examine how they “directly or indirectly” [...] “dominate and oppress” those Other to heterosexuality. Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 22) explain that students can, for instance, use a resistant reading practice every time they want to “challenge a sexist ideology,” or they can perform a “homosexual reading of a text” that challenges “heterosexuality as the norm.” This particular marginalized group is not represented much in the support materials and I suspect it is because, as Morgan (1997, p. 48) says, it is not easy to broach notions of sexuality in the classroom because it is “felt to be too intimate for public scrutiny or too subject to moral regulation to be opened for debate.”

Deconstruction

Multiple Meanings - ‘Readings’ in texts

Part of deconstruction, as developed in critical literacy, is to steer students away from single authoritative interpretations and towards the realisation of multiple meanings. Teaching about multiple interpretations is construed as emancipatory in that it provides an influential tool for revealing and avoiding interpretive violence. In the past, students were taught that texts contained universal truths that represented the human condition, and therefore dominant, singular readings were authorized and transmitted through English classes.

The support materials clearly elaborate the poststructuralist notion that not only are singular meanings an inaccurate way to view interpretation, but they also forge dominances and result in marginalization for many people (Fraser, 2001a, p. 2; Gillespie, 2001; McEwan, 2001, p. 6; Mellor, et al., 1991, p. 45; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 4). The entire first chapter of Herrett et al. (2003, p. 1) explores the “idea that texts can be read in different ways,” while Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 4) claim that the “words we read and the images we view are all examples of polysemic texts” (cf Corcoran, 1992, pp. 78-79; Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 3-4; Moon, 2001, p. 98; Queitzsch, 2001, p. 7).

Fraser (2001a, p. 2), taking up the view of Mellor, O’Neill and Patterson (1991, p. 45), teaches that recent literary theory construes the “purpose of reading” as “not to find and accept the

position the text is assumed to offer as the correct reading,” but to consider what the “possible readings of a text might be” (cf Fraser, 2001a, p. 2; Mellor, et al., 1991, p. Ch 1 & 2; Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 66-68; Moon, 2001, p. 129; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 22-25).

Singular Meanings Oppressive

McEwan (2001, p. 2), drawing from Mellor et al.(1992), comments that the ‘Heritage Model’ of English practice assumed that the text was a “repository of putative meaning,” but really this innocent reading simply “promoted the views of established critics” as they assisted readers to make the “correct interpretation of the text.” This model of teaching has “lulled generations of students of literature into accepting the practice of imitating the dominant reading of a text,” instead of formulating their own multiple readings of the text. She explains that, “a text can never be reduced to a single reading, since there is no transcendent authority to refer to in order to establish the truth of that particular reading” (2001, p. 6). Single readings are viewed as “impossible and often undesirable,” and readers are seen to “read in different ways on different occasions” (Mellor & Patterson, 2001a). Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 4) assert that it is only when students learn to deconstruct a text into its underlying components such as discourse, ideology, Intertextuality, reading positions and cultural context, that “a multiplicity of meanings,” that were “initially not visible, begin to emerge.” Reading to find a single unified voice shuts down the possibility of exposing the vested interests in the text, and this in turn masks the plurality of meanings.

Liberated by Rejecting Singular Meanings

Gilbert (1993, p. 100) explains that what is liberating in this practice is that once reading is freed from the “shackles of locating a singular and authoritative textual meaning,” it can instead focus on “how meanings are made,” and how “different readings can be made by different people, for different purposes” (cf Hannay, 2001, p. 8; Mellor & Patterson, 2001a, pp. 81-104; Moon, 2001, p. 129). Teachers using this approach to texts do not impose authorised meaning on students. Instead, as Misson (cited in Worth & Guy, 1998, p. 84) explains, they can now look at “ways in which the text opens up and constructs possibilities of meaning,” and how a reader is “able to realise that meaning potential.”

Textual Authority under Question / Considered Emancipatory.

The concept of resistant or oppositional reading is developed in nearly all the support materials (Mellor, et al., 1991, pp. 20-21; Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 66-67, 16; Moon, 2001, pp. 126, 129; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, Chapter 3; Yaxley, et al., 2005, pp. 33-37) and it is construed as emancipatory. Learning to read is not seen as a neutral activity but as that which accomplishes ideological work (Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 16,95; Moon, 2001, p. 71; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 7, 14, 18, 22-13, 68-19, 80; Salk, 2001, pp. 2,6,8). Instead of

taking up the dominant reading (Larrazabal, 2001, pp. 6-8; Mellor, et al., 1991, pp. 57,63,93; Moon, 2001, pp. 37,129-131; Queitzsch, 2001, pp. 4,12) of texts students are taught to read in opposition to the invited reading and therefore “challenge the prevailing views in the culture” (Moon, 2001, pp. 127-130). Queitzsche (2001, p. 3) claims that when students “see how texts work politically”...“to position readers” this gives them “opportunities to translate the text analysis into action or intervention with or against the text.” Moon (2001, p. 129) explains resistant or oppositional readings as those which are “unacceptable in terms of the dominant cultural beliefs” and which “challenge the prevailing views of the text.” They refuse to take up the story as it stands, but stand back from it and analyse it critically. They resist the norms and values that have informed the text and are presented to readers as authoritative (McEwan, 2001, p. 6; M. Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 95-101). They examine what the text foregrounds (Fraser, 2001a, pp. 2,3,5,9; Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 4; Mellor, et al., 1991, pp. 10,42; Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 22) and privileges (Moon, 2001, pp. 49-51; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 59-60) so that the text’s agendas, values, and ideologies are exposed (Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 24). Resistant readings “work *against* the text” (Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 4), “disagree with the dominant readings of the text,” (Mellor, et al., 1991, p. 4) , “challenge the point of view in the text” (Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 21) and “liberate the learners and teachers from the bonds of a dominant version of a text under study” (McEwan, 2001, p. 3).

Thomson (1992b, p. 4) explains that once he has worked with the class to “de-mystify literature”, to show that there is no “correct” or “natural” responses to literature the students could read it “without being dominated by it” and they could “argue against its ideologies.” He says that many of the students expressed that they felt “liberated from their previously restrictive notions about appropriate ways to respond to literature and to all ‘authoritative’ texts in society.” They began to “get some feeling of control over texts instead of being controlled by them.” Lemon (2001, p. 2) found that students love “playing around with a text” because it gives them a “sense of power and involvement” that is not so readily available to the “passive reader.” Appleman (2000, p. 3) cites Bonnycastle (1996, p. 34), as she makes a case for developing a critical reading lens in student readers.

Literary theories are subversive because (they) put authority in question. It enables students to take their own part in the struggles for power between different ideologies. It means no authority can impose a truth on you in a dogmatic way. If some authority does try, you can challenge that truth in a powerful way, by asking what ideology it is based on.

She explains further that young people will “remain powerless over these forces unless they can recognise them” and understand what is “influencing (their) reactions.” Gilbert (2001) clearly states that a critical reflexivity can make room for a range of strategies that would “enfranchise

more students,” and teachers must “problematize” their reading practices by exposing students to “texts that challenge textual authority” (cf Moon, 2001; Peim, 1993; Thomson, 1992b). McEwan (2001, p. 3) insists that critical literacy strategies will “liberate learners and teachers from the bonds of a dominant version of the text,” so they are “free to develop their *own* versions.” She argues that the way texts used to be read is “too rigid to allow for alternate readings to be explored,” thereby “marginalising and silencing elements of history, culture, race and gender” that students and teachers “bring with them to the study of a text.” Drawing on Comber (1993), Luke et al. (1994b) and Lankshear (1994) she says that critical literacy has “thrown down the gauntlet to students” to “challenge these accepted structures” and become “empowered to be more involved with and better able to relate to the text (2001, p. 5). Queitzsch (2001, p. 5) argues that when students have access to critical literacy discourses they become “enfranchised” because these new critical discourses shift them in such a way that they “learn about the implicit process” of discursive power. Misson (cited in Worth & Guy, 1998, p. 84) says “as well as English teachers teaching to “show the insights into human behaviour and life that the texts give they must also teach students “how texts work so that they will have control over them as far as possible.” He says that many fear that theory may be “irrelevant and constricting” but really it is “highly practical in its implications and wonderfully liberating.”

Various Literary Theories now Interpretive Orthodoxy

One of the concerns raised in Chapter 6 was that students simply learn to do theory and whatever literary theory they are learning is reflected in their interpretation of the text. As one professor put it, tell me the particular literary theory and I will tell you what the reader will find in the text (Tanner, 1999). McEwan (2001), speaking about the traditional reading practices, says that when “academic success is dependent on aligning [one’s] appraisal to a dominant or accepted reading of a text,” then students have “limited choices” other than to “regurgitate the dominant reading en route to a passing grade.” She understands that this is an entirely understandable position for the students to take, because the critique of a text they are required to produce is often for summative assessment practices. She claims that in this way the “authorized reading of the text” becomes “dogma and remains unchallenged.” Not one of the support materials, understandably, pointed out that this is exactly what can happen in a critical practice as well. There seems to be a lack of acknowledgment that this can occur in critical literacy also.

Multiple Meanings Linked with Evasion of Authority

Limitless Signification?

In some of the support texts the interpretive possibilities are posited as infinite, in that we “cannot judge one interpretation as superior to another.” Mellor, O’Neill and Patterson (1992, p.

42), drawing on Belsey (2002a) and Eagleton (1983), confirm the difficulty of trying to tie down a definitive meaning, arguing that texts can “support a multiplicity of readings” and that it is “not possible to choose one reading over another as the more accurate.” Linn (1996, p. 26) explains the genealogy of this notion by drawing from Derrida’s *Writing and Difference* (Derrida, 1978c). Derrida (1989, p. 164) says we must rejoice in the absence of the discoverable once-and-for-all meaning for without it each individual is left “free to play” with a text, free to make it mean whatever serves today’s interests and needs. If we take up Derrida’s “absent origin” then it is possible to embrace the joyous “Nietzschean affirmation” of the “play of the world,” the world of “signs... without truth” and “without origin,” our interpretations can be very active and imaginative. Mellor and Patterson (1991, p. 6) explain that a text cannot be reduced to a single meaning because there is no possibility of a “neutral authority or judge to decide which meaning is correct.” However they do explain that while in theory this means that “texts have the potential to be read in endlessly different ways, in practice, groups of readers produce a limited range of meanings by valuing some responses and disqualifying others.” There are always “recognizably acceptable and dominant ones” (cf Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 3-4).

Complete Freeplay of Sign, Text World?

When the support texts explicate multiple meanings, very few of them actually explain whether there can be a limit to the infinite possibilities in meaning. With the death of the author and the de-centering of the text as that which locks down meaning, there appears to be little else apart from the identity of the reader to produce multiple readings.

Misson (1998a) and Herrett et al. (2003) however do add a note of caution to the notion of complete freeplay of signification. Misson (1998b, p. 147) explains that the poststructuralist belief that there is no validating authorial presence behind the text has “enormous implications for the English classroom.” However he (cited in Worth & Guy, 1998, p. 90) claims that,

While it does provide tremendous freedom for reinterpreting, following through particular lines on the text, re-contextualizing it and discovering extraordinarily diverse meanings in it, it does not allow the reader to make any extravagant sense out of the text s/he likes.

It does not mean that a word or a text can mean “anything” because the “general features of meaning in a word and context” will help “limit the possible range of meaning in particular cases.” In his view, language is still “marked by a high degree of indeterminacy and instability but the interpretations are not limitless.” Texts do offer freedom for the reader to “disport her/himself” because there are “constraints or limiting structures” at work when we come to meaning as well.

While Misson addresses this issue of limitless indeterminacy and whether there is anything that limits the play of interpretation, the other support texts, apart from Herrett et al, appear to say very little on whether the text, the context, or anything for that matter, limits the meanings made. Herrett et al. (2003, p. 5) assert that while meaning is not fixed but can shift and vary, it does not mean that texts can mean anything we want. They say “clearly we could not communicate if this were the case.” Communication “depends on some degree of shared understanding.” Shifts in meaning do not imply that “anything goes” with texts, but rather that at different times, particular meanings or readings are dominant.

The support texts do present texts as products of the socio-economic system and implicated in the instantiation of inequitable social hierarchies. They also present the reader as implicated in this instantiation unless a critical reading practice makes this process visible and allows for critique and resistance. They propose a critical reading practice that will work towards positive change in the reader and then towards a more equitable societal change although he emancipatory claims are now diluted to some extent. Both the Marxist and poststructuralist distrust of consciousness emerges in these materials and they posit a suspicious hermeneutic that they see is on the side of the oppressed and dispossessed. They grant epistemological privilege to the marginalized highlighting race, gender, and less so, class and sexuality. They posit deconstruction with its multiple readings and challenge to textual authority as liberating for the reader. While they do not openly propose infinite signification they also do not say what might limit interpretations leaving that question open.

Chapter 8

Emancipation: What the teachers say

This chapter demonstrates that teachers expressed some similar concerns to the tensions raised in Chapter 6. They challenged critical literacy to critique some of its own assumptions and they posited deconstruction in particular as a practice that is in tension with critical literacy's emancipatory imperatives.

Does Critical Reading Change Socio-Economic Conditions?

At the beginning of the interviews only two of the teachers were aware that critical literacy is conceived by its proponents as an emancipatory educative practice. The majority of the teachers were completely unaware of this claim. The notion that a critical reading practice could bring about change in socio-economic conditions, was a complete surprise to them. Those who were aware of critical literacy's emancipatory claims said they, "did not see it as useful towards major societal change" or promoting a "shift in inequitable power," but that it would be "difficult to measure its success anyhow" (AA). Shocked and rather bemused by these claims, LL suggests "they are a bit ambitious." Teachers explained that they knew it had "small aims like don't be sucked in by a text" (HH) or "you don't have to believe everything you read" (FF), but did "not realise that it aimed for broad societal change" (BB). As LL states, "It is not feeding people. It's not releasing people from oppressive governments is it?" Another explained that she did not think employing a critical reading stance would "change our socio-economic circumstances" but that it "would be hard to judge the effects anyhow" (DD).

The fact that they did not construe critical literacy as an emancipatory practice pervaded all the interview transcripts by its obvious absence. This absence only became apparent to me at the writing up stage, at which point I was unable to tease this out further. I have since wondered if their genuine lack of awareness that critical literacy was conceived as emancipatory is because evangelical Christians in particular inhabit what they see as the cosmic and universally-encompassing story of emancipation. Christian educators challenge much emancipatory discourse, not because it is not in keeping with the Christian ethos to see humanity set free, but because they view Christ's proclamation of salvation as standing sovereignly over any politically constituted emancipation. They live within the Bible narrative, and are witnesses to the story of the gospel that, when believed, transforms the individual. This is a transformation, as revealed in Chapters 3 and 5, which supersedes all small gains made through literature in the classroom. Claims to transformation through a critical reading practice I suspect would be subsumed under the more primal transformation that Christ offers, but I am unable to provide much evidence to indicate that the teachers thought this way. This very point highlights one of the problems I see in reading for absences and gaps. When I read the interviews not for what *is*

in them but for what is *not*, it leaves the transcripts wide open for my own politics, religion or ideological prefigurements. I am not certain that this is what my teachers think on this matter; I only make inferences, given that I see them as inhabiting the same storyline as my own.

Recognize Signification Acts in the Service of Power

The teachers and I discussed aspects of a critical reading practice further, particularly the notion of positioning, and how texts might be manipulating the reader. When viewed from that angle, some said that, “it does perhaps enable people to question their world,” and you “cannot change it if you do not question it” (CC). Similarly, FF said “it does train the kids to look beyond the text, particularly the persuasive texts, and see behind the advertising and then they can refuse it. They do not have to take things at face value. It is only freeing in that area. It is not freeing in any deep sense at the core of our personality.” GG explained that “it might be freeing to a certain extent” in that,

The idea of being able to think about your own thinking is important. Why is it that I think that way, and what other ways are there of thinking about that thing? Certainly at a basic level in the way schools approach critical literacy, you address issues like racism, feminism, classism and so on, so students could come to see things differently through this approach and this could be liberating. It does teach people to understand that texts can manipulate.

CC agreed there is a limited freedom offered through critical practices:

There are certain freedoms that critical literacy might give to students where, for the first time, they may closely examine assumptions that they have made before or re-look at something that, in the past, they have accepted without questioning. They might on this new reading resist that and go “yes I don’t need to be under the power of that construct.”

And finally, BB said, “I would say to a certain extent it is definitely liberating. You know, every time they pick up a newspaper, they can be aware that someone is trying to position them to a particular point of view. I would say from that perspective critical literacy does have its merits. Yes, definitely, that is one of its strengths.” However the majority of the teachers were echoed in JJ’s comments: “Honestly I don’t think our students do get free from this process. We do not see the results of these large claims made for it.” EE, with a degree of amusement, said “honestly, how are readers liberated if they are simply being trained in what to find in the text? It is no different than it was before.”

Difference between Marxist and Christian Views of Emancipation

My initial research interest was whether there were tensions for Christians teaching critical literacy, given its Marxist and poststructuralist lineage. The majority of the teachers were not aware of either of these influences; at least, not in the sense that they could name it as poststructuralist or Marxist thought. For instance, while some were aware that critical literacy promoted a suspicious view of texts, they did not name that as emerging from either a Marxist or poststructuralist lineage, but simply saw it as something one does in critical literacy. There were a couple of teachers who said, "I know critical literacy has got something to do with the production of texts and that in turn is related to Marxist thought. We have to ask who wrote this, who produced the text, what are the dominant ideas behind its production, as if we will be duped if we don't see that" (HH). Also, GG said, "I think the Marxist idea is in critical literacy because they see ideology as an illegitimate and negative use of power, not a good use. And I think it is the idea that the reader's ideas about the text cannot be trusted." Others said that they knew "Marxism was atheistic" and that this was in obvious conflict with Christianity but they did not see "what bearing that might have on reading texts" (BB). While the teachers indicated a degree of awareness that texts are products of a particular history, and that they achieve political ends, they did not articulate these ideas as Marxist or poststructuralist in origin.

Christ's Liberation Offered to Oppressed and Oppressor

A number concurred with the notion, raised in Chapter 6, that regeneration, and therefore the liberation that Christ offered, was extended to all and not only the oppressed or the marginalised. A typical response is summed up in the following comment by BB:

I can see how it would be important to teach students how texts work to position us because the people in power create the knowledge bases; but Christ's emancipation, his liberation, goes across financial wealth and power; it is extended to everyone, not just the poor and suffering. It is equally extended to the ones that hold power as well as those that do not hold power. Those that are in powerful positions, whether through wealth, domination, political power or whatever, the minute they come to Christ... it is a complete liberation for them as well... no matter how powerful they have been. They will no longer be powerful or marginalised, in the sense that the world sees this, but they will have a common understanding with the rest that have accepted Christ.

Most teachers made the following distinction, articulated here by HH, "They are not being freed from their sinful nature. They are not forgiven in God, so they are not truly emancipated much at all. In a minor sense, they are not going to be conned intellectually. They are freer in some senses, but that is not going to be the ultimate freedom that they need." Similarly, FF insisted

that, “It might be emancipatory in a small sense, in that you do not allow yourself to be manipulated by texts, for instance like an advertisement or when they use science as leverage for you to believe in the product. However it is not emancipatory to the core of your being, as Christian emancipation or regeneration is. It is only superficial emancipation from a Christian point of view, isn’t it?”

GG explained that, “this freedom [experienced in embracing the redemptive work of Christ] embraces all gender, all races, all class, all ethnic groups, all sexual preference and any other divisions that we care to divide humanity into.” The “freedom Christ offers is far greater in scope than anything offered through reading critically” (HH). As AA saw it, “the oppressor needs to be freed too, in the Christian view of humanity.” BB’s was certainly a representative response, “When we examine positioning, we might be free to choose an alternative interpretation, but when Christ’s indwelling of the Holy Spirit comes to a person that is complete liberty.” Every interviewee resonated with FF’s statement, “You need to look at what God does to free humanity. What does He say about bondage and oppression and how humanity can find release from that?”

Do Critical Reading Practices Emancipate the Reading Subject?

Ideological Critique

There were a very limited number of interviewees who believed that reading from a Marxist or a feminist perspective could be emancipatory for people who were marginalized. LL explained it like thus:

It might be a liberating reading practice to engage in a feminist, Marxist, queer or post-colonial reading of texts initially, because some people only read from one perspective, and to have to read from a different perspective will show that there are other ways to read texts. They can be more open to those that have been pushed to the margins, so critical literacy might free some people.

And DD, speaking about using texts from the postcolonial milieu, said,

Certainly in my own teaching practice I would definitely have a unit using a post-colonial text to highlight the work of others. How much that liberates a white, middle-class person to think with more grace and empathy towards people constructed as ‘Other’ out there I do not know.

According to AA,

This is important for Christians, who are called to love people and be open to the outcast and the rejected. Critical literacy makes way for these people to have a voice. Reading for the marginalized, gender or race, is important to understand how

disadvantage works in our society, or where people come from in terms of their beliefs and values.

The majority of the teachers, when asked why they taught readers to unmask ideology in texts, said they did it because it was part of the critical reading process, explicated in the support materials. Even though nearly all the teachers taught students to read in this way, they did not construe texts as co-opted by the economic system and in the service of the reigning cultural power bases. They unproblematically spoke of the ‘real meaning’ of a text without any uneasiness that neutral readings might be shoring up inequitable power relations. Even though they worked to unveil textual ideologies, they did not construe this as serving emancipatory ends. They did not understand that when they taught students to disrupt naturalised readings, this might potentially enable readers to dislocate significations that instantiated relations of domination. There was very little sense at all that they were engaged in a critical reading practice that might liberate the oppressed, enslaved to the ideologies of capitalist societies and language.

Ideological Critique Emancipatory / Protects Christian Identity

By far the majority of teachers emphasised the emancipatory value of ideological critique only as it applied to the protection of Christian identity. They saw the reading practice that sides with the marginalized as a liberating imperative in that this would have particular benefits for the Christian community. As AA explained,

We need to understand that the things we do, the things we take up, do change our identities. We do become what we practice. A lot of critical literacy looks at the feminist way of reading. Has this female been marginalized or has the text marginalized a homosexual man’s interpretation of sexuality or something like that. We don’t go in to lots of those things. We look at how these different views sit with Christian ones. If there were a whole lot of texts that represented Christians really negatively, which there are, then I do want my kids to be able to see that selections are made to represent Christians that way. This is important for all people who feel that they are represented erroneously.

Or, as HH explained, “You want your students to be critically literate. You want them to be able to read below the surface of any text that they are approaching. You want them to understand the ideologies behind a text because so many of those ideologies are godless. You want them to be able to discern that they are godless.” All of the teachers agreed with KK that:

Christians have been examining texts critically for eons because they have to know what the world view is in the texts that they are examining. The Christian world view is

not the dominant world view anymore and they need to read and ascertain what underlies any text to look for its dominances.

Or as LL put it, “Christians are taught early on in their life to examine all cultural influences and see where they stand on them. Often the reigning culture is in tension with the values and beliefs of a Christian culture so we are taught to be suspicious of texts or even to avoid some altogether.”

The unstated premise in much of this thinking is that the person is set free as they come to know Christ. The disciple of Christ is told (in Galatians) that it is for freedom that they have been set free and they are warned to continue in that freedom. Consequently, reading to make visible ideology that is contrary to biblical notions is thought to keep the person walking in this freedom because they can reject anti-biblical notions. Some of the Christian writers, as discussed in Chapter 6, however, have expressed concern that ideological critique approached in this way might be more of a protective custody (Walsh, 2000) and a shoring up of Christian identity, rather than an empathetic social conscience that wants to maintain an open and merciful embrace of difference. While there was general agreement that the Church was not meant to be complicit with oppressive regimes, there did not appear to be an understanding that Christian schooling itself might possibly work as a cover for an imposed ideological orthodoxy.

Scrutiny of Texts for Racism and Sexism might not be Emancipatory

As I showed in Chapter 7, the support materials promoted the notion of multiple interpretation of texts as a liberating practice because once the reading subject is freed from a singular and authorized meaning they can instead focus on how meanings are made, and produce many different readings. However, many teachers complained that it was not really a critical practice in that the choices are limited in critical literacy as well. This comment by HH was typical:

It is not liberating if they are just looking for what the teacher tells them they have to find. “Just look in the text for evidence of oppressions,” or “look for who or what is marginalised.” Even then, the teacher tells them what is marginalized; they do not see it. Often they simply regurgitate the dominant readings such as feminist or Marxist.

Almost every teacher was in agreement that ideological critique that examines texts only for signs of sexism, classism, racism or homophobic dominances is “a narrow, forced reading practice,” and that it “tends to ignore what is actually in the text” (KK). KK articulates a concern that every interviewee mentioned, “The students will find what you lead them to find. How is that liberating? If I point out the exclusion of the perspective of women, is that liberating? It depends a lot on the teacher really, but they can do their own things with a text a bit... bring in and endorse their own politics.” GG explained this concern,

If we only read to see a text from the perspective of women (and surely the notion of 'women' as a unitary and cohesive group is fraught with problems too) then does that not simply establish different regimes of exclusion and inclusion? Is it really liberating? I would go beyond that and say that my experience [he is a Principal of 25 years experience in a Christian school] has taught me that one of the criticisms of Christian schools, for example, as an alternative, is that we are narrow-minded. Now I would actually argue that we are prepared to accept that there is a different way to look at things and this makes us actually more broadminded than somebody [asked to look at the Christian message] who said "I am not even prepared to go there."

HH posited this reading practice as constricted and inadequate and certainly not emancipatory.

You know, we teach students to read gender relations in Hamlet, but I see this as a narrow and limited reading practice. Because the students no longer engage with the characters or the themes in the text, they no longer experience the questioning that Hamlet was doing in his own life... the question of being, the question of existence, and the question of faithfulness, loyalty, betrayal, faith and family; all extremely important themes. These are universal, real world issues at those times, but for our time as well. But now we say "let's not look at those themes, let us look at how each gender relates to each other or how women are constrained by social practices." It is very limited. They lose so much richness in the text, and I think that is why I think this is limited. Something special is lost, something that might facilitate emancipation, when we approach literature just for signs of racism or sexism.

Some argued that intellectually it might be limiting, because the elevation and proliferation of difference, rather than facilitate liberation of the subject, might simply truncate sustained intellectual analysis. LL spoke adamantly about this,

Intellectually it is not challenging because one never has to define and defend an argument. All one has to do is bring up difference, and do that repeatedly. The students merely flag the existence of differences and this automatically throws any sustained argument into a negative light because it appears as if one is trying to dominate the game. One does not have to bring a counter argument to the one proposed but simply point out that there are differences. The mere existence of differences repulses any discussion of the argument. One does not even have to address the detail of the argument. You just say "ah, but what about such and such?" This is just intellectual laziness.

The consensus here appears to be that current literary criticism has its own exclusions and ruling regimes of thought. AA, who is a panel member for year 12 English folios, raised concern over whether exposing ideologies in texts always works in a liberating way:

I do not think that exposing ideologies is unimportant, but we can't really assume that the process of exposure necessarily works towards freedom of the reader. It could work to simply establish power in different ways that is all. Even within critical literacy it's got its own controlling ideologies... race, class and gender... oh and sexuality. On panel the 'best' reading is one that challenges and overturns the dominant ideology by exposing and dismantling it but I do not see that those readings are always the best in terms of what the text is about. Knowing what the text is about might be liberating. Have we lost this?

Critical Literacy must Critique its Own Assumptions

A limited number of interviewees felt that critical literacy needs to turn its analytical gaze upon its own philosophical assumptions and therefore its own dominances and exclusions. GG said,

Critical literacy needs to appraise its own veiled assumptions. I think you can apply the principles of critical literacy in an analysis of its own principles, and make clear to students where critical literacy stands on these issues. Kids of today are exposed to so much language that makes assumptions of truth that are unfounded. What are the underlying philosophical commitments in poststructuralism or Marxism or feminism? If you were able to look at critical literacy and the underlying philosophies, like poststructuralism, and you were able to vary the underlying philosophy behind, it I think it has much more value. I do not accept its antirealist assumptions. I would urge teachers to apply the principles of critical literacy to poststructuralism and to critical literacy itself and interrogate their own ideologies.

Or as FF said,

Most of my teachers (she is Head of English) are not aware that they are being positioned themselves in critical literacy practices unless they do stop and have a look at why they are doing this and what is behind this critical reading practice. Maybe we need to look at this and work out where we stand on these issues.

While HH, (another HOF), also insisted that "one needs to examine the underlying assumptions, and perhaps philosophies, behind critical literacy." This is a call that has come from quarters other than the Christian community (Ricks, 1997, p. 181), that "theory" is presented as "zealously inquisitorial about every form of empire but its own."

Poststructuralist Notions of Liberation

Not one of the teachers had any knowledge of poststructuralism. Until I broached the notion that poststructuralists view multiple interpretations and the valorisation of difference as emancipatory, there was no sense that this was so. A few of the teachers, in response to questions about interpretation, raised the question of whether a text itself has any rights under the glare of deconstruction. Thus for example GG said, “We now have to be conscious of the broader social and cultural context of the interpreter instead of looking at what the text actually says. The text itself has lost some importance.” DD claimed that, “Before, when we read we looked for evidence in the text to support a particular view of the text. Now we simply look to find evidence of how, as a reader, we are positioned. It does bypass the meaning in a text, doesn’t it”? Or as EE explained, “Now we do not limit interpretations to just getting meaning out of texts. Now we have to include the political task of the reader’s own discursive history. Interpreting seems much more complicated than it once was, and not really to do with the text’s meaning anymore. I do not see how this is emancipatory.”

Do Multiple Interpretations Facilitate Emancipation?

AA articulates the ambivalence that many expressed over the notion of multiple interpretations, in that she envisaged some value in multiple interpretations but not at the expense of truth in the text.

Multiple interpretation is one of the ideas in critical literacy that could have positive effects but it may not. The student is liberated to see that they can make a choice. They can choose what they take on and what they don’t. When we teach this idea, that students are free to make multiple interpretations, it liberates them from automatically having to accept and take up as true the dominant perspective in the text. The problem with this is that the dominant perspective or reading may not always be wrong. The dominant reading of a text may well be the truthful reading. Not only is it the invited reading, but it also may be the right reading. The closest to what the words say. Surely there is something freeing about getting to the truth of a text?

Many teachers were in two minds about this concept of multiple interpretations. GG articulated the tension between the notion that the bible contains truth and critical literacy’s view that texts are open to multiple interpretations, none of which necessarily contain ‘the truth.’

There are enormous tensions here. There is a tension in the way people view the Bible from a fundamentalist point of view that accepts that the Bible is literally the word of God, and an interpretive perspective that says that the Bible is written in terms of

parables and metaphors and the culture of the day. If you take a fundamentalist perspective that the Bible is the absolute word of God and largely, unless it is overtly indicated, that it's a metaphorical or in terms of parables, then you are not really free to interpret the truth that is in there, the truth is explicit. If you accept a more interpretive approach to the Bible then you are free to position yourself in relationship to it and read into and interpret it in the way that critical literacy probably promotes or promulgates. So I think there are great tensions between the notions of the Bible containing truth and critical literacy's perspective that in simple layman's terms truth is in the eye (mind) of the reader... rather than in the mind of the author.

Or as HH said, "I know that they do not like the idea of a 'right' interpretation but there are some better interpretations than others. There is something in there that the reader needs to get to and it might free the reader to know it." One can hear in the words of AA and HH a commitment to realism. There is a meaning in there to get right. The meanings a reader makes are to approximate the meaning that is already there in the text.

Unlimited Interpretation Degrades Textual Authority

Liberated from the Authority of the Text

Only three teachers raised the concern that the tools and practice of critical literacy might work to discourage obedience to textual authority. HH said that "really the reader is only liberated from the authority of the text," and she asks "what is next, what are they (the students) left with? This is negative if it drains the Bible of any authority." JJ explained it in this way:

Well I think because it involves people questioning... you know those that are marginalised, the gaps and silences... the dominances... It asks students to look at texts in a way that they can reject what is in the text based on those practices. If they wanted to they could reject the scriptures based on race. They can say well I reject that text because it is racist. It does not matter if it is racist towards them or not. It is an argument that they can have for not submitting to that word, and it is an excuse to avoid the claims that Christ makes on humanity.

Indeterminate Meaning Might Not be Liberating

Even though the teachers were teaching critical reading practices that work to multiply the possible significations, they had not thought about whether these were limited at some point. Nor had they thought about whether this matters at all. Some felt that I was "driving a critique of critical literacy in areas that were not warranted" (LL) or that I was "reading too much into critical literacy" (HH). A typical response to whether the support materials demonstrated a limit to signification at some point was that they were "not aware of it if they did" (AA). AA

explained it this way: “They say multiple interpretations can occur. They don’t address the issue of what might limit them.” Or as FF said, “I do not know if the support materials speak of limits to interpretation. I guess the assumption is that they can go on forever but I am not sure.”

BB, however, explained that unlimited signification might have negative side effects:

As teachers we do not go into a classroom and say “hey, there are unlimited meanings,” but it is possible that they might pick up that notion if we never teach that meaning can be fixed at some point. We might indirectly teach that notion without realizing it. I taught that the Kangaroo... the signifier has multiple connotations (M. Miller & Colwill, 2004) . They teach you to look at the word ‘kangaroo’ from the point of view of a farmer, a Japanese tourist, a car insurance executive, an environmentalist, a kangaroo shooter... what they are showing is that the sign has a number of connotations depending on a variety of cultural contexts. But I always bring things back to the situation that you have to be careful when there is no right or wrong answer. Often in life there is a right and wrong answer, whether it is our language, our actions, or the way we live our lives. Shifting meaning, if caught hold of, might not work to encourage liberation but might lead to a sense of despair. A lot of what we teach does feed into our kids and it does have an influence on them. Far from emancipating them, it might lead to discouragement and despair.

CC also concurred with BB that indeterminacy of meaning might be problematic:

If they get hold of the notion that they never really get to the the right interpretation because there is no right one to get, then that gives them a vague sense of dis-ease and a sense of not accomplishing anything final as well. This could lead them not to strive academically. Students want to know that they have approximated the truth or the meaning, that they are correct in their reasoning or that their analysis is correct. They need that assurance for life. If nothing is right or wrong then it all gets silly, really. I mean, who cares if it is just play and we can mean whatever we want? This sort of positioning would be very negative for the students.

HH explained that, even though she taught the Miller and Cowill exercise, she did not understand from that exercise that meaning was indeterminate:

I taught that exercise that you cannot fix meaning on the word ‘kangaroo.’ The meaning, if fixed at all, is fixed within the cultural, historical connotations that a viewer or reader might bring to the word. I did not think that I was teaching that language is indeterminate, that we cannot fix meaning anywhere within language. I did not see that at the time, but I can now that I think about it. I still think the meanings are more limited than what they suggest, and we probably need to point that out to students.

It is interesting to observe here that the teachers did not see deconstruction as promoting infinite significations, even though that is certainly one of the tensions that is raised by a number of Christians about deconstruction in Chapter 6. None of the teachers thought deconstruction meant a text's meaning is whatever the reader wants it to be. As I showed in Chapter 6, this is not a notion that Derrida intended, but one that he fiercely refutes and one that also many Derridean interpreters argue was never his intention (Caputo, 1997a).

Still Common Consensus on Many Signifiers

GG articulated a view about consensus on signification that was held by the majority of teachers:

I still think there is a common consensus of interpretation on many signifiers. Even though we work to demonstrate in critical literacy that the sign can signify many things depending on your discursive history, I still think the meanings are very limited on most words. There's still a degree of stable knowledge.

FF similarly claimed that,

There has to be some degree of stable knowledge in texts, otherwise why would anybody write anything? Why communicate? If it's always going to be miscommunication, why communicate? I am writing for a purpose. And I'm reading to understand what you're trying to say, that purpose should stay put. Why bother saying anything in texts at all if it's just a whole pile of miscommunication [with considerable frustration and annoyance]. Why bother?

JJ went so far as to extrapolate from instability of signification to a lack of direction in life:

If students cannot read a text and put an interpretation on it that they believe is the right reasoning in their analysis of the text, and if they take this notion into their life situation, then they are going to start believing that there is no right interpretation there is no ultimate influence in their lives that can give them direction, and I really think that is a dangerous path to travel and I think young people, especially adolescents, need some sort of direction, some stability and foundations a star for them to walk by.

And HH construed this similarly saying, "No fixed answers to questions can be very disconcerting for students. There is a fixed order in creation. God did create, name and order existence. I would say that interpretation has to stop somewhere."

Multiple Interpretations of the Bible Problematic?

This raises the question of whether the teachers saw multiple interpretations of the Bible as problematic. All the teachers bar one said that the notion of numerous interpretations of the Bible was not problematic, but the notion that they could go on forever was. The three main

issues raised were, firstly, that it “drained the Bible of authority” (CC); secondly, that it “made students nervous about whether truth could be found in it”(JJ); and thirdly, that “multiple interpretations denied the role of the Holy Spirit interpreting to the believer the same message in the same way” (GG). Only one interviewee thought that the “existence of God probably limits the interpretive possibilities,” but she was “not sure how” (CC). While she recognised that the “Holy Spirit would be at work to limit interpretations in the scripture,” she does “not see exactly how the presence of God limits interpretive possibilities in all other texts, even though [she] believe[s] that it probably does.” A different way of viewing this issue was put forward by GG:

I think there has been quite deliberateness in the way God has developed the scriptures and allowed there to be some human error in the way they’ve been interpreted and the way they’ve been translated, to allow there to be enormous difference of opinion. If you read the New Testament you will see how Christ is so critical of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who took what they believed to be the truth, and interpreted it to the absolute letter of what they said the meaning was, to the point of death to the heretic. And so the ambiguity and paradoxes we see in scripture are, I think, a very clever strategy of God’s, to prevent that sort of legalistic approach being taken. The ultimate themes of scripture are far more important than any passage or word. And it’s in that that we get the intended meaning of the author and we believe the author to be God.

The others did not address this issue at all, and even when I raised it they answered in ways that were either not pertinent to the question or that indicated confusion with my questions. I felt that to press this issue further, even though I saw it as significant, would be to drive the questioning in areas of my own interest but not necessarily theirs.

Deconstruction Contradicts Emancipatory Imperatives

Chapter 6 highlighted claims that there are aspects of deconstruction in critical literacy that might not work in emancipatory ways. The teachers supported some of these claims. CC said,

The deconstructive move away from truth may not work in liberating ways. Students want to get to the truth of things, to the truth of the text, and of reality in general. There is a link between knowledge of truth and liberty and freedom. The truth shall set you free [she quotes from the scripture here]. It might not be ethical to establish a default position of suspicion in students.

I read to the teachers Morgan’s comment about critical literacy, that it is “a practice of scepticism but within an ethics of care for others.” HH responded to this by saying,

Once you get rid of the idea that they will find meaning *in* a text, once you thoroughly teach a sceptical practice to approaching texts, what you might be left with is the idea

that there are no absolutes, there are no universals, there is no real objective knowledge, it is all social construction. The knowledge we have is only what the community agrees on. There is no given knowledge out there apart from language. If a child gets hold of that, how do you have an ethics of care? How does one decide what is ethical? When the universals have gone, what do you base your care on? How do you decide your ethics? What does 'care' mean in a culture that does not have foundations?

And similarly GG said,

If you make knowledge or truths appear shaky, it is only what we make. If you take a strong position in that way, that is in tension with also wanting to propose a goal of social action. What you might be encouraging, with a sceptical view of knowledge, is a laziness and a lack of commitment because when we make claims that truth might not be there it actually undermines the goal of social action.

Or as BB similarly saw it, "to bring about social change for people" there must be a "sustained ethical and moral practice in the world where you've got to make decisions based on something. If suspicion frustrates that, it might not be a good thing. It might prohibit the possibility of change." As DD explained,

Individuals really must have something solid at the core to bring about sustained social change or to endeavour to right the wrongs of the world. Making textual authority undecided, as we do in critical literacy, might not be productive for Christians who walk in discipleship based on the scriptures, or for any people who want to bring about significant social change.

Deconstruction a Flight from Authority

A number of the teachers linked the notion of emancipation to what follows when a person trusts in God's word. They felt that deconstruction led to a distrust of texts, and that this might frustrate confidence in, and obedience to, God. Two of the teachers commented that a default position of resistance to texts might not be enabling, given that liberation might follow a reading of a biblical text when one surrenders to its claims. CC explained it this way:

This critical reading practice could become a destructive resistance to any authority that does not suit. This might not be productive in the end. It might not be enabling on a broad cultural level as well. We need to approach the word of God not just as neutral enquirers but allowing it to be our antagonist.

JJ raised similar concerns: "If we do not look into a text to understand what the text is saying, but we are only asking questions about why this was said, or who said it and whose interests are served, the student is not looking at the message of the text. They simply bypass what is said to

ascertain what the power play is in it.” AA agrees with this position, saying, “I accept the authority of the Bible in my life. We are exhorted to hear it and do it in Matthew. How can you do this if you only hear it with distrust or with a desire to deconstruct it for hidden ideology or sexism?” And FF, taking a particularly Protestant position, similarly explained that, “A personal choice and trust in God’s word is required to embrace the finished work of the cross and to experience what salvation means. The bringing to light of those purposes is tied up with trusting God and trusting His word.”

Deconstruction of the Bible Not Emancipatory

All but two of the teachers emphatically said that they would not deconstruct the Bible. Typical of the responses was “I really do not think I would want to apply critical literacy to the Bible because you have to take it on faith. There is a lot of tension between the Bible, a faith life and critical literacy. God speaks to us through the Bible and we are called to live by faith” (FF). KK corroborated this point:

I would not deconstruct the Bible because it is the inspired word of God. It is eternal. It is different to all other texts. Remember that word from Isaiah 40.8, the grass withers, and the flower fades but the Word of our God shall stand forever. Deconstructing the Bible, the reader might miss the word of God to their heart.

And, ardently, from HH, “I *absolutely* see the scriptures as different from other texts. I would *never* deconstruct the Bible or teach my students to do so. The scriptures are there for the disciple’s instruction, reproof and training in righteousness” [she quotes here from the Bible]. And as BB said,

I would say to my kids there is a difference between the newspaper that we read and the Bible because the Bible is the inspired word of God and therefore it does not only have a human origin. It is the Holy Spirit that has inspired it and it is God who speaks through it. There is a major difference between the texts. I would say to my kids “just read the Bible and let God interpret for you and speak to you.”

DD explained it this way, “If we’re talking about scripture, the Bible itself, it is just paper and ink, that’s all it is. It is actually just a book. In the reading, it’s the way in which God’s Spirit takes those words and gives life and meaning. It is a living word. A revelation occurs in reading it. It is life-changing for many... transformative and emancipatory.” Every interviewer, in different ways, spoke about God speaking through the scriptures, which resonates with Wolterstorff’s (1997) notion of double discourse. This is the notion of two speakers in the biblical texts. The human writers of the scripture are engaged in what he sees as a deputized speech from God that speaks to the reader.

However, there were two who took a different position on deconstruction:

While I probably would not bracket out the Bible from a deconstructive process, I do not see it as an important or helpful thing to do. Not in the sense where all one does is unpack to look for discursive influences. It seems irrelevant, and maybe even irreverent. God actually speaks or communicates through the Bible. One wants to read with a humility that actually seeks knowledge, not one that works to reject all truth claims and rejects, as ideological and repressive, every claim made in the Bible. In the life of faith we are taught to trust and obey (BB).

GG was the only one who argued quite strongly that the Bible should not be bracketed out from deconstruction:

I know that students might get scared about deconstruction of the Bible, but they will be challenged all their lives on these matters. Students must come to their own place of submission and that includes revelatory submission to the biblical text. You cannot control what views someone is exposed to. You cannot control the degree to which they have comparatives to compare their own thinking to. This is very controlling. So if you were to take the extreme of fundamentalist Christianity that would say “let’s protect our kids, let’s glasshouse them, let’s not expose them to anything that is outside the Christian worldview,” that’s like a hothouse. If you buy an indoor plant from an air-conditioned supermarket and bring it home to an un-airconditioned house, the chances are it will die. That I think, in fact, is what happens to young people, when only exposed to one viewpoint. Very quickly they challenge that viewpoint. Very quickly they seek out alternative views. It’s like the human mind is inbuilt inquisitively and with curiosity. When you actually lay out various views, I think the human mind and the human spirit is very capable of identifying the truth and is very drawn to the truth. However I would argue that we should deconstruct the Bible. I think you can apply deconstruction rigorously to any text and even the Bible. It could be a helpful approach.

Most, however, supported the view of JJ, “Education reformers want students to think critically about texts but as Christians we need to bracket the word of God out of deconstruction. The truth in that word can set the captive free [she quotes from the Bible here]. I tell my students that, absolutely.”

Problematic when Suspicion Directed towards the Scripture

Most, but not all, of the teachers raised the question of whether a hermeneutic of suspicion towards texts in general would encourage defiance towards the Christian scriptures, and an increased suspicion of submission to God as revealed through them.

It is important to point out that there is a long Christian tradition of saving encounters with the biblical text (Augustine, 1951), with a belief that meaningful revelation from God can come to the reader in an individual encounter with the Bible. This, according to Cunningham (2002), is a particularly Protestant position that the Word speaks directly to the individual, without the aid of the church, its priests or its canonical authorities.

All the teachers were of a Protestant background, and this was definitely a theoretical backdrop for their thinking. They understood that “reading the Bible and obedience to a revelation from God could and does set the captive free” (HH). Since they construed a saving encounter with Christ, via the scriptures, as the ultimate emancipation, anything that negates an openhearted reading of the scripture is viewed as something that might limit emancipatory possibilities. FF explained that “personal choice and trust in God’s word is required to embrace the finished work of the cross and to experience what salvation means. The bringing to light of those purposes is tied up with trusting God and trusting His word.” And as GG said, “As Christians we are called to a life of faith and trust, and in our case, it is connected with trust in what has been revealed in the scriptures about God, so there are tensions here, if this distrust is directed towards the reading of the Bible.”

Doing the Word Sets Believer Free

Some explained that a suspicious reading of the scripture might frustrate ongoing discipleship, which in turn precludes the freedom that comes to the disciple when they act in obedience to the God who speaks through the Bible. JJ explained that the process of discipleship, what she describes as “becoming transformed by the Word of God” is,

probably in tension with a reading practice that encourages suspicion towards texts. When a student has had the heart change... and we are teaching discipleship that involves faith and obedience. Are they always going to question why? Who said this and why are they saying this? How do we know it’s prophetic? How do we know it is not just the tales of an old man? Whose voice is left out here? How is this biblical text trying to position me? What is the power behind this text? Have they left out women?” We want them to understand where obedience and faith must kick in, over pure questioning and critique. The Bible calls for a response to its claims. This is an important tension for Christians.

BB spoke for many when he said a suspicious view of texts, “might not be a good thing to do in the end, even for non-Christians. Christians are called to hear the word and do it [he speaks here of responding to the injunctions in the scripture]. That is the mark of *real* discipleship. That is what sets them free. That involves trust.” Or, as EE said, “it might be a challenge to Christian students because they are taught, so often to obey the word. They are being taught that ‘trust

and obey' is a positive, life enhancing notion. This is a different process happening here." KK explained this further,

Obedience plays a large part in a Christian's formation. We are given explicit ways to live in the Scriptures... how to treat each other... living for Christ we *want* to do those things. It is not like an enforcer saying 'you will obey.' It is obedience born out of love because he showed His love to us first. The idea of obedience to textual authority would have to be canvassed in a Christian school. There is an ultimate authority for Christians, of course, which is God as revealed in Jesus through the scriptures.

The teachers raised the problematic nature of textual distrust when this is in direct contradiction to what is required in a life of Christian discipleship.

Rewriting Scripture Problematic

Every teacher saw the deconstructionist notion of rewriting texts as problematic, if applied to the scripture, and most were incredulous to hear that some theologians do engage in this practice. They said that theologians who do this, "have no respect for the scripture" (EE), have "severed themselves from the authority of the scripture" (DD) and are "writing theology that are just human ideas that are not linked to any scriptural authority" (AA).

Is the Complex Language of Deconstruction Marginalizing?

A few teachers agreed with the concern raised in Chapter 6, that students are marginalized by the critical literacy meta-language, and that this hardly enhances its emancipatory imperative. JJ claims that "students and the parents of these students get frightened by the meta-language of critical literacy." DD emphatically agrees, "I have seen that exact thing happening, where teachers familiar with the jargon speak together, almost in a holy huddle, while those who have no training in it stand around feeling left out." FF also said, "The language is very difficult to understand if one is not trained in it and this could work against its claims to liberate people, if they cannot get a handle on it." However, CC said, "I did think the language was difficult at first, but once you get hold of the language it is quite simple really." FF expresses annoyance that she "had to learn all that language myself and I do not use it anywhere else. The kids have to use that language for senior English classes but nowhere else. They might use it for university English but other than that it is redundant." The majority however, agree with BB that "it does appear to be a little elitist at times and isolating for a teacher who cannot get their head around this new language, but once you are used to it is okay, really."

CC, spoke with respect to her particular interest as Director of Studies and English teacher articulates the marginalizing impact the language of critical literacy can have:

This year 32 students at year 12 OP English have transferred to English Communications. Yes, they are bailing out. They have struggled... they've gone from c- to d+ for 3 semesters and in the end they are saying, "I need a pass to get my QCE. I cannot seem to get on top of English." They are trying hard but they are unable to get on top of it. They are struggling with the language of critical literacy. It alienates them.

CC affirmed the point raised in Chapter 6, that the complex language in various literary theories is peculiarly satisfying for the insiders but maybe not for the uninitiated. She said, "You know, the language adds a perceived credibility for people who have been trying to chase that sense of credibility for a long time. It has become a lot more technical getting hold of the meta-language however this might not be advantageous to a practice that seeks to be emancipatory."

The teachers, in concert with many Christian scholars, posited major disparities between Marxist, poststructuralist and Christian views of emancipation and, along with a growing number of secular theorists, question whether critical reading is efficacious towards socio-economic change. Although they perceived value in ideological critique of texts, and value in particular with reference to representations of Christianity, they understood readings that only scrutinize for the race, class, gender trilogy as limited in an emancipatory sense. They challenged critical literacy to critique its own assumptions and exclusive orthodoxies, they questioned whether deconstruction's multiple interpretations, unlimited signification and indeterminate meaning are conducive to human freedom and they raise this problem with particular reference to the scripture which they insisted holds the ultimate message from God about true emancipation.

Chapter 9

Truth and Meaning and the Literature

To make my trek through the vast volume of literature more manageable I chose to examine, in particular, the critical reading practice that teachers called deconstruction. This chapter explores the interface of deconstruction with multiple Christian conceptions of truth and meaning. I acknowledge at the outset that deconstruction, worked out in the teachers' practice, is somewhat different to the Derridean notion. However, the frequent conflation of the terms deconstruction and critical literacy, indicate the generally held notion that deconstruction is what happens in a critical reading practice.

The literature broadly demonstrated that there were three denials enmeshed in deconstruction; a denial of presence; a denial that the sign has any stability; and a denial of the universality of any metanarrative. The denials all work in various ways to make suspicious any assertive or universal truth claims and to further the notion that meaning is not stable or fixed at any point. Chapters 9, 10 and 11 are organized around these three denials. Firstly they examine a denial of presence through attention to the evasion of authority implicit in deconstruction, an analysis of reading for gaps and silences and intertextuality, and the responses to the rejection of a correspondence of truth, objective truth and foundational thinking. Secondly, they examine deconstruction's destabilization of meaning. This is achieved by analysing a hermeneutic of suspicion and binary oppositions, by scrutinising the rejection of authorial intention for meaning and by examining the practice of rewriting texts. Finally, it explores the implicit denial of metanarrative in critical literacy and the consequence of such for universal truths. While these themes and subthemes structure each of the next three chapters, the complexity of each of these issues means that I am unable, in this project, to tease out all the arguments and counter arguments within each of them. I will however, flag some of the tensions raised at this interface, since it is these tensions that I have explored in the teacher interviews.

Before I began this project I observed anecdotally that Christian teachers understood critical literacy, to a certain extent, to be a denial of truth claims. I expected therefore that there would be resistance to its inception. A rejection of truth claims sits uneasily with many Christians because first, the one Christians follow claims to *be* the Truth and *speak* the Truth, and second, because Christians contend that the bible speaks the truth about God and the reader. The biblical exhortation is that Christians know this truth, do the truth (1 John 3 18-19) and continue to walk in it. As Erickson (2002) explains, Christianity has a major stake in the outcome of the discussions posed by postmodernism, and deconstruction in particular, especially where they pertain to the conception of truth.

Deconstruction Denies Presence

At the centre of Christian faith is belief in the Logos. In the beginning was the Word. There is something or perhaps more accurately someone, at the centre, that stabilizes possible significations and meaning. For Derrida, however, the idea that there is any presence at the centre that stabilises signification is a myth designed simply to calm humanity's fears (Derrida, 1976). Following Nietzsche, he posits truths as metaphors that simply conceal power bids, and belief in Truth, as simply a human yearning for full presence (Norris, 1987; Ricoeur, 1977). A belief in Truth is the very human need for a reassuring foundation, for an origin that will secure the cessation of signification. Derrida rejects logocentric thought and eschews any notion of metaphysics of presence (Derrida, 1974, 1976). He stresses the arbitrariness of language and the lack of a transcendental signifier that can ground language on objective reality. For him there exists no validating reality or presence behind language that gives it meaning. In a truly intertextual sense, what we find in, and behind texts, are simply more texts, not presence or ontological reality.

Transcendent Meaning Exists in the Logos

Many Christian thinkers regard deconstruction as a denial of presence. They read Derrida as saying there is nothing other than texts and words (Erickson, 1998b; Groothuis, 2000, 2004; Vanhoozer, 1998). Vanhoozer (1998) says that for Derrida there is no presence, nor reality, above or outside the play of language. Meaning is not something in the text but what happens in the experience of reading. Derrida, according to Vanhoozer (1998), calls readers to abandon a search for meaning or truth in a text and instead own up about their reader interests (cf Fish, 1980; Stout, 1982). The idea that language is all we can know is problematic for many Christians because the transcendental signified that derives in western metaphysics from the Greek logos is a familiar term for them from John's gospel where it refers to Christ as the logos (Mills, 1995b). Erickson (2002, p. 66) argues that Derrida's rejection of logocentrism and metaphysics of presence, directly conflicts with the biblical picture of truth. He claims that in the case of biblical texts and others, there is a presence to which readers are responsible. The task for biblical hermeneuts, and readers of other texts, is to find this and lead it out of the text. Erickson says that if Christians want to preserve the full scope of Christianity, they must resist and reject a view of truth that denies metaphysics of presence or denies that truth is an external and pre-existent reality. Some thinkers, such as Noll (1990, p. 392), believe that the very foundation of Christianity is at stake in the crisis about realism. Veith (1994), locating the centre or logos in God, argues that Christians would agree with deconstructionists that if there is no God then there can be no transcendent meaning. However, if there is a God, then meaning is

grounded in him and only in Him (cf Groothuis, 2000). He argues that God became flesh in Jesus Christ who is the word, the logos underlying all of existence and accessible to us in the form of a written text the Holy Bible the unique Word of God. The incarnation means that Jesus is the physical manifestation, the speaking forth into the world of the unknowable God who is the presence behind Him. He understands that there is a transcendent presence behind language that fills the emptiness with meaning.

Wright (1988, p. 32) has elected not to engage with the challenge of deconstruction, opting instead to distance it from Christian thought. He writes, "The belief that language does point to a real referent, however indirectly, seems to me to be crucial to Christian faith." Mills (1995b, p. 127) sympathizes with Wright's position, but insists that this cannot be asserted convincingly unless the linguistic problematic raised against such a position by deconstruction is addressed. With this imperative in mind, Mills raises technical linguistic reservations to the notion that there is no logos, only trace (Derrida, 1976, p. 65) by drawing on Ricoeur's (1977) notion of metaphor. He shows that meaning arises at the level of metaphor so language can be characterized in ways other than as a system of signs (cf Vanhoozer, 1998). Meaning can occur through sentence and discourse so the sign does not totalize language and even though the sign may uncover the metaphysical implications of semiotic theory it never finally overthrows the logos in favour of the trace. Mills claims firstly that the logos, as a philosophic-linguistic principle cannot be conjured away by means of the sign and secondly that the role of faith is crucial in the production of *all* linguistic meaning. He sees the characterization of deconstruction as anti Christian polemic as misguided. Firstly he argues that labelling Christianity as a species of Platonism is misguided and secondly Paul's privileging of the Spirit over the letter is not reducible to a metaphysical gesture. He insists that whether we read biblical, "religious" or "secular" texts the task of interpretation is a spiritual imperative not only because we always assert the importance of the letter/spirit distinction when we interpret, but also because discerning between them, is a matter of life and death (Mills, 1995b).

Vanhoozer (1998, p. 122) argues that it is not so easy to reject the metaphysics of presence. Lowe (2003) takes up this point maintaining that while deconstruction demonstrates how pervasive and even ubiquitous the assumption of presence is, it also shows how pervasive the longing for presence is. He questions whether this longing, that is so widely shared, should be dismissed as sheer perversity or might it bear some undisclosed significance? He ponders whether it was this kind of reflection that led to Derrida's (1995a, 2002) later writings foregrounding religion (for an over view of the religious development in Derrida's thought see Caputo, 1997b). Interestingly Smith (2000), a Christian philosopher, argues that Derrida himself is still locked into the ghost of the metaphysical past. He asserts that Derrida understands all interpretation and categorization as violent only because he is still haunted by

the ghost of full presence. He claims that this is an indication of the modern tradition of immediacy for it is only if one is “looking for immediacy and full presence that the finitude of interpreting ‘as’ something is considered a lack, a fall, or an impurity” (cf Hart, 1989).

The question that arises in the debate about presence is whether reality ‘as it really is,’ not to mention God, is even inaccessible to us (Vanhoozer, 1998)? Kraft (1996, p. 239) argues that it is erroneous to conclude that because there is no “pure presence” that there is “no presence at all.” He expresses concern over what might actually follow from the destruction of metaphysics. He argues that the matter of presence affects everything else including the slant one takes on texts and readers. He argues that when we re-conceptualize presence as a fiction there must be consequences and we need to think about what these might be (Kraft, 1996, p. 238). He asks whether now we should write as if there was nothing to write about but writing. He raises the problematic nature of what he sees is a rather self defeating system of thought (1996, p. 239). Vanhoozer (1998, p. 435) is concerned that those who participate in the Derridean disruption of presence are “free only to negate not to create meaningful form,” and that this has “consequences on our sense of self and a sense of agency.” While Kraft (1996) makes a similar point, that for all Derrida’s emphasis on the play of differences in writing, the tendency in deconstruction appears to be an *indifference* to the world. The crucial question then, as Kraft (1996) points out, becomes what follows from this? What will be the consequences when we reject the notion of presence? Some thinkers urge humanity to make a wager on presence, that what we encounter in language and literature transcends the mere play of signifiers (Steiner, 1989, p. 216). Steiner argues that deconstruction confronts readers with a religious choice, either the nihilism of deconstruction’s ultimate end, or “In the beginning was the Word.” Steiner and Vanhoozer (1998) both argue that there is a word to which the reader is responsible, a presence, an ‘otherness’ that calls the reader to respond. They both hold to the notion that presence is important because readers must retain the covenant between the word and the world; the conviction that reality is “sayable.

Derrida Does Not Suspend Reference

Derrida says of himself that he is not contending for a suspension of reference or proposing that there is nothing beyond language, even given his now famous statement “there is no outside-the-text.” He is simply showing that the question of reference is much more complex and problematic than traditional theories supposed (cited in Kearney, 1984b, pp. 123-124). He is not a linguistic idealist (Derrida, 1988) but simply an advocate for the notion that there is no reality that is not *always already* interpreted through the mediating lens of language (Derrida, 1976). He says that to distance oneself from the “habitual structure of reference, or to challenge or complicate our common assumptions about it, does not amount to saying that there is nothing beyond language” (cited in Kearney, 1984b, pp. 123-124).

There are a number of Christian writers who support Derrida's self assessment (Benson, 2002, p. 150; Caputo, 1997a; Smith, 2006c, pp. 34-35). Smith (2006a) explains that many Christians construe Derrida as a linguistic idealist who thinks there is only language and not things. If it is the case that it is interpretation all the way down then this would be antithetical to Christian faith because this makes even the gospel not objectively true (Carson, 2005). Smith (2006c) agrees that if Derrida is a linguistic idealist then deconstruction and the Christian faith would be incompatible because if there is nothing outside the text then the transcendent creator could not exist and what the bible refers to would not be real. It would be antithetical to an authentic Christian confession, but this is not what he is saying (cf Benson, 2000; Caputo, 1997a). Smith (2006c) argues that Vanhoozer's (1998) reading of Derrida as a 'countertheologian' for whom there is nothing outside the play of writing with nothing that guarantees our words refer to the world is in error. Derrida is, according to Smith (2006c, p. 39), simply a "comprehensive hermeneuticist who asserts the ubiquity of interpretation" in that "all experience is already an interpretation" but he is "not meaning that all referents are denied" (Derrida, 1988, p. 148). We can never get past texts and interpretation to things simply as they are in any kind of unmediated fashion.

Non-Metaphysical Christian Theology

While many Christians argue to retain the notion of presence, there are some theologians that move away from the metaphysical language of being (Marion, 1995) when they speak of God (Altizer, 1982; Raschke, 1982; Taylor, 1982a). Marion presents a God-without-being not to advocate a non realist theology but simply to assert the absolute freedom of God with respect to the world that he calls into being. Or as Carlson (2003, p. 58) puts it,

The divine existence, or non existence, that human thought might ever imagine, falls infinitely short of the divine generosity that stands at the heart of revelation.

Marion (1995) argues that the correlation of Augustine's Platonic reading of Christianity and Aquinas's interpretation of the faith within Aristotelian categories of thought has led to the domestication of God within ontotheological metanarratives that are just human notions (cf Benson, 2002; Marion, 1995; Westphal, 2001). These thinkers argue that it is always misguided to attempt to determine and comprehend God according to the measure of human concepts. When we construct a view of God that is simply a conceptual idol, co-opted and developed over time by human reason, it is one that must die, in the Nietzschean sense, because it was only a modernist myth to begin with. Benson (2002, p. 151), following on from Levinas and Derrida, actually supports the Derridean notion of trace as a Hebrew and Christian view of scripture. Perception and language do not give us the thing itself but a trace of the thing, a partial vision of the thing with much left out. He claims this is not inconsistent with some biblical claims, for

instance where Moses was warned that he would never see God in all his glory. The trace presents itself but does not fully present. Derrida explains that what separates theology from deconstruction is that the former is concerned with establishing God's hyperessentiality beyond the realm of predication and being. This is not the imperative of difference, because that is not found beyond predication and being, but within (cited in Caputo, 1997b).

Denial of Presence: Evasion of Scriptural Authority

This denial of presence, or hermeneutic agnosticism, as Vanhoozer (1998) calls it, is not just a theological challenge but a salient issue for everyone because these questions are fundamental to our common humanity. As he (1998, p. 30) insists, the "question of meaning concerns not only texts but human actions and history as well." The rights of texts, readers, authors and the values that drive a culture are all at stake here. Steiner (1989, p. 3) insists that

Any coherent account of what language is and how language performs, that any coherent account of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling, is in the final analysis underwritten by the assumption of God's presence.

Vanhoozer (1998) says biblical authority is undermined by the rejection of presence because it leads to a consequent instability of meaning. If there is not meaning in the text other than what we bring, then there is nothing to which the reader is held accountable. Consequently Phillips (1995, p. 134) asks what happens to biblical interpretation, if meaning is not located in the texts but in the knowing subject? If the text is interpreted according to a predetermined social agenda what does this imply regarding the exegetical task? Do exegetes only find, whether God or meaning, a projection of themselves (Feuerbach, 1957)?

Denial of Presence: Gaps and Silences

One of the ways in which presence is denied is a reading practice that reads not for what is present but for what is absent. The deconstructionist is suspicious that the unity of truth is purchased only at the cost of repressing what doesn't fit (Olthuis, 1990). Truth is construed as a human social construction and so deconstruction encourages a reading of texts that leads the reader to ask what and who has been left out, silenced or suppressed. All totalising constructions of reality necessarily result in a violent closure of human thought that denies all heterogeneous difference. This is done by coopting, dominating or eliminating that which is perceived as other. The deconstructive reading that reads for gaps and silences works therapeutically to denaturalise the givens as constructions. The purpose of this therapy is to stop the violence by making space for the other to speak. Misson and Morgan (2006, p. 92) explain that a text "yields a very different meaning" when examined through "lenses shaped to detect ideologies of race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality." This leads them to focus on what is "not there in the text," and on what it "omits or conceals as well as what it offers." This reading for

absence is valorised because “wittingly or not” the gaps and silences “sustain and reinforce assumptions of our political systems” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 45).

What, or Who, Fills the Gaps?

One of the issues raised about gaps and silences comes from Levin (1997). He maintains that often when oppositional critics depict traditional literary scholarship as complicit with aspects of dominant ideology, and they cannot find evidence in the text, these critics simply discover silences. These are the things that go unmentioned which they assume exhibit tacit acceptance of the status quo. Levin makes the obvious point that it is tenuous to infer an interpreter’s attitude towards the status quo of their society based on their silence about it. This position closes down inquiry because it works on a basic system of polarization where if you are not with us you are against us. It also infects those using it with self righteousness that they are interpreting in ways that bring about transformations that will eliminate the real injustices of society while those not engaged in it become the “accomplice of the dominant ideology” (Belsey, 2002b). If we do not allow the marginalised to speak or privilege the formerly marginalized then we are complicit in preserving the political status quo (cf Green, 1991; Sinfield, 1983; Widdowson, 1982). Eagleton (2004, p. 13) now complains that it is what stands askew to society as a whole “the marginal, mad, deviant, perverse, transgressive—which is most politically fertile.” He complains that this is ironical because it is just the kind of “elitist, monolithic viewpoint which postmodernists find most disagreeable in their conservative opponents.” Vanhoozer (1998) raises the obvious question of who gets to decide what is marginalized and what should be brought back to the centre. What or who will the gaps be filled with?

Denial of Presence: Intertextuality

Vanhoozer (1998) construes intertextuality as another way of restating Derrida’s (1976, p. 158) maxim that “there is nothing outside texts,” so in that sense, it is another denial of presence. In the same way that the sign’s meaning is always deferred onto more signs and therefore not fixed at some point, the text’s meaning is never fixed because it too has no centre no beginning and no end. The movement towards meaning is always sideways towards more language, not towards the thing itself. Vanhoozer (1998, p. 133) argues that reading intertextually has implications for scripture reading in that “some interpreters simply use intertextuality as an excuse for textual freeplay.” If there is no constraining context, readers can simply spin off Freudian, Marxist, feminist and structuralist interpretations of the text including the gospels (cf Crews, 2002). He demonstrates this point drawing on McFague’s (1982) theology that takes up this view of language as “speaking sideways in metaphors” (Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 133). The language we use about God is simply metaphorical and it does not correspond to the God that

is, so we think up new metaphors about God such as lover or mother, that suit the times better (McFague, 1987). He asks readers to think about what sort of spirit is in intertextual freeplay? He argues that what is really denied in the intertextuality of deconstruction is the incarnation. This according to Hall (1993, p. 178) is a break between the sign and the world, reality and truth. In deconstruction there is no real or world in interpretation, only language and the play of writing. The freeplay of signs is endless. Vanhoozer (1998, p. 122) explains that in deconstruction "There is no Neo-Platonic 'One,' no Christian three-in-one, that fulfills the sign and stops the play of meaning." As he insists, at no point can a reader "break free from writing in order to establish a non-linguistic beachhead from whence to make superior truth claims" (1998, p. 131).

Denial of Presence: Rejection of Correspondence Theory of Truth

Another way that presence is denied is by a rejection of truth as correspondence. The literature demonstrates that some Christian thinkers embrace the postmodern epistemological position that it is not possible to get beyond representation to some unconstructed truth or unmediated reality. There are those that assert there is no place where correspondence between language and meaning is unmediated (Raschke, 2004; Smith, 2000). According to Raschke (2004) realism and the correspondence theory of truth were only the predilection of the church during the Constantinian period in the High Middle Ages (ca. 1175-1375). These thinkers argue that we simply do not have access to the real world. They see humanity as trapped inside language and unable to get outside it to know reality as it really is. According to some there are no theory-independent facts (MacIntyre, 1988). Rationality is only found within a tradition (MacIntyre, 1985) and these traditions condition how we see the world. The language of scriptural foundationalism simply cannot secure a connection between biblical propositions and a reality beyond our experience (Murphy, 1996). Language and the world are only internally related (Kallenberg, 2001). Language remains self contained and autonomous and we never get outside it to know how things are. When theologians do theology they are always working from within language (Grenz & Franke, 2001). That is why Webber (2002) insists, drawing on the work of Lindbeck (1984), that the truth value of religious language is intratextual rather than extratextual. If the language is true, it is so not because it corresponds to an objective reality outside language, but because it forms a perspective on life that is consistent with the perspective of a particular tradition. It is impossible to get outside language to know foundational, universal, transcendent, objective truths. McGrath (1996) argues that it is a travesty of the biblical idea of 'truth' to equate it with the enlightenment notion of conceptual or propositional correspondence. Raschke (2004, p. 53) similarly says that correspondence theories of meaning obscure the fact that meaning and signification are not vertical connections between words and things. What we call meaning is just the Derridean "double sentence"

(Raschke, 2004, p. 86) or the “double commentary” (Smith, 2006c, p. 37). Writing takes place on a single horizontal plane as opposed to the phantom vertical, second order of correspondence theory.

Confidence in Correspondence between Language and the World

There are however many Christian thinkers who argue that it is essential that Christians hold to a realist view of language because the scripture mandates an uncritical correspondence of language and world. They eschew the various anti-realist views of truth and argue for a correspondence between a relevant fact and a proposition (Erickson, et al., 2004; Moreland, 2004, pp. 76-77). According to Wellum (2004) when theologians employ a coherentism, pragmatism, and epistemological and metaphysical non realism as resources for theological method they have obvious difficulties defending the truth question. Groothuis (2004) examines the coherence, pragmatic and post modern theories of truth and the correspondence theory of truth and endeavours to demonstrate that only the latter is sufficient and acceptable for evangelicals. For him, the correspondence view of truth, is not simply *one* of the options for Christians, it is the “*only* biblically and logically grounded view of truth available and allowable.” For some, it is precisely this deconstructionist break between language and the world that makes it anti-Christian because it refuses the possibility that language is a reliable medium of meaning and truth (Jeffrey, 1988). Noll (1990) goes so far to claim that what is at stake in the crisis about realism, is the very foundation of Christianity, and Smith (2005) is resolute that if Christians “neglect or deny” the correspondence view of truth, they do so “to (their) peril.” Vanhoozer(1998) claims that what drops out of this theory is the relation of language to the world, the relation of meaning to external objects, and the factual reference of truth. He charges all educators to think carefully about whether the sign is ultimately unreliable to fix any definitive meaning because to cast serious doubts about the ability of language to represent reality accurately and objectively will have enormous ramifications. Pooley(1995) however, claims the obvious, that language and its objects are not so easily torn apart (cf Vanhoozer, 1998), and Erickson (2004, p. 334) says that the furor in the USA over the fabrications in the New York Times, clearly indicates that people still adhere to the correspondence theory of truth. Smith (2005) insists that humans do have access to epistemic reality outside the linguistic realm and that human’s can and do get outside of language because they were never on the inside. He argues that if we remove truth as correspondence this would be to abolish theology and evangelism entirely.

Christian Philosophers Moreland and Craig (2003) point out that while the bible does not teach any particular theory of truth, the scripture does regularly presuppose some form of correspondence theory of truth (cf Erickson, et al., 2004; Groothuis, 2000; Kostenberger, 2005; Mohler, 2004; Moreland, 2004; Moreland & DeWeese, 2004). Hundreds of biblical passages

explicitly ascribe truth to propositions in a correspondence sense and the Old and New Testament words for truth are “emet” and “aletheia”, faithfulness and conformity to fact (Moreland & Craig, 2003). As Erickson (2004) puts it, “The scripture presupposes an uncritical correspondence view that the world exists independently of our perception of it, deriving its ultimate reality from God, even though our perceptions may be far from identical with that reality.” For these thinkers the goal is to bring our beliefs into conformity with that reality (cf D. Groothuis, 2000; Groothuis, 2003, 2004).

Vanhoozer (1998) construes the deconstructionist spirit of writing as essentially a “disembodied break with the world” (cf Zacharias, 2000). He says the trust between the word and the world has been broken and that what the contemporary non realists are really denying is a created order. He works to regain that covenantal trust. Drawing on Ricoeur’s distinction between the sign and the sentence he demonstrates that sentences are not just products of the language system but rather meaningful personal actions. He also draws on the work of Austin to shore up his notion that humans were created with the ability to communicate and to understand by means of language. He posits a parallel between deconstructionists and the Gnostics in that they deny the preeminent Christian premise of the incarnation, all we have are signs and no world, reality or truth (cf Lundin, 1993b). He links the death of presence in the sign with the death of God and posits meaning as more to do with the “responsibility of communicative agents in intersubjective situations” than with the “play of linguistic elements in an impersonal sign system” (Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 203).

Does Humanity have access to an Objective World?

According to Smith (2004) the important question, in response to various postmodern epistemologies, is whether humans do have access to an objective real world. Mohler (2004, p. 68) insists that humanity could not operate in life without some form of correspondence theory of truth. An epistemology that rejects any form of realism, in that all we can really be sure of are our own sensory experiences and not anything external to that which those sensory experiences correspond, is in error. The “result is solipsism,” where private reality is all there is (Wright, 1992, pp. 33-35, 51-53). The basic awareness that truth, language and ideas express something other than interiority and refer to something outside ourselves is fundamental for all of life (Alston cited in Mohler, 2004, p. 69). Smith (2004) says if we cannot achieve some vantage point outside of all languages then we cannot adjudicate from any standpoint between contending stories. While Mohler (cited in Taylor, 2004, p. 32) insightfully claims, “A word that can mean anything means nothing.” Meek (2003, p. 182) asserts that humans as knowers exercise a profound responsibility to submit to the dictates of reality. It is not responsible to deny objective truth and reality in knowing and neither is it responsible to make the human knower or community of knower’s arbiters of private reality. The kind of freedom implied by

the thought that we humans completely determine our reality leaves us with a “gnawing sense of the relative insignificance of our choices.” While she also points out, that paradoxically, it leads not to a “deeper sense of communal or individual identity and dignity,” but to a “disheartening lack of it” (2003, p. 182). Moreland (2004) takes the strong view that the postmodernist rejection of propositional truth and truth as correspondence is an “irresponsible and cowardly abrogation of duties that constitute a disciple’s calling to be a Christian intellectual and teacher.” While Freadman and Miller (2005) insist that the construction of an adequate theory of literature requires that we reject this denial of referentiality and therefore objective truth.

Denial of Presence: Rejection of Objective Truth

Foucault, Derrida and Rorty reject the once reigning modernist epistemological principle of the correspondence theory of truth and the notion of objective truth. They put no confidence in the belief that truth consists of the correspondence of propositions with the world out there. They treat claims to objective meaning as illusory and view interpretation oriented to transcendence as idolatrous. Foucault (1972a, p. 47) for instance, rejects any notion of “objects prior to knowledge” while Derrida rejects any stable objective truth, which is the realm of being, outside or above language. Language and thought alike are thought of as always already interpreted through some finite perspective or another. For the non realist, meaning is not there in the text. What one finds in the text depends on one’s aims, categories and perspectives brought to the text.

There are Christians who have taken up this perspective arguing that the notion of objective truth, and the need to verify it, was a wrong turn philosophically, that there is no such thing as objective truth and that for Christians this is a good thing (Kenneson, 1995). Kenneson argues that when Christians lay claim to objective truth it often vitiates the incarnational witness of the church because it allows Christians to appeal to truth apart from the character of their lives. Raschke (2004) further explains that it is subjective truth, properly understood, that has been far more congenial to the expansion of the gospel throughout the ages than any canon of propositional certitude. According to McLaren (2000, 2001, 2004) it is problematic for Christians to make absolute truth claims because this involves a gross misunderstanding of the philosophical baggage associated with terms like absolute or objective as they are linked to foundationalism and the myth of neutrality.

Groothuis (2000) counters Kenneson’s (1995) claim arguing that the bible itself presents truth as objective and that Christians throughout history have believed that the bible’s claims correspond to reality. He claims that Kenneson’s paradigm for truth and epistemology cuts the ground out from under any rational apologetic for the truth of the Christian faith. If there is no

objective Christian truth there is no Christian witness to that truth, no embodiment of that truth and no apologetic at all (cf Clark, 1993; Schaeffer, 1998). He says that Christians must declare, defend and *demonstrate* truth and they must have truth that is more than self referential. If the believing community only has its web of beliefs that do not reflect objective reality this leaves them with no compelling reason to adhere to them (cf D. Groothuis, 2002, 2004). Carson (2005, p. 126) claims that both “historic Christianity and the bible itself have always insisted on objective truth.” Fernando (2000) claims that a rejection of objective truth not only militates against the truthfulness of the gospel but also that the ability to respond to and appreciate objective truth is actually part of human nature. This is a point that Eagleton (2004) takes up that to know something to be true, even though we accept the fact that our knowledge is framed within a specific culture, belongs to our dignity as moderately rational beings (cf Carson, 2005). Pearcey (2004, p. 395) also rejects any philosophical position that leads to “subjectivism.” She argues that there is an objective structure to the universe and an embrace of subjectivism “fails to account for what ordinary experience teaches us each day.” Christianity “treats truth as objective because the world is the creation of God not of our own minds or of language.” The doctrine of creation, gives logical grounds for the belief that an objective external world exists, with its own inherent structure and design. As Moreland (1997, p. 45) explains it, when Christians affirm that the bible is a revelation from God they also mean that God has revealed understandable, objectively true propositions (cf Groothuis, 2000). Groothuis (2004) argues that unlike a Platonic view that makes truth abstract and independent of God’s being and revelation the biblical view deems truth to be personal in that it issues from a personal God. God is the source of objective truth about himself and his creation (cf Henry, 1976b). A number of theorists also raise the obvious irony that the more postmodern theories insist that all theoretical stances are social constructions, and that no theoretical construction bears any necessary relation to objective truth, the more their claims undermine the truthfulness of their own constructions (Carson, 2005; Erickson, 2001).

Many take issue with the possible consequences of rejecting any notion of objective truth. Fernando (2000) portends a great deal of chaos emerging from the rejection of objective truth, including an erosion of the place and significance of language in society. Henry (2001) foresees a serious breakdown in the confidence of any truth claims and Lyon (1994) claims that many are now unable to tell the difference between display, sign or reality. Newbigin (1991) asserts that a culture, trained in deconstruction’s subjectivism and skepticism will become unable to embrace the possibility of knowing any truth. Dockery (2001) speaks for many Christians when he says that the rejection of objective truth is dislocating for Christians in particular because any proclamation of truth is seen as intolerant and bad form. He exhorts Christians to find ways to hold on to notions of rational or objective truth and speak into this postmodern generation.

There must be Christian apologists for objective truth because the underlying subjectivism in postmodern thinking will continue to erode the place and significance of language in society (Erickson, 2001; Fernando, 2000). Objective truth is seen by many to be still relevant, attractive and ultimately indispensable.

Denial of Presence: Rejection of Absolutes

Vanhoozer (1998, p. 92) explains that Derrida's project is closely tied to Nietzsche's genealogical analysis that attempted to "demystify truths" that only appear as absolute. What appears as absolute present truth, in Nietzschean terms, are actually the "products of an historical process that has constructed and legitimized them." They are not givens. He raises the difficulty of holding to the notion of absolute truth when Foucault's hermeneutics of suspicion sees the notion of absolute truth as really a code word for power and control. The real agenda behind absolute truth, so Foucault (1980) and Derrida (1978a) tell us, is to maintain one's own belief system as the solely legitimate system within a larger community.

Absolute Truth Crucial for Some Christians

Some prophesy doom for the western culture unless they turn away from postmodern thinking and affirm once again the existence of absolute truth (Bork, 1996). Others understand that Christians must embrace that which constitutes absolute truth because that is the only way they can battle against postmodern thinking. Lindsley (2004) disagrees with current views that belief in absolutes, especially religious ones, inevitably leads to oppressive absolutism as evidenced in the Crusades or the inquisition. He argues instead that surprisingly it is often the relativistic perspective that harbours inflexible absolutisms. He argues for a retaining of absolutes without falling into absolutism. Hinkson and Ganssle (2000) claim that the western culture has become acclimatised to a rejection of absolutes but we now have a certain groundlessness and incoherence that humanity might not be able to live with. Some claim that the postmodern notion that there are "no absolute truths or absolute standards collapses any notion of right and wrong" and that this is problematic (McDowell & Hostetler, 1998, p. 9). As they see it, not only does this collapse "jeopardize the Judeo-Christian tradition" it also leads to the "death of truth, the disappearance of virtue, the demise of justice, the loss of conviction, the privatization of faith, the tyranny of the individual, the disintegration of human rights and the descent into extremes" (McDowell & Hostetler, 1998, pp. 53-68).

Dark Side to Absolute Truth

However other Christians construe the notion of absolute truth as having a dark side. Greer (2003, p. 4) argues that modernist philosophy has usurped protestant Christian theology by grounding it in the Cartesian Cogito of the absolute, and in so doing, it has altered the whole notion of absolute truth causing unalterable static principles to become more fundamental than

the living God. He construes the death of absolute truth as positive because the church is positioned to occupy the void left by its death. Evangelicalism has become complicit with modernism in its hermeneutical substructure and according to Stott (1999, p. 44) it is high time this bubble burst and we may “be thankful postmodernity has pricked it”. Placher (1989) complains that people who affirm this notion of absolute truth cannot seem to agree with one another what it should look like. They become triumphalist in their approach to faith (Caputo in Olthuis, 1990). Speaking of truth as absolute Jungel (1983, pp. 3-4) points out that though many are troubled by the death of God or the death of absolute truth this should not lead to theological mourning. He argues that aporias actually lead to new theological possibilities.

Denial of Presence: Foundations

Christians often speak of absolute truth and foundations as something that is critically important to their faith. As Shults (1999) explains, any critique of foundational thought or absolute truth is met with fear and sometimes demonization by Christians. For the poststructuralist though, there is no foundation of any sort that can guarantee the validity or stability of any system of thought (Gutting, 1998, p. 597). Foucault’s (1977) genealogical analyses, following on from Nietzschean hermeneutics of suspicion, demonstrates that if we trace the lineage of all thinking, we find at bottom, not timeless essences or foundational realities but fabricated essences posing as foundations. This is so endemic in today’s society that humanity has lost sight of foundational questions (Dockery, 2001).

Christians Reject Foundationalism

Contrarily, a number of Christian theologians and philosophers of the Christian tradition have rejected a foundationalist epistemology altogether while others argue for a softer more moderate form of foundationalism. There are those who struggle to reconstruct a theistic epistemology that takes seriously both Christian truth claims *and* postfoundational insights. Christian scholars (Raschke, 2004; Westphal, 2001; Wyschogrod, 1990), including some who identify as evangelical (Grenz, 1993; Grenz & Franke, 2001; Olsen, 2003), actually celebrate the subversion of modernist foundationalism by postmodern thinkers. These postconservative evangelicals (for an overview see Taylor, 2004), argue that they cannot do theology as they once did because it has too uncritically embraced the now outdated foundationalist epistemological perspective (Dorrien, 1998; Grenz, 1993; Olsen, 1995; Phillips & Okholm, 1996). They claim that a quest for certainty is at odds with biblical teaching about faith, the sinfulness of our intellectual and sensory faculties, and the impossibility of grasping an infinite God. Others argue for the need to rethink theological method in the light of postmodernism (Lints, 1993; Vanhoozer, 2000). The younger evangelicals (Webber, 2002) and the growing emergent church movement (McLaren, 2001, 2003, 2004; Sweet, 2003) explore ways to do

theology that moves beyond the traditional evangelical foundation of propositional revelation gleaned from the scripture. The post-foundational realists move beyond the Cogito while retaining the idea of ontological referents (Grenz & Franke, 2001; Smith, 2000; Volf, 1996b) and the post-foundational middle-distance realists, reject the Cogito but strike a middle distance between realism and antirealism (Frei, 1974; Lindbeck, 1984, 1988). Others maintain that post-foundationalism is positive because it opens space for a rethinking of church theology (McLaren, 2000, 2001; Raschke, 2004; Sweet, 2003), and others, that the shift away from universal, foundational, rationalistic propositions, to the notion of storying, might open space for the Christian story to get a hearing (Allen, 1989). Taylor (2000) insists that Christians must move past the Cartesian Cogito arguing that the ‘myth of certainty’ brings with it a hyperfundamentalism characterized by authoritarianism, hypocrisy, narrowness and intolerance. According to Smith (2006c) postmodernist anti-foundationalist perspectives could possibly be a “catalyst for the church to reclaim its faith”, not as a “system of truth dictated by neutral reason, and built on propositional foundations, but rather as a story that we witness to.” Frei (1974) also argues that the Christian story cannot really be discerned by rational analysis or codification. Propositional statements tend to be historyless and abstract and therefore not a good way to understand the real world. The work of Greer (2003) makes clear that many evangelical Christians function within a cognitive dissonance. Although they are grounded in fundamental realism theologically, on a practical level, their pietism is grounded on bases other than the enlightenment modernism. Downing (2006, p. 118) speaks of moving foundations arguing that foundations hold strong precisely because they move. The movement has limits however, and she develops a four sided pit, based on the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, that limits extreme movement in response to cultural change. The four walls are the Bible, church tradition, reason and personal experience (2006, p. 119). She insists that the bible explicitly warns against unmoving foundations. Christ moved foundations by healing on the Sabbath, Peter by extending Christianity to the gentiles, Anselm with new views of atonement, and Luther in his radical challenge to church authority. Franke (2005, p. 118) clarifies that non foundationalist theology means the end of foundationalism, but not “foundations.”

There are also the post-foundational anti-realists (Hick, 1980, 1996) who reject the Cartesian Cogito insisting that the really real (the thing-in- itself) cannot ever be known in a definitive way and some fully embrace deconstruction (Cupitt, 1980, 1994b, 2001) and write not theologies, but a/theologies (Taylor, 1982a, 1984). Hart (1993, p. 7) gives an explanation of a non realist ‘belief,’ asserting that there is “nothing beyond or outside human beings,” neither God, nor some other notion like “ultimate reality that gives life meaning and purpose” (cf Freeman, 1993). Cupitt (1987) explains that ‘God’ is subsumed within human consciousness, as a projection of value, and that as objective truths fall away, and dogmatic theology becomes

impossible, “the arrow pointing up to heaven became internalized. It was an inner pathway of self-transcendence.” It sounds like an old lie. For many Christians the notion of theological anti-realism in postmodern theology is severely limited and ultimately unsustainable. The issues are important here because many Christians hold to the view that a relationship with Christ is foundational to their life, that the truth of Christ can be known through revelation in reading of the scripture, and that ongoing discipleship requires a believing *and doing* of the word of God. I expected to find, and did, that Christians who believe in a fixed foundation to their faith as revealed by revelation and through the scriptures, would have difficulty with the deconstruction theologians as they speak about the scripture in the following way:

Christians need to re-envision the closed book as an open text. The unending play of surfaces discloses the ineradicable duplicity of knowledge, shiftiness of truth and undecidability of value. Since there is no transcendental signified to anchor the activity of signification, freely floating signs cannot be tied down to any single meaning. Everything inscribed within the divine milieu is thoroughly transitional and radically relative (Taylor, 1987).

Foundationalism Idolatrous

There are those that view foundationalism as idolatrous (Benson, 2002; Marion, 1995; Smith, 2000, 2005b, 2006c). They argue that Christianity was never meant to be an ontotheologically framed religious phenomena (Lindbeck, 1984, 1988; Westphal, 2001, 2005). Westphal (2001) explains that overcoming ontotheology and its notions of God belongs just as much to the Christian tradition as it does to postmodern atheism. They both draw profoundly from a conception of human finitude. Christians ought also to be suspicious, as are Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida, about any conceptions of God that serve the human desire to master the totality of being. They construe the foundationalist quest for certainty to be at odds with biblical teaching about faith. Many are influenced by the work of Levinas (cited in Benson, 2002, p. 49), who makes a “prophetic cry” against the rationalist foundationalism in theology and asserts that only a God who is “otherwise” than Being can be a God who corresponds to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Such a God is a person and not a metaphysical principle.

Smith (2004), explicating Radical Orthodoxy, argues that the foundation in Christianity is not indubitable propositional truth but a community of believers with whom Christians should identify (cf Milbank, Pickstock, & Ward, 1999). Foundationalism has confused metaphysics with faith. It has attempted to ground God in the logic of reflection and supposition rather than an encounter with a relationship seeking God (Benson, 2002). Benson (2002) actually argues that anti-foundationalism is *more* Christian than foundationalism and that Christianity has been guilty of idol worship in its co-option by modernist foundationalism. Clapp (1996) supports this

contention, arguing that evangelicals should be non-foundationalists precisely *because* they are evangelicals. McGrath (cited in Greer, 2003, pp. 91, 260) sees protestant evangelicals as secret prisoners to enlightenment and foundationalist epistemology in such a way that it has become “intellectualized rather than incarnate” (cf Smith, 2006c).

Raschke (2004), indeed, claims that Derrida is closer to the protestant reformers than many contemporary theologians who subscribe to what Derrida dismisses as pagan logocentrism or metaphysical foundationalism. Drawing on Heidegger, Raschke (2004, p. 81) says that metaphysics treats the conceptual representation of God *as God Himself*, they confuse presence with representation. He insists that this metaphysical God of the philosophers is not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who is relational but the god of the philosophers who is *logical*. Hart (1989, p. x) makes the point that the “common view” of Derrida’s deconstruction framed as a straightforward affirmation of groundlessness, and hence anti-theological, is incorrect. He claims that deconstruction is not a critique of theology but a questioning of the limits of metaphysics. As he puts “it is not a first order position about the ontology of knowledge or being but a second order discourse on epistemology that traces the effects of the will to totalize.” Some theologians embrace Derridean thought completely, and remove Christ from the centre, including all religions in their theological framework (Hick, 1980, 1996).

Foundational Realists

Some Christians still maintain a foundational realist position where, provided an inerrant Bible serves as the hermeneutical foundation from which to undertake the pursuit of knowledge, a fixed body of absolute truths can be obtained (Koivisto, 1993; McDowell & Hostetler, 1998; Nicole & Michaels, 1980; Peters, 1992; Schaeffer, 1968, 1976). Carson (2005) charges the new emergent church, a global church movement, open to the antifoundational aspect of postmodernist thinking, with syncretism with the culture of post modernism. He argues that McLaren, one of the leaders of this movement, is actually departing from biblical orthodoxy. Moreland and DeWeese (2004) claim that to report on the demise of foundationalism (Clapp, 1996; Grenz & Franke, 2001) is far too premature and that a complete rejection of a foundationalist epistemology is a serious mistake. Mohler (2004, p. 66) is adamant that while the challenges postmodernism has presented to Christians are very real, the outright rejection of foundationalism is untenable. He claims that we cannot even understand thought itself without some form of soft foundationalism.

“Softer” Foundational Realists

The literature demonstrates that there are opposing views with respect to the notion of foundationalism and that while many reject outright the Cartesian form that seeks absolute certainty, many others want to hold to a softer form of foundationalism without a complete

surety. Geivett (2005) says there is a good deal of confusion about the foundationalist picture of justification, especially among theologians sympathetic to postmodernity. Most of the discussion about foundationalism has been directed at a model of Cartesian classical foundationalism that just yields an easy target (cf Erickson, 2001). The recognition of the failure of classical foundationalism has led many thinkers to “assume that no form of foundationalism can succeed” (Moreland & DeWeese, 2004, p. 84).

When postconservative theologians assert that foundationalism is dead (Clapp, 1996; Grenz & Franke, 2001), what they are really critiquing is the classical foundationalism of Descartes that required epistemic certainty (Erickson, 2004; Kostenberger, 2005). This takes no account of the various forms of softer, more moderate foundationalisms (Alston, 1976; Audi, 1993), developed over the past three decades, as a corrective to the overly ambitious classical version (Triplett, 1990). According to DePaul (2001), to ignore this work is short sighted, given that the majority of epistemologists agree that some form of soft foundationalism is the dominant epistemological position. Smith (2004) urges Christians to understand and embrace a foundationalist epistemology, even if in a more chastened or modest form, so that they can wage a successful battle against the errors of postmodernism (cf Carson, 2000, 2002; Groothuis, 2000, 2004; Kostenberger, 2005; Moreland, 2004; Moreland & Craig, 2003; Pearcey, 2004).

The “soft” foundationalists take up a foundationalist perspective without claiming “absolute” certainty (Erickson, 1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2002, 2004; Erickson, et al., 2004; Platinga & Wolterstorff, 1983; Platinga, 2002). Platinga and Wolterstorff (1983) critique classical foundationalism, while appealing to God as properly basic. They claim that certain beliefs are not indubitable, but may still be legitimately held as properly basic, such as “beliefs grounded in perception, memory and testimony and that certainty is not a necessary condition of knowledge” (Vanhoozer, 1998). They suggest the obvious, that many common beliefs of ordinary life, on which we base our living, are clearly justified beliefs, and yet are excluded by the criteria of classical foundationalism (Platinga & Wolterstorff, 1983). Geivett (2005) argues for a foundationalist epistemology, appropriately modest about the degree of justification that is purchased, but still hopeful that it will yield reasonable belief in truth (cf Erickson, 2004; Mohler, 2004). vanHuyssteen (1993, p. 46) calls for a fallibilist, experiential epistemology. He believes this will facilitate a continuation of the discussion between Christians and postmodernists, in that a case can be made for the rediscovery of the explanatory role of religious experience in post foundationalist theology. And while Thielicke (1974), Macintyre (1988) and Wolterstorff (1976) are critical of Cartesian and enlightenment foundationalism, none would endorse the poststructuralist’s method of dismantling foundations.

Denial of Stable Meaning

Hermeneutics of suspicion

Critical theorists claim that when people, who engage with texts, assume and proclaim their “descriptiveness,” their “disinterestedness” or their “ideological innocence” all this does is “reproduce and naturalise bourgeois ideology as literary value” (Widdowson, 1982, p. 3) or betray its “elitism, sexism and individualism” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 45). Readers, in a critical practice, are taught to read suspiciously, to become aware that texts whether “wittingly or not, sustain and reinforce assumptions” of “our political systems” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 45). What we find when we dig below the surface of any knowledge claims, or claims to objective truth, is simply the below surface workings of power. In this economy anyone who makes fixed knowledge claims should be viewed with suspicion and even construed as immoral and irresponsible. As Vanhoozer (1998, p. 185) puts it, doing justice to a text from a suspicious hermeneutic means “undoing every attempt to understand it.”

Vanhoozer (1998, p. 138) claims that the end result of a deconstructive suspicion is to “destabilize any interpretation of the text that pretends to have got it right.” He calls it the “sophistic acid that strips away the layers of rhetoric that disguised values as truths.” He cautions that “suspicion cannot be the last word on reading and interpretation, or even as a world view, because in that way lies madness” (1998, p. 458). As Naugle (2002) sees it, once deconstruction achieves its rigorous scepticism, any world views, truth claims, or universal claims lose their significance. They are reduced to a “self referential system of linguistic signifiers dispossessed of any authentic metaphysical, epistemological or moral import.”

Henry (1976a, p. 24) claims that the postmodern suspicion of the value of truth means that, not only have words lost their value in society, but in the church as well. There is a breakdown in confidence of communication both written and verbal. Words, are now viewed as a “cover up rather than a revelation of truth, they are used to “conceal, distort and deceive.” The ubiquity of suspicion has led us into *The Post Truth Era* where society has moved beyond any concern for truth. Humanity now expects dishonesty and deception and most people go through life expecting to be lied to (Keyes, 2004). Carson (1996, p. 105) insists that Christians need to be suspicious of the claims of deconstruction where a hermeneutics of suspicion is the golden key (cf Meyer, 1986). Abrams (2004, p. 305) highlights the irony of Derrida suspiciously ignoring the “literal normative meanings of a text and moving them into the realm of indeterminacy” but when it comes to his own writing he “tacitly relies on communal norms when undertaking to communicate the methods and results of his own interpretations to his own readers.”

Denial of Stable Meaning: Binaries

There are an increasing number of Christian scholars who, while not openly explicating Derridean thought, do engage in the deconstructive desire to undo privileged oppositions such as rational/ irrational, spiritual/physical, and male /female (Castelli, et al., 1995; Rutledge, 1996). For them it is imperative that Christians see how the binaries work and to extricate themselves from their power. One Christian theologian, turned philosopher, taking up Derridean themes, sets out to debunk the traditional polarities in western monotheism by deconstructing the distinctions on which it depends; theism/atheism, truth/error, good /evil, innocence/guilt (Taylor, 1982a). He argues that this opens up a brave new world of religious imagination that will invert and subvert the poles between which Western theology has been suspended. Caputo (1997a) also construes the traditional binaries as destructive, explaining that when binaries are represented as something that is simply the lack of the other, this can be invidious and loaded with traps. He argues that Derrida does not undermine all distinctions but shows that distinctions are better thought of differentially as occupying different points along a continuous line where elements of one thing blend and bleed into others. Both ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are traps for instance because they thwart the creation of new forms of gendered existence that shatter conventional stereotypes. Some argue that exposure of binary thinking in Christianity is needful because it has contributed to a long history of patriarchy in the church, as well as tensions between Christians, Jews and Muslims (Caputo, 1997a; Smith, 2005a).

A number of Christian thinkers celebrate the deconstruction of the various binaries such as reason/faith, truth as public/private and knowledge as secular/sacred. Schaeffer (1982) argues that the concept of truth has been divided into two realms, the non rational, non cognitive and the rational and verifiable. He argues that this is the single most potent weapon for delegitimizing biblical perspective in the public sphere today. Secularists don’t attack religion directly or debunk it as false; they simply consign it to the value sphere where it has no relevance to the public realm. Naugle (1999b) explains that even though a majority of sincere, evangelical Christians embrace a split view of reality by dividing things up into sacred and secular compartments, the biblical worldview grounded in creation, fall, and redemption will not permit such a perspective (cf Colson & Pearcey, 1999; Pearcey, 2004). Downing (2006, p. 138) also celebrates the deconstruction of the reason/faith binary as that which might provide space for faith to speak. According to Pearcey (2004, p. 17), when “Christians accommodate the secular/sacred split, it reduces Christianity to a matter of private, personal belief so that religious belief is acceptable only if it does not pretend to be knowledge” (cf Newbigin, 1994). To unlock this captivity Christians need to be utterly convinced that Christianity is not merely religious truth but total truth. Even given this embrace of the subversion of binaries there are

some notes of caution. Easterlin (2005, p. 632) argues that even though the structuralist's binaries collapse under the realization that such terms are not true opposites poststructuralism's conclusion that language has no stable structure may be erroneous. And one question that Vanhoozer (1998) raises against Derrida's discrediting of binaries is that recognizing some hierarchical oppositions may well be the *condition* of human liberation. For instance, he argues that a person who refuses to acknowledge the binary opposition between Creator and creature will never correctly attune to the structure of reality.

Authorial Intention

The influence of poststructuralist thoughts on the author have contributed to a destabilization of meaning because no longer do readers ask the classic hermeneutical question what meaning is the author trying to convey in the text (Williams, 2002). The author is dead so Barthes (1995) tells us. Derrida's account of writing involves the deconstruction of the authorial-authoritarian subject. Within a deconstructive construal, the true meaning of a text is not connected to the animating presence of authorial intent (Norris, 1987). The intent the author had in mind when constructing the text does not determine its meaning. Texts do not release single 'theological' meaning from the mind of the Author-God (Vanhoozer, 1998). They are always multi dimensional where a variety of writings, none of them original, clash and blend (Barthes, 1977). Derrida vehemently rejects any notion that a reader can pass beyond the written word to some prior linguistic reality, such as the original intention of the author, to reveal the true meaning of the text. He shuns the notion of originality of text, the unitary nature of the author and also the presence of the speaker in the speech act. The self and the author are simply products of language (Peters & Burbules, 2004). This is considered liberating because once a reader establishes that the author is dead they no longer have to link the text's meaning to the author's intent. Hermeneutic "unbelievers," as Vanhoozer (1998, p.58) calls deconstructionists, "do not believe in authors, neither the creator of heaven and earth, nor the originator of meaning in texts." Their objection to the notion of the author as determinate of meaning is that they see it leading to a politics of authoritarianism that constrains readers and limits interpretation. As Barthes explains, "The notion of the individual author is tyrannical because it limits the meaning of the text to that of the inferred intention of the author and does not allow for re-evaluations or re-interpretations.

It is important to point out here Smith's (2006a) view, those Christian scholars who criticise Derrida for having no concern for authorial intent do so based on Searle's misreading of Derrida. Derrida is not saying that the authors' intentions cannot be communicated but that there are limits. Smith (2006a) says this common misunderstanding of Derrida, mediated by American English departments, is that semiotics spells the impossibility for texts to communicate the intention of their authors. Derrida's account of language does not dispose of

the role of authorial intent. It simply diminishes the power of the author to govern all interpretation. As Burke (1992, p. 143) explains, Derrida “does not kill the author but puts him in his place.” The author’s determining will is construed as just one fact amongst others.

There are some Christian writers who appear to take up the notion of Barthes and Derrida that it is questionable to appeal to the author’s intention to make meaning of a text. Dawsey (1986) deconstructs Luke’s gospel to demonstrate that the notion of author is entirely unreliable and Moore (1994) points out that reading for the author’s intention might even be an immoral act. He argues that deconstruction enables us to read against the grain of the biblical authors’ intention in ways that might affirm women. It is often necessary to set aside the traditional task of reconstructing the author’s intention and read against the ideological grain.

There are however still thinkers who see the importance of holding to authorial intention as having at least some bearing on the meaning made (Kreeft, 1982). There are those that define all meaning and interpretation in terms of authorial intention (Hirsch, 1967), those who defend the notion that we can make progress towards knowing the intention of the author (Meyer, 1989; Moseley, 2003; Wright, 1992) and biblical writers who have tried to counter deconstruction by reasserting the authority of the divine author in Scripture (Lints, 1993). For Hirsch the author’s intention is still the only practical norm, the sole criterion for consensus, and the sole guarantor of the objectivity of meaning. For Knapp and Michaels (1982) something is not even a text unless it is produced with authorial intention and its meaning is entirely a matter of the author’s intention. Clark (1993) explains that writers from a variety of disciplines are now suggesting that if we hope to make sense of any text we must first attribute it to an author. Wolterstorff (2006) works to ‘resuscitate’ the author arguing that proper interpretation must focus on the text as an illocutionary act of the author and this is an important ethical dimension for the reader (cf Vanhoozer, 1998). Austin (1975) argues that the illocutionary act of language, that is what we do when we speak, brings the author to the fore and that it really is difficult to dissociate the speech from the speaker (cf Vanhoozer, 1998). According to Carson (1996), true knowledge of the text, and also the thoughts of the author who wrote it, is possible even if perfect and exhaustive knowledge is not. He argues that that is how things really are, and theories that deny that, need to be re-examined. Smith (2006a) states the obvious that there are many texts where discerning authorial intent is of paramount importance, such as promises and contracts.

While Croatto (1987, p. 17) takes the view that the absence of the author is “semantic wealth,” leading to an “openness of meaning” Vanhoozer (1998, p. 88) argues that this “absence can be very disheartening.” He argues that similar to the death of God announcement, if there is no author, then “everything is permitted.” Vanhoozer devotes a third of his text to explicating the death, and providing a way forward, for the resurrection of the author. He construes an “ethical

vacuum accompanying the death of the author” and argues that it is “certainly not a given that freedom to deconstruct texts and authors leads to liberation of the self.” He questions whether the death of the author is a liberating or debilitating hermeneutical event? He says it might well be a text’s undoing. Because he links the death of the author with the possibility of meaning in texts he asks what the ramifications might be of teaching students to interpret the text without any reference to the author. He makes a clarion call for a renewed respect for authors arguing that the “death of the author could well produce the death of human agency.” If authors are “not in conscious control of their work;” if they are simply caught up in “sociolinguistic forces that shape discourse;” then we might well ask “how free and responsible are speakers and interpreters?” If the “author cannot author can the agent act” (Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 89)? According to Vanhoozer it is precisely because we have authors that texts cannot mean just anything. The author’s will does impose itself on language and literature and therefore acts as a control on interpretation. He advocates a move back to the author because there can be no claim to accuracy, authenticity or authority in our interpretations if there is no norm to which these interpretations correspond. He makes this claim even given the tensions inherent in any notion of authorial intention (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1954).

Tallis (2005) points out that the dissolved Barthesian author is really a straw person. While no one would assume that the author has the last word on meaning in ordinary everyday life, the author remains alive and well. Ironically, and I think this bears Tallis’s point out, Ellis (1989, pp. 12-13) speaks of deconstructionists in personal conversation at conferences, speaking about whether someone else’s formulation of their own work was correct or not. Often, says Vanhoozer (1998), postmoderns “fail to notice the philosophical beam in their own eye, failing consistently to practice what they preach they seek justice for others but they refuse to give authors their due.”

Death of Author and Biblical Authority

Vanhoozer (1998) construes Derrida’s deconstruction of the author as a more or less direct consequence of Nietzsche’s announcement of the death of God, so therefore the challenges existing in philosophy and literary theory are actually theological challenges. He argues that the denial of the author has enormous implications for biblical authority and that “authentic Christianity depends on one’s ability to recover the author’s intention and perhaps through them the mind of God.” He argues that the death of the author encourages the notion that God does not stand behind or accompany His word. It strips the bible of any stable meaning so that it cannot “state a fact, issue a command, or make a promise with any authority.” Smith (2006a) claims that taking the bible as God’s word means taking authorial intention seriously. For those that receive the scripture as the word of God one cannot circumvent authorial intent. If the scripture is to be able to function as an authority for faith and practice, it must derive from the

authority of the divine author in some way. Ong (2002, p. 175) similarly says at its core, Christian teaching presents the written word of God, the bible which, “back of its human authors, has God as author” as no other writing does (cf Carson, 1996). God discourses with His creation. When readers read the scripture they are not just acting on an artefact but engaging with God (cf Wolterstorff, 2006). Traditionally biblical interpretations have always sought to do justice to the intention of the author. Now however, if a reader takes up deconstructive notions, biblical authority is undone. If there is no stable ground of meaning that the author intended, then there is ultimately nothing to stand over against interpretations to test and adjust them. These thinkers still hold to a link between authors and the meaning of a text? Vanhoozer (1998) questions what we are really left with if all our reading is only a search for false and totalising ‘truths.’ Readers are not reading to find truth anymore, but simply reading “freed from the urge to truth.” When the intention of the author was the home of meaning at least readers could discuss themes, truths and ideas in texts but now they simply dispute different interpretive strategies. He strongly argues that authors have moral rights and the reader must respect this so they can receive the text’s communion and not just revise or rewrite it. Vanhoozer (1998) strongly holds to the view that interpretation is still the positive attempt to recover the author’s enacted intention. The reader owes an obligation to the other, the author. Within any notions of interpretation there must be an ethics where the readers’ first obligation is to recognise in the text the voice or face of the other, and certainly something other than one’s own. Interpretation requires a belief in transcendence otherwise what one finds is oneself, and with respect to the gospel, that is futile. Interpretation is a deeply ethical act where “we have a duty to the voice of another not to crush it.” As he puts it, “one can take pride in ones scepticism just as one can in ones certainty” and to “ignore the reality of the author’s claims on us is to refuse to acknowledge the otherness of the text” (Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 463).

Denial of Stable Meaning: Rewriting Texts

For some the entire notion of rewriting texts is problematic especially if it is applied to the scripture. McFague (1982) however is one theologian who argues that Christians must redefine and rewrite how ‘God’ should be envisioned. She understands the language of Christians about God as a human construction and something that can be changed (McFague, 1987). What lies at the heart of speaking about God is not God but metaphor, therefore, since theology is mostly fiction, readers are free to associate God with new semantic fields and thus create new models or imaginative pictures with new metaphors such as lover or mother. She sees these metaphors as less oppressive and more appropriate for this age that we now live in. Vanhoozer (1998, pp. 134-135) construes McFague’s view of biblical metaphor as similar to Rorty’s pragmatic stance towards language in general and he argues that if we take up the view that “there is no non metaphorical word that can be said of God” this produces an “indeterminate” view of God.

Carson (1996) examines Cupitt (1994b), Schneiders (1991a) Exum (1993b), and asserts that what passes in the deconstructive theological milieu is often just sheer creative imagination. He charges, them with telling completely different stories but positing them as alternative readings. Hart (1989) captures the concern that many Christians raise, about a rewriting of theology based on one's own conceptions of God. These theologians have cut themselves loose from the moorings of scripture and tradition and appeal only to experience. The authority of the scripture to set any normative standard for interpretation is eroded.

Denial of Universals

Rejection of Metanarrative

Both Derrida and Foucault, in different ways, posit meta-narratives as oppressive and totalizing. All overarching truth claims are viewed as stories that fund various forms of totalitarianism. They work by suppressing that which does not fit (Derrida, 1978c). Derrida (1995b) works to disrupt the illusory unit by allowing the disenfranchised to speak and Foucault demonstrates that 'truth' is only established by those with the power to marginalize and oppress those without it. Lyotard (cited in Vanhoozer, 2003, p. 15) actually calls metanarratives "crimes against humanity." Foucault (1984b, p. 46) condemns any search for formal structures with universal value as dangerous and misguided and says we must face up to the utter absence of an absolute. We "must turn away from all projects that claim to be global," we have to give up hope of ever acceding a point of view that could give us access to any complete and definitive knowledge" (Foucault, 1984b, p. 47). It is therefore no surprise that the gospel that calls all humanity to repent (Acts 17:30) is often rejected in this age because it claims to be true for all humanity (Hinkson & Ganssle, 2000).

Christianity is a Metanarrative

According to some, the metanarrative is often the non negotiable point of irreconcilable opposition between Christian faith and postmodern philosophy (Westphal, 2001, p. xiii). The majority of Christians definitely view Christianity as a *Grand Recit* par excellence that covers from before creation, to the consummation of time and beyond. This obvious place of tension leads Wright (2004) to raise the question whether the postmodern incredulity toward metanarrative (Lyotard, 1979) sounds the death knoll, not only of Christianity, but the other historically teleological religions as well. Many Christian thinkers respond to postmodern philosophy by insisting that Christians must *more fully* embrace a coherent biblical framework for thinking about who we are, where we are, what's wrong and what's the remedy (Holmes, 1985; Jenson, 1993; Marsden, 1997; Naugle, 2001, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2006, 2004c, 2004d; Olthuis, 1989; Platinga, 1984; Platinga, 2002; Schaeffer, 1982; Walsh & Keesmaat, 2004; Walsh & Middleton, 1984; Wolters, 1985; Wright, 1992). Many agree that Christians

cannot counter the spirit of the age in which they live unless they develop an equally comprehensive biblical worldview, an outlook on life that gives rise to a distinctly Christian form of culture based on the Word of God, true for all times and places (Colson & Pearcey, 1999; Dooyeweerd, 1953-58; Erickson, 2002; Pearcey, 2004; Wolters, 1989). Erickson (2002, p. 78) explains that the universal element in the Christian message is “so deeply embedded in the testimony of the biblical documents that it cannot be wrenched from Christianity without destroying the very organism.” Similarly Mohler (2004, p. 59) asserts that the gospel message is “irreducibly a metanarrative of all metanarratives” and that “Christianity is meaningless” apart from that gospel while Geivett (2005) similarly claims that reducing Christian doctrine to a fictional, local micronarrative will jeopardize Christian orthodoxy. For many the poststructuralist incredulity of metanarratives is in tension with the universal claims of the Christianity.

Metanarratives are Not Necessarily Exploitative

Groothuis (2004) argues that metanarratives are not oppressive merely by virtue of being comprehensive truth claims. These views may not be oppressive to those who do not hold them and the Christian worldview while frequently distorted, is not intrinsically oppressive, given its ethic of incarnation, love and justice. Wright (2004) also argues that the mark of totalitarianism is to be found, not in the presence of metanarratives per se, but in their material content, hence the Christian ontology of gracious love is less obviously totalitarian than many postmodern alternatives grounded as they are on the assumption of an all pervasive ontology of power.

Metanarratives are Universally Needful for Humans

While there is acknowledgement, amongst Christians, that meta-narratives have presided over dreadful atrocities (Walsh & Keesmaat, 2004; Walsh & Middleton, 1995; Wright, 2004), they also argue that meta-narratives are universally needful for humans (Berger, 1967; Groothuis, 2000; Neuhaus, 1994; Vanhoozer, 2004; Walsh & Keesmaat, 2004). Zacharias (2000, p. 23), claims that humanity has lost any “metanarrative to life,” that there is “no overarching story by which all the particulars can be interpreted” and that “culture neither owns a story nor holds at the centre” (cf Dever, 2000; Jenson, 1993; Smith, 1992). The postmodern incredulity to all overarching and civilisation directing narratives has created a culture where there appears to be “no fixed ethical anchor” (Walsh & Keesmaat, 2004, p. 150). For many Christians, a rejection of metanarrative is “characterised by profound moral instability” because everyone needs to “ground their life in a worldview that both “directs” and “legitimizes their praxis” (Walsh & Keesmaat, 2004, p. 150). Humanity can only ask the question what are they to do if they can answer the question of what stories are they a part (cf Jenson, 1993; MacIntyre, 1985). Wolters (1985, p. 4) explains that because humans are by nature, rational and responsible beings, they

sense that they need some creed to live by, some “map by which to chart (their) course.” This is in direct contrast with Harvey’s (1989) elucidation of the postmodern self that lives daily with fragmentation, indeterminacy and intense distrust of all universal or totalising discourses. As Geivett (2005, p. 40) explains, all humanity need a “mental or conceptual universe” in which they live that “provides a network of principles that answer the fundamental questions of life” (cf Sire, 2004).

Erickson (2002, p. 279) asks the logical question of whether it is even possible to avoid metanarratives completely. That behind Derrida’s work on justice and Foucault’s on discourse and power there is a type of liberal ideology, or overarching view, that places strong emphasis on the goodness of human beings and in particular in their unhampered freedom. Wright (2004) insists that modernity has simply ridden roughshod over classical theology conceptualizing “God” as the first principle of the natural world, as the ground of authentic human experience and as the ontological foundation of the liberal virtues of freedom and tolerance. Historically Christians have challenged the modernist metanarrative supporting these liberal virtues, that finite beings as self sufficient, autonomous subjects can discover on their own, apart from God and His revelation, universal and objective truth (cf Henry, 1976a, 1976b; Schaeffer, 1982; VanTil, 1967). Many Christian thinkers assert that the Christian message has always maintained its own prophetic critique of dominating, totalizing worldviews (Caputo, 2006; Walsh, 1999, 2000, 2001; Walsh & Keesmaat, 2004) and its creational scope and radical attentiveness to suffering provide its counter ideological dimension (Walsh, 2005).

There are some who argue that the Christian faith and postmodern incredulity to meta-narratives is *not* mutually exclusive (Greer, 2003; Smith, 2005b, 2006b), as other Christians claim (Grenz, 1996; Ingraffia, 1995; Walsh & Middleton, 1995), that Christianity as a metanarrative is “Constantian” (Smith, 2006c) and possibly ideologically repressive (Walsh, 2000). Others insist that postmodernity itself has become its own meta-narrative (Carson, 1996) and is now a reigning ideology (R. Snyder, 2006). Smith (2006c) claims that when Grenz (1996) and Middleton and Walsh (1995) critique Lyotard for his incredulity of metanarratives they have misread him. Lyotard is not just criticising the universality or the scope of metanarratives but he is concerned with scientific rationality’s way of legitimising its knowledge (cf Downing, 2006). Smith (2006c) argues that the bible story is not a metanarrative in the sense that Lyotard uses the term and Westphal (2001) agrees that Christianity is a meganarrative but not a metanarrative in Lyotard’s sense. Even though Christianity makes universal claims of truth, these claims are not made on the basis of some universal reason, but on the basis of faith. According to Smith (2006b), when Lyotard makes visible that all metanarratives that ground knowledge are in fact myth or narrative, he therefore relativises any philosophy’s claims to autonomy and so grants the legitimacy of a philosophy that grounds itself in Christian

faith. Smith (2006c, p. 72) correlates these aspects of postmodernity to a retrieval of a fundamentally Augustinian epistemology that is attentive to the structural necessity of faith preceding reason, a stance that Vanhoozer (1998) takes as well. It is very interesting to read Eagleton's (2004, pp. 15-16) more recent view, that what he sees as "postmodernism's vacuity," actually stems from its "obsessive fixation with debunking metanarratives of all kinds." He construes this postmodern prejudice against norms, unities and concensuses as "politically catastrophic" because once the cultural discourse devolves into "predictable celebrations of pluralism, discontinuity, and heterogeneity" it is "divorced from any coherent foundations or framework."

There are some theologians that have developed a critique of the religious exclusivism in the Christian metanarrative (Hick, 1980; Smith, 1981), reconstructing a more pluralist Christianity devoid of incarnational Christology. However Greer (2003, p. 126) says, that at this point, they have made a final break with conservative biblical Christianity.

Christians highly value truth, primarily because they see it personified in Christ who they see is the Truth and speaks the Truth. For many, truth becomes questionable under the glare of deconstructions denial of presence, denial of stable meaning and denial of authoritative metanarrative. There are multiple responses to deconstructions denial of presence with some arguing that Derrida does not suspend reference and that non metaphysical theology is the correct way forward theologically. Others argue that a denial of presence leads to an evasion of scriptural authority. Much debate exists over whether it is enabling to reject any correspondence of truth, whether readers should dissolve meaning into infinite textuality, whether people can have access to an objective reality or whether we should reject absolutes and foundational thought. Debate also exists over the value of a suspicious hermeneutic and over the rejection of authorial intention as determinate of meaning. Some argue that the rejection of authorial intention and the critical penchant for rewriting of texts leads to an evasion of textual meaning and authority. Debate exists also over the value of metanarrative although most tend to view the Christian gospel as the ultimate emancipatory story for all mankind.

Chapter 10

Support Materials' Treatment of Truth/Meaning

Chapter 9 highlighted a degree of concern, expressed by some Christians, that the critical reading practice of deconstruction supported a number of denials that might not be enabling for those who believe in truths or Truth. They suggested that it challenged the belief that truth is present in a text, rejected the idea that meaning or truth can be fixed in language and discarded any trust in the universality of metanarratives. This chapter seeks to explain the way in which the support materials articulate the critical reading practice of deconstruction, and in particular, it seeks to make visible whether these denials are present in these texts.

Deconstruction in Critical Literacy

The term deconstruction is used in the support texts to explain the process of critical reading in which students are encouraged to engage. The majority of the senior work units written for year 12 English and edited by Fraser (2001a) state that they are teaching the critical reading process of deconstruction (Foster, 2001, p. 4 ; Fraser, 2001a, p. 3 ; Johnson, 2001a, p. 3 ; Jones, 2001, pp. 6, 7 ; Lemon, 2001, p. 3 ; McEwan, 2001, pp. 2, 4 ; Salk, 2001, pp. 3, 4). The three that do not use that term to describe their approach still engage in the deconstructive processes of looking for gaps and silences, reading for the marginalised and examination and resistance of dominances (Hannay, 2001, pp. 2, 6 ; Larrazabal, 2001, pp. 1, 6, 7; Queitzsch, 2001, pp. 3, 7, 10). Deconstruction is variously described in the support materials as a “practice most often associated with Derrida (Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 40-41), a “practical application of poststructuralist theory” (Moon, 2001, p. 32), and a “highly political practice” that exposes how “texts privilege particular values through their very construction” (Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 40-41). Other materials commit to the process of teaching students how to deconstruct texts (Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 43, 103-104; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 6-8, 23, 85, 105), although the relevant section in Moon (2001, p. 30) is included in a general glossary of literary terms, and in Herrett et al. (2003, pp. 40-41) it is in a general overview of literary criticism for high school students. The deconstructor is interested not so much in what the text says, or the truth in a text, but in how it organises its message. A text is examined not to ascertain its expressed views of reality but to examine how the language is being used, and particularly if this involves rhetorical devices. While Mellor et al. (1991) do not introduce the word deconstruction, they teach the process of such by including sections on the “contradictory and fragmentary” nature of texts (1991, p. 9), “gaps,” (1991, pp. 6, 9, 12, 72) and the “silenced” and “marginalised” (1991, pp. 10, 76). Appleman (2000, pp. 99-115) devotes an entire chapter to deconstruction (although not uncritically) in a book that lays out a number of other critical approaches to textual study.

The support materials demonstrate a commitment to deconstruction, even if not quite of the Derridean kind. The practice of textual deconstruction in the support materials does seem to revolve around the same trinity of denials as those highlighted in the more theoretical accounts of deconstruction in Chapter 9.

Denial of Presence

While the support texts do not explicitly state that they deny presence, this denial is implicit within their explanation of critical reading practices. They support the notion that meaning does not reside *in* a text, by teaching students to read for gaps and silences and for what is marginalized, in teaching about intertextuality, in their rejection of correspondence between word and the world, in their rejection of objective truth, and in their debunking of any stable foundations for indeterminate meaning.

Denial of Presence: Suspicion of Truth Claims

The support materials generally do not explicate any philosophical or theological position on truth. If they do speak of truth the word is often placed in inverted commas to highlight its questionable nature, and students are told they will learn a “sceptical reading practice” that will teach them how to “resist the ‘truths’ offered in texts” (Hannay, 2001, p. 1). Traditionally, students of English were encouraged to see that literary texts “contained universal truths and represented the voice of all humanity,” but now there is no need for students to “continue *ad nauseam* their reckless pursuit of the ‘truth’ of a text” (Moon, 2001, p. 126). Students should be actively encouraged to create their own meaning of all texts under study. Lemon (2001, p. 2) says we no longer search in a text for an “essential truth,” and Larrazabal (2001, pp. 1, 7) that students must come to see that the “media are key power brokers in language use,” and they therefore play an important role in “creating and perpetuating particular ‘truths’ in our society.” Herret (2003) explains deconstruction as an investigation into “how certain ‘truths’ have been constructed and a determination of which interests these ‘truths’ serve.” All the support texts openly proclaim that they are subverting textual authority in that they teach students to read resistantly (Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 66-68; Moon, 2001, pp. 127-130; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 7, 21-25), to challenge the authority of a text, and to resist its dominant discourses.

Denial of Presence: Meaning not Present in Texts

In the support materials there is no one indisputable way a text can be read, because the meaning of a text does not reside objectively within the text, it comes from a complex negotiation of other factors. Meanings are called ‘readings’ within a critical practice, because the reader brings different reading practices to each text (Mellor, et al., 1991, pp. 6-19; Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 4; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 21-24). These readings are “constructed

for a text” and not “simply extracted from it” (Moon, 2001, p. 129). Readers “construct meaning rather than just find it in the text” (Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 2-3). It does not “reside in a text put there by the author,” (Mellor, et al., 1992, p. 42), it is “not intrinsic to the text” (Fraser, 2001a, p. 2) and “there is no unmediated access to texts-in-themselves; there are only readings of texts” (Lee in McEwan, 2001, p. 6). A critical approach to texts will concentrate not on what is *in* the text but on “*how* meanings are made” (McEwan, 2001, p. 1). Drawing on Thomson, McEwan (1992b, p. 11) claims that it is futile to analyse the meaning of a text “based on the words in the text” because they are “not the sole determinants of meaning and value for the reader.” To ascertain meaning by looking only at the words in the text “devalues the relevance of a reader's extra-textual experience and the cultural, historical and linguistic locations of both text and readers.” Gillespie (2001, p. 2) spells this out, quoting from Peim (1993, p. 2),

Poststructuralism would tend to insist that knowledge and understanding are always positioned and that the identity and meaning of things shifts radically given different perspectives and cultural contexts.

Other support materials confirm this view when they teach the notion of cultural codes (Johnson, 2001a, p. 3; Mellor, et al., 1991, p. 44; Moon, 2001, p. 14; Pappalardo, 2001, p. 9; Queitzsch, 2001, p. 16; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 1-4,40), conventions (McEwan, 2001, p. 7; Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 46; Moon, 2001, p. 24; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 42-43) and contexts (Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 2-5, 60-72; McEwan, 2001, p. 6; Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 53-59; Moon, 2001, pp. 21, 123; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 4, 7, 23, 36-37). If meaning is not “intrinsic to the text, or not locked down by the text, but is merely a cultural construction,” then “how it operates within particular cultural formations is important” (Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 4).

Hannay (2001, pp. 8-9) provides practical exercises to demonstrate that meanings can “spill over the apparent limits of any text” because “meanings are held in place by things outside of texts.” She asks students to compare the meanings they each made on a text and then collectively ascertain how many of their decisions about meaning have “come from the text itself and how much from outside knowledge.” They are to consider to what degree the “meanings are determined by the text, or by their reading of it?” Mellor, O'Neill and Patterson (1992, p. 42) insist that ultimately it is a “pointless argument about what the text ‘really means’” and therefore students should concentrate on the “terms of construction of such a reading.” In this view of texts, they do not have any central integrity. They “do not give us ‘reality’ but ‘versions of reality’” (Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 3). Moon (2001, p. 129), explaining how it is that a texts can be read in different ways, says,

Texts do not ‘contain’ meaning in some fixed form, rather meanings are produced when readers activate a text in accordance with certain reading practices and within specific readings contexts.

This sounds like a Derridean theme that meaning refers not to something ‘in’ texts but rather to what happens in the experience of reading. Meaning is not an ontological property found within a text but a function of the reader’s discursive history. As Vanhoozer (1998, p. 158) explains it, “It is not so much about some “fixed nature in the texts itself” as it is about the “function of a text for the individual reader”.

Denial of Presence: Gaps and Silences

The support materials teach students that one way of exposing ideology in texts is to read for gaps, read for silences, read to recover the marginalised, and to generally read for what is not there. This suspicious hermeneutic is posited as liberating because it debunks the idea of neutrality which works to efface political orientation and instantiate dominant ideology. Readers look for the voices, experiences and histories that are omitted or marginalised (Mellor, et al., 1991, pp. 10, 76; Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 26, 70; Moon, 2001, pp. 52-54; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 12). Students are asked to engage in a reading practice that works against the grain of the text (Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 66-68; 2001, p. 127; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 21-25), that challenges the obvious or dominant meaning of the text (Mellor, et al., 1991, p. 4; Moon, 2001, p. 37), and that focuses instead on what is not said or what is not there (Hannay, 2001, p. 2; Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 7; Mellor, et al., 1991, pp. 6, 9-10, 72, 91; W. Morgan, 1994, p. 37). This is definitely a practice that supports critical literacy’s evasion of textual authority. It refuses to accept the illusion that the text has an obvious meaning or that it is complete or whole (Mellor, et al., 1991, pp. 9, 12, 25). Texts are viewed as “contradictory and fragmentary” (Mellor, et al., 1991, pp. 4, 9) and it is the “reader that often unconsciously unifies and completes these fragmentations by ignoring or resolving them, or by filling in gaps with the meanings that are available in their culture” (Lemon, 2001, p. 2). Readers are encouraged to be “sceptical of any assumed order or coherence of text” and to engage in an “examination of the ‘cracks’ in a text” that “allow for different meanings or readings to emerge” (Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 40). The gaps must be examined to see what values are conveyed by these omissions (Foster, 2001, p. 4; Larrazabal, 2001, pp. 6, 7; Lemon, 2001, pp. 2, 5, 8, 12, 13). “Looking for gaps and silences” will enable students to “detect the ideological dimension” of the texts (Queitzsch, 2001, pp. 3, 7, 10), and enable them to think about “whose voices are being heard, and whose are not” (cf Fraser, 2001a, pp. 1, 2, 4, 7, 8; Larrazabal, 2001, pp. 1, 6, 7; McEwan, 2001, pp. 6, 8, 10, 12-13; Pappalardo, 2001, pp. 1, 2, 6) . Readers must “not take for granted the forms and functions of language.” They must ask what may “not get instantiated or realized in language and texts, as well as what does” (Morgan, 1994, pp. 37-38).

To read for gaps and silences, and to valorise the marginalised, elucidates the Derridean view that rejects the “overall unity of a text” and concentrates on the contradictions and inconsistencies within a text; on what the text excludes, as much as what it includes. This is a reading imperative that valorises the margins and exposes how filling in the gaps supports a political or moral position. Morgan (1992, p. 92) says a student who can “comfortably handle gaps and silences in an “open” text” and who is “more tolerant of indeterminacy” and will “risk allowing readers to construct their own interpretations of their work.”

Denial of Presence: Intertextuality

The notion of intertextuality is given privileged status in the support materials. Robinson and Robinson (2003, pp. 31-40) devote Chapter 4 to the “Textual Universe” to an exploration of intertextuality; Miller and Colwill (2004, pp. 44-63) the entire third chapter, and Herrett et al. (Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 28, 82-101) all of Chapter 4. Other support materials devote smaller sections to intertextuality (McEwan, 2001, pp. 9, 12; Mellor, et al., 1991, p. 44; Moon, 2001, p. 76; Pappalardo, 2001, p. 5; Queitzsch, 2001, p. 6; Yaxley, et al., 2005, p. 39). The aim of an intertextual reading strategy is to make visible “how individual texts operate within a system of texts to create social, historical and ideological meanings” (Moon, 2001, p. 78). As Miller and Colwill (2004, p. 46) explain, “Making meaning relies strongly on the “text’s similarity to and connections with other texts,” and this “intertextuality is strongly dependent on cultural knowledge” (cf Moon, 2001, p. 78 ; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 31). At no point in the Miller and Colwill (2004, pp. 44-63) chapter on intertextuality do they encourage readers to discuss the meaning within the prescribed text. What they are encouraged to do is to look for examples of *other* texts within the one examined. As Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 31) explain, a text never acts alone in the creation of meaning but is “interpreted within the context of many other texts that have preceded it.” Texts become themselves, only as they differ and relate to other specific texts. This is what Mellor et al. (1991, p. 44) call an “interweaving of texts” (cf Moon, 2001, p. 76), and what others call an “echo” of all other texts (Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 82; Yaxley, et al., 2005, p. 39). All cultural texts are like designs woven into the larger fabric of language and writing (Moon, 2001, p. 76). What happens when someone reads with intertextual links is that it “naturalizes certain ways of thinking and acting, making them seem normal and innocent” (Moon, 2001, p. 76). Critical literacy seeks to make this visible to the reader in order to debunk the idea that a text is “unique” or “original” (Moon, 2001, p. 78).

Denial of Presence: Representation

The notion of representation is developed in Chapter 5, *Representations of Gender*, and Chapter 6, *Representations of Race*, in Robinson and Robinson (2003) , and Miller and Colwill (2004, pp. ch 1, p 2-16) devote an entire chapter to the concept. There are detailed explanations of representations (W. Morgan, 1997, pp. ch 2-3) and exercises designed to explicate how they

work (Moon, 2001, pp. 136-138; Yaxley, et al., 2005, p. ch 5). The Fraser (2001b) compilation only has one contributor who uses the term ‘representations’ (Queitzsch, 2001, pp. 7, 12), even though all the units deal with the ideas that circulate around it. Moon (2001, pp. 136-138) tells us that the texts that we thought were somehow “reflecting the world around us” are not. Language is not giving us “reflections but constructions” of the world (cf M. Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 3). Language simply re-presents again the world or the thing. It does not give us the thing. The sign that is used does not relate to an “objective real world” but cultural and “habitual ways of thinking about and acting in the world” (Moon, 2001, p. 136). The representation, whether a single sign, sentence or text does not give us reality, only versions of reality that are culturally specific (Hannay, 2001, p. 201; Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 3; Moon, 2001, p. 136). They are simply textual constructions that represent the referent or the world as “natural” (Moon, 2001, p. 28; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 42-43) but are really only social constructions. Since they are only social constructions, representations must not be judged on their “accuracy” to objective reality but on their “effects” (Moon, 2001, p. 136).

Denial of Presence: Rejection of Foundations

I found nothing in the support texts that referred specifically to foundational thought, even though the teachers spoke clearly of their view that critical literacy denied foundational thought. The examination of the literature in Chapter 9 also raises many theological issues with the poststructuralist denial of foundational or logocentric thought.

Denial of Stable Meaning

Denial of Stable Meaning: Suspicious Hermeneutic

Critical literacy establishes a reading practice that encourages a suspicious attitude to reading and interpretation. Critical readers refuse to accept the norms and values that have informed the text and that are presented to readers as authoritative. They unravel its strategies of persuasion, or manipulation, so that the text’s agendas, the text’s values, the text’s ideologies are exposed. This works to demystify language and to expose the ways in which our linguistic and cultural systems are constructed by ideologies that further the interests of those who hold the power. This hermeneutic of suspicion, originally coined by Ricoeur (1970, p. 30), naturally lends itself to a critical reading practice that reads against the grain or one that resists the invited reading (Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 4, 52; Moon, 2001, p. 129; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 7, 21-25). To read against the grain is to reject the story as it is, to distance oneself from the offered reading, to stand back from it and analyze it critically.

The language that the support materials use to speak about texts and language is suspicious and wary in its tone. Readers are told that language “manipulates” (Johnson, 2001a, p. 1) and

English teachers must be engaged in “raising students' consciousness of manipulation.” Students are encouraged to “critically reflect on how meanings are made” (McEwan, 2001, p. 1), to “problematised classroom and public texts” (Comber cited in McEwan, 2001, p. 5), to “manipulate and question texts,” and “to seek out alternate reader positions in the future” (McEwan, 2001, p. 3). Lemon (2001, pp. 5-6) claims that to evaluate the meaning of a text is “frequently irrelevant” because the texts are “constructed in certain ways” and these “constructions do not hold inalienable worth but can be questioned and disputed.” He says we should engage in an “interrogation” and the “demystifying of a text” and the “appreciation of how a text works.” As I showed in Chapter 7, most of the support materials list the Luke, O’Brien and Comber (1994a) or the Peim (1993) starter list of questions that interrogate the voices, interests and ideologies of the text, to ascertain what influence they might have on the reader. Students are encouraged to “destabilize meanings” (Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 52,161), because they are “not stable or trustworthy as they seem” (Moon, 2001, p. 32). This default reading position gives pause to think about whether educators want to work with a hermeneutic of faith, which aims to restore meaning to a text, or a hermeneutic of suspicion, which attempts to decode presumed meanings that are disguised.

Denial of Stable Meaning: A Break Between the Sign and its Referent

A number of support texts take up the notion that there is a break between language and that to which it refers. Signs are not transparent mirrors of the real world. There is no easy correspondence between the word and its ontological referent. This is a shift away from the former view that there was a direct correspondence between a sign and what it signified. Language no longer reveals the essence or truth of a world beyond the text. Herrett et al.(2003, p. 32) explain that a diverse critical movement, based on the work of Saussure, posits a “basic divide between language and what language represents (cf Fraser, 2001a, p. 2; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 4). This is in keeping with the notion of representations that negates the idea of objective meaning.

Several of the support texts explicate the work of Saussure to support the claim that there is no essential connection between a given word and what it connotes (Fraser, 2001a, p. 2; Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 32-33; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 4). The insight of structuralist thought is that things do not have meaning in themselves but are constructed to convey meaning. The sign, in this view, is ultimately unreliable to fix any definitive meaning. Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 6) demonstrate this by explaining that signs can be “broken down into denotations and connotations,” and the connotations on a signifier will have a “variety of meanings” in that they will “carry social meanings that are contextual.” They explain that when students “write down the denotations of the sign and the connotations or social meanings of the sign” it is clear that if they “make comparisons with other students, the meaning changes” as “one takes into account

the context, the age, gender and class of the reader.” The purpose of breaking down the sign into its constituent parts is to make visible how “meaning is created through language.” Moon (2001, p. 32) also engages students in a similar practice. He uses the example of the signifier ‘police.’ In different contexts ‘police’ might produce different connotative meanings. Depending on one’s reading context, one might attach the connotation to the signifier ‘police’ as “protection, security and order” or “harassment, repression and danger.” What he wants to make visible is that the meaning changes depending on the context in which the signifier is used (cf Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 1,3, 5 60-72; Moon, 2001, pp. 21, 173; Robinson & Robinson, 2003).

Miller and Colwill (2004, pp. 2-5), similarly, provide an exercise in which students are asked to write about the signifier ‘kangaroo’ from the perspective of a farmer, a Japanese tourist, a kangaroo hunter, a tourist road traveller, and a car insurance assessor. Students are encouraged to see that the significations of the sign ‘kangaroo’ are selected constructions that are “always mediated by ways of thinking about the world.” They are “not fixed but can change.” In each case it is expected that the student will provide differing significations depending on the perspective from which they are asked to write. This, in turn, will demonstrate that the signifier becomes disconnected from the thing it signifies, in that its signification depends on the attitudes, values and beliefs of the receiver of the text, not on something *in* the sign (cf Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 32, 40; Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 49). This is a poststructuralist view of language, in which the sign is not reliable and nor can it be fixed. As Vanhoozer (1998, p. 63) puts it, “There is nothing within the sign itself to keep meaning centred, stable or determinate.” Misson (1998b, p. 146) explains that the poststructuralist writers work in many different ways to undercut the “stability of meaning by all sorts of techniques.” To draw from Vanhoozer (1998, p. 43), this appears to be very much like Derrida’s iconoclasm that seeks to overthrow idols of meaning and interpretation. Critical literacy works to undo the idea that the sign reliably corresponds to reality. Vanhoozer (1998) sees this as an expansion of a Nietzschean (1976, p. 47) theme, where the meaning of the sign is not the actual thing to which it refers, but rather the concept of the signified that has come to be arbitrarily associated with it.

Denial of Stable Meaning: Binary Oppositions

The poststructural critique of binary opposition occupies a central place in critical theorising about language, and it is also pivotal in the support materials. Derrida’s claim that binaries are unstable and that they readily collapse when readers realise the terms are not true opposites but culturally contingent, is worked out in the support materials (Foster, 2001, p. 13; Jones, 2001, pp. 4, 6, 13; Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 13, 130-131, 140; Moon, 2001, pp. 3-6; Queitzsch, 2001, p. 12; Thomson, 1992b, p. 18), briefly by some, but more fully by others (Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 34-35, 48-49, 179; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 11-12, 45). Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 11) present the structuralist notion of binary oppositions as a powerful use

of discourse that “creates pairs of opposite meanings” which have the effect of either “excluding or including individuals or social groups from the text” (cf Herrett, et al., 2003; Moon, 2001; 2003, p. 11). They assert that complex social and political issues such as gender, race and class operate through the use of binary oppositions, and that is why it is important for students to be able to recognize them at work. Binaries create “in and out” or “empowered and disempowered groups,” and students need to see how “certain minority groups become marginalized by stereotypical representations of binary oppositions within popular culture” (Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 12). Moon (2001, p. 3) cites Derrida, saying that one element in the binary is often privileged over the other. The second term often comes to represent only the absence of the first, and when this happens the second term is inevitably de-valued (cf Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 34; Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 13; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 12). When readers unconsciously and uncritically read within these binaries, established patterns of thinking are supported and become further entrenched. What critical literacy does when it engages in this practice of making binaries in texts visible, is to identify the cultural assumptions that it supports, recognise that they are manmade not natural, and then the reader can possibly debunk them (Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 179; Jones, 2001, pp. 4, 6; Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 130; Moon, 2001, p. 4). An example of this is given in Robinson and Robinson (2003, pp. 40-54), exploring how certain minority groups become marginalized by stereotypical representations of binary oppositions within popular culture.

A study of binary oppositions in a text can reveal how patterns of established thinking get supported. This is considered liberating because once these can be traced to the cultural assumptions which have been coded into the text, the receiver of the text can read these resistantly. Readers, therefore, must keep in mind that whatever structure they do find, whether linguistic, familial, social or philosophical, has now been exposed by Derrida as ultimately arbitrary and simply artificial human constructions. The Derridean idea is to reopen all places that the binary schemes have closed off, and when students can recognise this linguistic device within texts it will be a precursor to resistance. When critical literacy works with the notion of signifiers, connotations and binary oppositions it seeks to emphasize that signs are not reliable indicators of the way things are. It also thwarts any attempt to unify knowledge or truth by swallowing them up in the particulars or small details of the text.

Denial of Stable Meaning: Rewriting Texts

In critical reading practices, a student’s understanding of written texts is revised to enable them to engage in an active reading, which in many cases involves a re-writing. Morgan (1992) speaks about rewriting “counter texts” or “subversive fairytales” so that the “authority of the original is questioned and undermined.” These “counter texts” lay bare the “ideological ground of both versions and lead to an understanding that no text is politically neutral.” Robinson and Robinson (2003, p. 25) similarly ask students to choose a popular fairy tale and “critique the

dominant reading and ideology of the text” by writing their own “resistant” fairy tale. This task is undertaken to teach students how to “subvert the norms and create a more critical engagement with the audience.” Hannay (2001, pp. 2-3), drawing on Morgan (1992, p. 105), says we must “read as writers” so we can “alert” students to the “liberating opportunities offered by experimentation.” Also, Pappalardo (2001, p. 2), drawing from Luke, O'Brien and Comber (A. Luke, et al., 1994a), argues that “text analysis and critical reading activities [. . .] should lead on to action with and/or against the text.” With this aim in mind, she includes the activities suggested by Luke, O'Brien and Comber (1994a, pp. 143-144), such as “rewriting the text” and thereby “changing its topics, perspectives and portrayals.”

The stated purpose of the final assessment activity is to ‘empower students’ to have a “final say as to the outcome (s) of the novel.” She sees this as empowering because “students are in the position to control someone else's reading position on the text.” It is really a technique of creative writing rather than reading.

Fraser (2001a) designs activities around Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in which students are asked to construct their own readings of characters and rewrite them into contemporary situations. She claims that when students write alternative endings to already existing texts it helps them to “foreground dominant readings and bring them into closer scrutiny.” Similarly, Queitzsch (2001) asks students to “rewrite segments” of the boxing texts to make “counter-constructions” (cf Fraser, 2001a; Lemon, 2001), and Yaxley et al, (2003, p. 119), to “rewrite (a) story to disturb the traditional attitudes and roles to gender.” In an examination of Baz Lurmann’s *Romeo and Juliet*, Miller and Colwill (2004, pp. 138-140) present an example of the fact that texts are never “static” but are “open to revision and adaptations,” and students are asked to intervene in the text so that they can construct an alternative ending. They explain that the way a story ends positions readers and viewers to respond in particular ways and it therefore accomplishes significant ideological work. They ask students for an “alternative ending that will create an ideological shift that repositions the audience in terms of the underlying attitudes, beliefs and values.” And finally, Queitzsch (2001, p. 3) teaches her students to “rewrite [these] cultural texts,” in “order to contest” its representations. This, she hopes, will lead to a “rewriting of the cultural text” that “will instantiate different power differentials.”

Again this appears to be very much what Vanhoozer (1998, p. 46), as I noted above, calls the “empty text syndrome” where a text provides a great place of freedom for interpretive play. Barthes’ (1986, p. 61) notion that a text can be read “without the Father’s inscription” also facilitates a freedom for students to do what they like with them. Texts are not viewed as unified wholes with integrity of their own. Once the notion of an author having any control over the meaning of a text is challenged, it is possible; although not advisable I would suggest, to do

what we want with it. In a critical practice re-writing of a text breaks open any sense that there could be a single unified meaning or comprehensive order within that text (cf Mellor, et al., 1991, p. 25; W. Morgan, 1992; Robinson & Robinson, 2003; Thomson, 1992b, p. 4). The integrity of the text is ignored and the student intervenes at various places within the text to change them. This proposed intervention into texts, to rewrite in places that suit the reader, challenges the authority of the original text and supposedly liberates the ‘writerly reader’.

Denial of Stable Meaning: Meaning Cannot be Fixed

In critical practice, students study the effect of the reader’s location (social, historical and theological) on the act of interpretation, demonstrating the poststructuralist belief that the sign is essentially unstable. Moon (2001, p. 33), in an explanation of why a text’s meaning cannot be pinned down, explains that the words we use have two ‘levels’ of meaning. The “basic dictionary type meaning,” and a “set of associations that we attach to the sign.” He posits ‘denotation’ as the “literal or factual” meaning and ‘connotation’ as the “suggested or implied meaning.” He uses examples to demonstrate to students that the “assumptions and structures which seem to guarantee the meaning of a text are not as stable or trustworthy as they seem.” He lists four words, rose, father, mother and clouds, and then asks students to fill in a grid based on the following possible responses: safety, rest, privacy and support (cf Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 39; Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 1-4). The students all produce different associations for these signs, and so he asks them where these associations come from if they are not present in the word or sign, and are these associations the same for everyone (cf Misson, 1998b, p. 146)? He provides these exercises for students to make visible that a sign can mean many different things across cultures, people groups, history and environments (Herrett, et al., 2003). In an explanation of how difficult it is to lock down meaning, Herrett et al. (2003, p. 39) explain the Derridean term ‘differance.’ Meaning does not “result from just differences between signs” in the structuralist sense, but rather is “always deferred or unable to be pinned down because meaning ‘slips’ between signifiers.”

The view taken up in the support materials is that the connection between words and their referents is arbitrary, and it is therefore not possible to fix meaning (Fraser, 2001a; Mellor, et al., 1992, p. 42). Deconstruction works to demonstrate the instability of the sign, the sentence and the text. The view is also promoted that it is not possible to close the possibilities of meaning. Texts are “ultimately undecidable” (Lee cited in McEwan, 2001, p. 6), and they are never “fixed or final” because they are always “mediated by ways of thinking about the world” which are never neutral (cf Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 3-4). Fraser (2001a, pp. 3-4) draws on the work of Saussure to demonstrate that it is “not possible to fix meaning.” She (2001a) works to disrupt the “apparent naturalness and fixedness of meaning” by swapping characters around in *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*. Drawing on Mellor, O’Neill and Patterson (1992), she says this “disrupts the expected.”

Denial of Stable Meaning: Language Constructs Reality

All the support texts promote the notion that it is language that constructs reality, hence the concentration on how language works. Fraser (2001a, p. 2) sets exercises in place to demonstrate that it is “language that constructs versions of reality.” Moon (2001, p. 143) explains that we do “not try to explain the meaning in texts,” but instead we “demonstrate *how* texts are constructed and how it is possible for them to mean.” Miller and Colwill (2004) also insist that texts sustain a number of readings because of the different cultural, social and reading practices of the reader. Robinson and Robinson (2003, pp. 4-5) demonstrate how an examination of individual signifiers “carves the text up into basic elements and then discovers the rules by which these elements are related.” Part of this carving is the examination of the multiple signifieds that students might attach to signifiers. The significations on a sign are multiple and unstable in that they signify differently for different people and differently at different times. This is a Derridean expansion of a Nietzschean (1976, p. 47) theme where the meaning of the sign is not the actual thing to which it refers. The meaning is simply a culturally accepted concept that has become arbitrarily associated with the sign, and these associations change depending on the culture of the reader. The inference, then, is that “meaning results, not from a direct correspondence or reference between word and thing,” but from the “culturally imbedded knowledge that allows for and enables any signification” (Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 39). It is “language itself operating through a complex system of codes and cultural conventions or social rules [that] creates meaning” (Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 1).

Denial of Stable Meaning: Authorial Intention Diminished Role in Meaning

Another element of a suspicious hermeneutic, developed in some, but not all, of the support materials, is the denial that the author has a bearing in determining meaning. They take up the notion that authorial intention is irrelevant to ascertain meaning; that it is really the culture expressed through discourse that speaks through the author, and that authors have no ultimate control over the meanings made of their work. Herrett et al. (2003, p. 127) explain that contrary to the modernist conception that the author could transcend culture and produce something unique, Barthes (1977, pp. 143, 148) argues that it is language, with its culturally embedded ideas, constructs, images and phrases, that actually speaks through the text (cf Misson in Worth & Guy, 1998, p. 100) . The author is merely a site through which this language passes; a “scriptor who speaks a ready-formed dictionary” (Linn, 1996, p. 26). The author does not use language to write his text, rather, language uses him to write it (cf Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 126-128; Moon, 2001, p. 1). The author simply weaves the already-existing images and phrases together into a linguistic tapestry. In this way, authors are pronounced dead because they are, in reality, just other readers who are reading the multiple linguistic codes embedded in language (Miller & Colwill, 2004, p. 66; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, p. 8). Even the phrase “individual

author” is posited as “tyrannical” because it “limits the meaning of the text” to that of the “inferred intention of the author” (Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 128-129) . This closes down meaning by not allowing for “re-evaluations or re-interpretations.” The meaning of a text is “not created by the person who wrote it,” but is “re-written every time it is read.” Of course, in this conception, the reader becomes “very important in the meaning making process”. Barthes’ (1988) view, cited in Herrett (2003, pp. 128-129), is that the death of the author is a “liberating event” because without an author there is “no secret ultimate meaning to get hung up on”, no “final message which the critic has discovered” and the “reader must accept”. Linn (1996, p. 26) comments on Barthes’ position, that since “the author does not exist independently of language” it is now “the individual reader” who becomes the source of “whatever meaning the text has.” She is now “left free to make her own interpretation” (cf Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 127; Moon, 2001). Similarly, Lemon (2001, p. 2) explains the search for any “essential truth” or the “real meaning the author intended to convey” has been “abandoned in favour of a poststructuralist approach” where the emphasis is placed on the “plurality of meanings which are determined by the social baggage (Fairclough, 1989), which the reader brings to the text.”

In Yaxley et al’s (2005, p. vii) introductory page on critical approaches to making meaning, there is no mention of the author’s intention as having any bearing on the meaning made. Instead, they list discourse, ideology, intertextuality and gaps and silences as the determinants of meaning. Similarly in the Fraser (2001b) work units, the majority do not mention the author’s intention as having any bearing on the meaning of the texts (Fraser, 2001a; Hannay, 2001; Johnson, 2001b; Larrazabal, 2001; Pappalardo, 2001). McEwan (2001, p. 4), drawing on Mellor, O’Neill and Patterson (1992, p. 40), explains that the heritage model in which the “author’s meaning is fixed” and “inextricably linked through the words on a page, and preserved through time” is “now challenged.” According to Leggo (cited in Appleman, 2000, p. 101), a “text is not a window a reader can look through in order to see either the author’s intention or an essential truth.” Lemon (2001, p. 2) quite confidently announces that the “real meaning the author intended to convey has been abandoned,” while Salk (2001, p. 2) claims that “poststructuralist theory now questions all familiar and habitual assumptions of English like the author.” McEwan (2001, pp. 3-4) clearly develops a poststructuralist position, arguing that the idea of the “author’s words fixing the one true meaning of a text is an untenable situation for proponents of critical literacy” and that “deconstruction is suspicious of any attempt to trace back meaning to any original source” (cf Foster, 2001, p. 7; Mellor, et al., 1987, p. 42; 1992, p. 43; Moon, 2001, pp. 1-2). Drawing from Peim (1993, p. 59), she (2001, pp. 3-4) asserts that there is no way an “author’s intention can verify or illuminate a reading” (cf Salk, 2001, p. 2).

One support text does, however, draw on the work of Bakhtin (1981) to flag the fact that this is still a contested space Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 127-130). They suggest that “the questions

surrounding the relationship between author, text and audience in the creation of meaning, authority and control are much debated.” They point out that it is not assumed as a given that the notion of authorial intention is finished, and they include mention of Bakhtin’s work that places equal importance on the speaker/writer and the listener/reader in making meaning of a text (cf Robinson & Robinson, 2003). Foster (2001, pp. 4, 6, 7) also encourages teachers to examine the notion of “what might constitute an author,” and Gilbert (2001, p. 3) supports a “rethinking” of “authorship.” Misson (1998b, p. 147) does provide a cautionary note, that even though this new theorising about authorial intention does provide “enormous freedom for reinterpreting” and finding “extraordinarily diverse meaning “ in a text, it does “not give the reader licence to make any claims about meaning.” However he continues to insist that the text is no longer tied down by authorial intention. It has “become material to be re-written over and over again in different constructions in each reading.”

Denial of Universals

Rejection of Universal Metanarratives

The term ‘metanarrative’ is only mentioned in one of the support texts (Herrett, et al., 2003, pp. 83, 184-186). However, the critical practice of examining texts for gaps and silences (Moon, 2001, p. 52), of ascertaining privileged and dominant discourses, and of foregrounding the marginalised, is a development of the postmodern incredulity of metanarrative (Moon, 2001, p. 49). Herrett et al. (2003), in an explanation of postmodernist thinking, explains that “grand narratives of the past that made sense of the world, such as Christianity, have been replaced by little narratives.” This appears to be an outworking of Derrida’s deconstruction that rejects comprehensive explanatory schemes because, as he sees it, reality does not present itself as fully coherent. Deconstruction calls attention to the extraneous factors, the left-out material, or the contradictory elements; what Derrida calls alterity or otherness. In the Foucauldian sense, also, the left-out material represents the voices of the powerless, neglected or overlooked members of society. The unity that appears in people’s comprehensive views of reality is illusory and only achieved by disallowing the disenfranchised to speak. Critical literacy, therefore, works to disrupt this process of smoothing over that which does not fit by breaking open space for the marginalised to speak (Herrett, et al., 2003, p. 4; Miller & Colwill, 2004, pp. 22, 26; Moon, 2001, pp. 49-51; Robinson & Robinson, 2003, pp. 12, 59-60) and by a concentration on difference (Foster, 2001, pp. 2,5,15; Jones, 2001, p. 8; Larrazabal, 2001, pp. 2,5,8; McEwan, 2001, p. 6; Salk, 2001, p. 3). These practices teach a reader to be guarded about any master narratives. Implicit in this practice is the suspicion of all unifying conceptual schemes because of their tendency towards a violation of others.

The support materials demonstrate that they are committed to deconstruction and a suspicious view of truth claims. They evidence the three denials embedded in deconstruction: presence, stable meaning and metanarrative. The practice of deconstructing texts is supported in the curriculum materials and they provide many practical ways in which these denials are instantiated. They deny presence by teaching reading practices that work to expose gaps and silences, by ignoring what is present in the text and in teaching about intertextuality. They demonstrate a break between language and its referents in their attention to connotations on the sign and in their teaching about representations. They openly state that meaning is not present in the text and that they are suspicious of truth claims. While there is nothing in the support materials explicitly about deconstruction being a challenge to foundational thought, many Christian scholars challenged this anti-foundational stance in deconstruction and most of the teachers felt that this notion was present in critical literacy. The denial of stable meaning is supported in the curriculum materials by teaching reading practices that teach about binary oppositions and the process of rewriting texts. They encourage a suspicious hermeneutic, a distrust of confidence in the correspondence between the sign and the referent and they diminish the role of authorial intention in meaning. They emphasize that it is language that constructs reality and that meaning cannot be fixed on the sign, the text or the world. They deny universals in their suspicion of metanarratives.

Chapter 11

Truth: What the teachers say

The question of truth, as might be expected, is of utmost importance to most Christians, and certainly to all the teachers interviewed. When we began the interviews on truth and meaning, all teachers agreed, to some extent, that critical literacy challenged notions of truth, and some emphatically so. However, when I asked them in what way this was achieved, they found it difficult to explain. The majority of the answers were inextricably linked with shoring up the notion that the Bible speaks truthfully and that Jesus is the truth about God. An example of this was GG:

Truth exists objectively, independent of our language. I think the critical literacy approach would suggest that truth is arbitrary, that it is not an absolute, it floats. It floats within meaning in the mind of the reader rather than in any meaning intended by the writer. Jesus was the physical embodiment of that living word. When the Bible says ‘In the beginning the Word was with God and the Word was God’ we believe that to be a reference to Christ... that He became the physical representation of the spoken word of truth.

They tended to bring questions of truth back to speaking about God as revealed in the person of Jesus, or the reliability of the scriptures. Most teachers made the point that the word and the world came together in the incarnation, but they did not relate this directly to notions of meaning in general, or to textual meaning in particular.

Some felt strongly that “critical literacy is out to abolish truth” DD or that “critical literacy does not believe in truth” (EE). Others said that the ‘truth’ for critical literacy is that there is “always textual oppression and if one resists it then one can find the truth” (EE). Still others articulated a more qualified position, that “critical literacy is not making a statement that there is no truth” but that “when things come to be known as truth then we should examine that concept to see how it is manipulating or positioning the reader” (AA).

One observation that needs to be made clear here is that when teachers spoke of their critical practices, they usually used the term deconstruction. They tended to conflate the two terms.

Denial of Presence

As I showed in Chapters 9 and 10, in a critical reading practice the meaning is not necessarily present in the text. It is dependent on meaning outside itself and the meanings the reader brings into play via various reading practices. Every teacher, however, answered an unequivocal ‘yes’ to the question ‘Is there something in the text which is not of the reader’s own making?’ AA said that the “constant emphasis on readings, and multiple ones at that, undermines the idea that meaning is actually there in the text.” KK said,

We need to come to texts believing that there is something there that was created for a purpose. Yes, the purpose might be to influence me to purchase a product, but we need to be open to the message first.

However, EE contradicts this idea. She said the notion that there is no presence in a text does not come across in her experience of critical literacy. In fact, she said, it is quite the opposite. She said,

This is a complete contradiction to what I thought critical literacy was. I taught students to look at what the author put there and look at it carefully so that the reader could see how they were being positioned by the text. I taught that meaning is clearly there in the text and we had to see how the text was making meaning. The author puts their own values and beliefs in there in the text, and we train students to understand that the text is not neutral, that there are beliefs and values in there. We are very much looking at the presence in the text, as I see it, so we can challenge it.

I often found this to be the case, that there was discrepancy between teachers, understanding of critical literacy, as they variously described the critical reading practices that they developed. Critical literacy has many faces.

Denial of Presence: Evasion of Textual Authority

Chapter 9 flagged the concern that the dominating imperative behind critical literacy and deconstruction in particular, is an evasion of authority. A few of the teachers spoke of this, linking the denial of presence in a text to a rejection of that text's authority. EE asks, "with respect to multiple interpretations, is it possible that they are just an excuse to evade the authority of the text?" DD explained it this way:

If we reject the idea that something is in the text that we need to know, and place emphasis only on the reader's interpretation, this is scary, and not just for reading the Bible. It is part of this culture's constant focus on self; that we hold the meaning inside ourselves, ungrounded meaning that we self-construct with no foundational underpinning. Meaning loses its proper significance if it is only what we can come up with. We teach them in critical literacy to understand *how* meaning is made not *what* the meaning might be. This removes a sense of authority from the text when you read in this way.

HH located the emancipatory power in critical literacy in the 'liberation' of the reader:

The reader is liberated from what is in the text, to engage with it in the way they desire. The power implicit in critical literacy is to place authority in the reader. Critical literacy

is a suspicious move away from any fixed meaning. The reader brings meaning *to* the text. The text does not *provide* it.

Denial of Presence: Evasion of Biblical Authority

Mostly, when I asked questions about presence in texts, the teachers responded in ways that bolstered belief in the Bible's truth, even though I was not asking about biblical truth. They turned in that direction without prompting. I suspect that this was motivated by an intuitive understanding that a rejection of presence undermines biblical authority. Most teachers expressed apprehension about the erosion of biblical authority following a critical reading practice. DD explained that,

Critical literacy is teaching us to question the Bible even though it does not specifically teach about the Bible. It teaches that there is no truth in texts, but God's word is truth.

Similarly, FF said that,

The words in the Bible are not just words written on paper. When you believe God and believe the Bible, those words seem to have a life of their own. It will actually bring things to fruition. It is alive, as no other text is.

HH also said that,

We would be doing something extremely detrimental if we start bringing our own agendas to the Bible because the scripture has its own sovereignty. The Holy Spirit is behind the scriptures. They came from God and He speaks through them. Critical literacy is saying that authority is banished and that authority is held in the reader themselves. It is not in the text. The idea that there might be something behind a text that readers need to get is cut out of critical literacy. It is destroyed. They are not meant to hunt for the truth of Christ to meet them, they are to challenge that. I think the notion of using different reading practices works in that way because you are asking the students to read against the meaning in the text, to take a completely different angle, so you remove the authority of the author and then proceed with your own.

Thus the teachers tended to equate critical literacy's critique of truth claims with challenges to biblical authority. They were intuitively aware that the denial of presence in deconstruction leads to an evasion of textual and therefore biblical authority which they felt the need to defend.

God Speaks: Presence Behind and In Text

Consistently, the teachers anchored their central views about presence in the Bible to a belief in the notion of revelation; that God himself can come to them and speak into their lives through the scriptures. As well as the human authors, there were also the words of God spoken through

the Holy Spirit. These teachers have taken up what Wolterstorff's (1995) calls "double agency discourse," where, in addition to human discourse, God is also speaking to the reader. They were unanimously adamant that something outside the person can come to the reader on reading the scripture. An example of this is HH who said, "Revelation comes to us. We do not bring that to a text [referring to the Bible]. It comes to us and *finds us* [strong emphasis here] when we read the text." Or as FF said, "God speaks into His world through His Word." "When we read the Bible sometimes God speaks to us directly through those words on the page" (AA). GG said that with respect to the Bible, the notion of presence in the text or an authority behind the text is crucial to the reader. Speaking about revelation he said,

There is a metaphysical presence, especially in the case of the biblical text. I do not accept that information only comes into our lives through our senses. As Christians, we would add a sixth sense that we would call revelation. If we accept that revelation is a form of text, then I would agree with Derrida that there is nothing outside texts, but revelation comes from God who is outside all our efforts to make meaning. As Christians, we acknowledge the idea that something can come into ourselves that is not within ourselves, but from without ourselves. This is revelation. In a similar way, general texts can move and change us.

I told the teachers about some Christian thinkers who have taken up deconstruction, or pragmatic views, in biblical studies, who argue that texts have no "substantial presence" in themselves (Moore, 1989, p. 133), and that they "can be used in whatever way readers or interpreters choose" (Morgan & Barton, 1988, p. 7). Their response was that "this would lead to a lot of confusion in students" (EE) and would have "enormous implications for Bible reading" (DD). They held to the realist notion that meaning was anchored in the text, and also in the intention of the author, and that a reader could get some way towards knowing what that was, even if that knowing was not absolute.

CC said, "The Bible is read not like other books by most Christians because it is viewed as authoritative in relation to the disciple." I am reminded of Vanhoozer's (1998) important question to all Christian educators; do we read the Bible as a critic or a disciple? JJ, taking up this point, said that "we need to think about how we present the scriptures in our classes. Will they be authoritative or not?"

Denial of Presence: Gaps and Silences

One of the subtle ways that presence is rejected is when teachers engage with a critical reading practice of reading for gaps and silences, or reading to ascertain who or what has been marginalized. Every teacher said they taught these skills. This is a reading practice that concentrates not so much on what is there but on what is absent. Meaning is not something

inherent in the text, nor is it locked down by the text, but it is culturally constructed. What is absent from, and silenced in, the text, is just as important to make meaning as what is present. CC raised the concern, also pertinent to many others, that something important might be missed in this reading practice:

When a reader reads for absences they are not interpreting what is there. It's the missing bit. We get so intent on looking at the bits not there that your whole class is spent on that, rather than the parts of the text that are actually there. So much is lost. The wonderful language and philosophy [in this case, she speaks of Hamlet] is bypassed in the process.

FF also spoke to this concern:

Is anything missed for the student in reading for absences consistently? If you're only looking at what is left out, and not looking at what is actually being said, you miss the intention of the author straight up. You're missing the whole crux of what the message is about, because you're too busy looking at what's not in the message. This is an arrogant refusal to examine a text as it is, and to let the text speak to you.

A number of teachers addressed the problem of filling absences with one's own politics. They raise the concern, highlighted in Chapter 9, that if the reader cannot find evidence of ideological complicity in the dominant ideology of the text, they simply search for the silences and place what they want in that space. Speaking about reading for absences, HH explained that

A lot depends on the teacher, and it's so easy to do a lot of political work in those absent spaces. And if you're that way tempted, you could just take over. Where's the female voice? Where are the people of colour? Where's the homosexual voice? Who decides what will fill these silences? A teacher can simply fill absences with what they want. This reading practice can easily be co-opted by a teacher to do their own politics.

Similarly, CC claimed that,

You're adding things to the text. You're making things up in a sense. You're ignoring the truth or message of the text, saying these people or groups aren't there, and you're having a bit of a guess about why that is so.

AA complained that reading for absences is an illogical reading practice:

In some ways, it is an irrational reading practice. Most people would think you were silly to read for what is not there. I guess I can understand where that's coming from because it's not reading the text for what it is. It's kind of adding to the text, but I think it comes back to what the text actually is. If it's an advertisement or something like that

then reading for what's not said is pretty important. If not, then you can just put anything into the gaps, which is not a truthful reading of what is there.

KK, similarly, insisted that,

If you read any sort of politics you like into marginalisation... you can't do that across the board with all texts, can you? That would not be wise. Just because the marginalised do not speak in a text does not automatically mean that the author is preserving the political status quo. The text is just about something else. You must let a text be itself.

One teacher complained that there are negative effects as a result of consistently reading for difference; that it actually closes down academic inquiry at a time when students need to be learning to read closely. She said,

The penchant for searching out difference is not always productive. When you say to students, "here's a fact," 30 % of the kids will say "but what about..." and "you have left out"...and so on. I say enough of postmodernism, let's look at the detail, because they have developed a habit of not looking at the detail because they are so busy with the exceptions and what does not fit. We teach this politicized reading practice before they are even close readers of what is there.

However some perceived value, although not without a note of caution, in reading for absences. CC indicated that it might provide a creative space to valorise the Christian voice:

Where you draw the line is the tricky point. The teacher of critical literacy can use that space... the marginalization and gaps and silences in texts, to bring in their own politics, their own values. It is possible that reading in this way could be totally co-opted by a political ideology. I do it myself sometimes, in seeking for silences where I can insert a Christian perspective.

FF also saw value in reading for gaps and silences "when you want to expose attitudes that are not positive." She said she looked for gaps and silences if she felt that her class was particularly racist:

If I've got a class that is rather racist in their viewpoints, I will make them stop and think "does this apply to everybody? What sections of Australian audiences have been removed from this? If you were a 13 year old Aboriginal girl in the outskirts of Darwin, how would this affect you?" At the present moment, we're doing a unit on developing Australian national identity and the majority of my class are white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class students. Fortunately, I've just got two students from PNG, and just got two who arrived from America, and their input has been good, because it's shaking the kids. They see that their view is not the only 'truth.'

AA raised what she saw as one of “the most important questions” to be asked about critical literacy, “How do we decide whose politics will be valorised? Who makes these decisions?” As she saw it,

A lot hangs on the teacher’s choice of text and their own ideological views here. Why just the Marxist, feminist and queer perspectives? Why not others as well?

Generally, the teachers were not really aware that traditional reading for ‘meaning’ is construed in a critical practice as complicit with instantiating dominant ideologies. They seemed confused to some extent as to why they were engaging in oppositional or resistant readings that sought to valorise the marginalized. It was simply “something that one does in critical literacy” (FF). They, at no stage, expressed to me that they engaged in reading for absences so that it would denaturalise the givens as social constructions. This was interesting, especially given that the support materials outlined in Chapter 10 certainly took this view.

Denial of Presence: Intertextuality

Another aspect of the critical reading practice that thwarts presence in texts is the notion of intertextuality. Many of the teachers did not teach about intertextuality, which is interesting given that Miller and Colwill (2004) definitely highlight intertextuality as a dominant critical literacy practice, devoting a third of their text to the concept. A number made comments similar to BB that “We did not go into it much at all.” Some said they “did not really understand it” (EE), and KK said that “it is too difficult to pick up on the run.” One teacher who did teach the concept (she had a university background in critical literacy), linked the practice of reading intertextually to a destabilization of meaning:

If you are looking for a text to understand its essence or its authority, intertextuality is set out to go in the opposite way. Instead of looking at the text in front of you, you are looking at other external texts and references to them. It does the complete opposite of locking down any essence or final meaning. You never get to the core of the meaning because you are encouraging students to look externally to other influences; you move away from the original text to look at others. Intertextuality moves us away from foundational thinking. The text keeps shifting. This unsettles any set meaning (DD).

Those that did teach about intertextuality expressed surprise when I suggested that this notion implicitly taught that a text’s meaning is never fixed within the text. They did not see that the notion of intertextuality implied a movement sideways to more language, more texts, instead of fixing meaning somewhere within the text. That was not at all apparent to them, so the concern raised in Chapter 9, that teaching about intertextuality facilitates insecurity about fixing definitive textual meaning, was not apprehended or supported in the teachers’ practice of critical literacy.

Denial of Presence: Rejection of Correspondence of Truth

The denial of presence is established in critical literacy in its rejection of a correspondence understanding of truth. Reading for absences, reading for intertextual references, concentration on the smaller details of a text such as the connotations and the binaries, are all tools that destabilize a direct correspondence between language and the world. DD explained that any reading that rejects a connection between language and the real has intellectual and moral limitations:

Rejecting a connection between the word and the thing sideswipes the truth of an argument. It does not matter. It is only about language. The morality or ethics of an argument is irrelevant. What counts in this sort of reading is how the language works to position you. That is what is foregrounded as important over and above what they are saying. It is limited really, and perhaps immoral in a way, because it denies the right of the text to declare anything.

Most of the teachers stated that there were at least some texts that must be read and adhered to absolutely. AA said:

There are some texts that we have to treat as a realist text. Like the law, or a manual for something. This person has written this for me to understand. There's a truth in there and I have to get it right, otherwise I could foul my whole body up [speaking of medical procedures] or breaking the law.

Representations

I showed in Chapter 10 that the support materials took up the view that texts do not transparently mirror or reflect the real world. They are only re-presentations, or textual constructions, that re-present the world. They negate the idea of objective meaning. They do not give us the thing. With respect to the idea of representations, the teachers expressed concern that this notion might disrupt confidence that language points to the real, and they query whether this distrust of language will produce negative effects in students. DD asked,

Is it possible that students might lose confidence in the ability of language to refer to the real world, especially when we are teaching them that it is all representations? We do not want them to be suspicious of all texts. We want them to approach texts, maybe not all texts, with a sense of security or with a sense that they might learn something really useful, maybe even life changing.

BB challenged a statement made in the support materials:

Miller and Colwill say that texts do not mirror the world, but often they do and students must know that. They might not give us the absolute reality, in that it is not there to

touch and feel, but it can come very close. When we speak about ‘versions of reality’ then it can be anything goes. I don’t like where that takes us.

KK also raised disquiet about what might happen if teachers facilitated a reading practice that breaks with any correspondence of truth. She asked,

whether the idea of representations might create students who are not confident that there is a some link between the word and what it names. I do not want my students to get the idea that we cannot trust language, or that it is not a safe way to communicate, or that what it refers to cannot be trusted. There are matters of trust here. Is it going to be helpful to teach students to distrust language? Many times our words *do* imitate the world, and if we lose confidence in that notion where to from there?

A number of teachers raised the quite serious question of where this diminished lack of reference will take humanity. What might we be left with if we teach students to distrust language? It was also interesting to see that the teachers did not associate this notion of representation and versions of reality with any notion of multiple versions of God as linguistically and culturally mediated, even though this was raised as a point of tension in Chapter 9.

Denial of Presence: Objective Truth

The teachers were in agreement that when students are taught to read to dismantle truth claims, or to read so that they are suspicious of truth claims, it thwarts the notion that objective truth might exist. Every teacher emphatically claimed that truth existed objectively. One complexity I found in their responses was that they tended to conflate objective truth with absolute truth and universal truth, so it was difficult at times to tease out exactly what was being said.

AA demonstrated this with the following statement,

I see objective truth as something that does not change dependent on who looks at it. I see that as absolute truth. So that truth is not just for me, it’s truth for everyone; it is universal. Critical literacy is saying you bring your discursive history to the reading and when you do the truth changes, depending on who’s looking at it and where they’re looking from. I do not hold to this notion for the scriptures. The truth will not later change when I look at it from a different perspective.

This statement also demonstrates the link that teachers often made between defending the idea of absolute truth and sustaining the idea of unchanging truth in the scriptures, even though we were not speaking of the scriptures.

An example of the strength of their convictions about objective truth is the statement made by AA:

Some things are true and not just conditioned by what we think or our culture. No matter what my discursive history is, or my race or gender, objective truth is always truth, no matter what my values, attitudes and beliefs.

Similarly, GG insisted, “I am saying that truth exists objectively, independent of our language. Yes, I think that is an important point to be made in response to critical literacy.”

Every interviewer posited God as existing objectively and outside humanity’s discourses. The following comment by HH was a typical response: “The Truth is the person Jesus Christ, who is the revelation of God. Jesus is God Incarnate and the truth is what He says about God, us, and the world.” GG took a slightly different perspective:

I believe in an absolute truth, as the word of God, as it is presented in the Bible, and yet as an English professional I can see that it can be read, and truth interpreted, in a variety of different ways; that it can be very difficult to find absolute truth in scripture. And I actually think that God in His wisdom has been quite deliberate in what He’s done there. That scripture itself doesn’t rely just on the mental evaluation of text. It relies on the revelation of the Holy Spirit. And again you could argue there are multiple meanings in that. But I say no, there is an absolute truth and part of the Christian life is about seeking that absolute truth.

GG continues to grapple with the notion of whether objective truth exists and whether it can be known, and in doing so, speaks from what I understand to be a critical realist perspective:

The way that postmodern thinking tends to frame things is that one has to make a choice between being somebody who sees knowledge as coming from absolutes only, through to somebody who sees there is no solid foundation for truth and knowledge. There are places in between. I think statements about truth should be qualified with statements like ‘at this point in my life’, ‘at this point in my journey this is what I see as truth’, because I don’t think there are very many things I would be immovable on. I’m immovable on the fact that it’s true there is a God. I’m immovable on the fact that Christ is true. I do believe that truth is an absolute; that it is a set of absolutes; but I recognize that our own mental capacities and processes, our own humanity, our own imperfections, our culture, our upbringing, a whole huge range of things, the texts we’ve been exposed to, the texts we haven’t been exposed to, all contribute to the degree to which we are able to interpret what those absolutes are, and that then swings me back to the other end.

FF made an important point that was reiterated a number of times by many teachers on many of these issues that arose with critical literacy: “Whether critical literacy rejects absolutes or objective truth depends a lot on the teacher and the school teaching it. We don’t do that.”

Denial of Presence: Foundational Beliefs

Again, as with notions of truth, I asked a question such as “do you think critical literacy has anything to say about foundational truths,” and most of the teachers vehemently insisted that it denies them.

EE explained that it “is possible that students get hold of the idea that there are no foundations in critical literacy.” Similarly CC said, “I think their whole world today in the 21st century, even apart from critical literacy, is without foundations.” And GG,

They are bombarded with texts and discourses all clamouring for their allegiance. Real freedom might be found in stopping the interpretations and saying “I am going to believe this one as truth, as foundational, and finish with the play.”

However, when I asked them to explain what particular practices take us in that direction, they were often not so sure.

DD, the teacher with the strong background in critical literacy, explained its anti-foundational stance in the following way:

Critical literacy’s purpose is to reject any foundational thinking. It uses the tools such as gaps and silences, binary oppositions, intertextuality and resistant readings to deconstruct a text. Its primary purpose would be to deconstruct any foundation. Instead of looking for the core of the meaning that comes out of the text’s essence, we teach students to examine for intertextuality and for ideologies, and for what is not there, its gaps. The techniques in critical literacy seem to be deliberately employed to frustrate final meaning. Definitely gaps and silences is a clear one because you are looking for what is not in the text so you bypass what is there to look for what is not there and that serves its own purposes one way or another. I would teach this process for some texts but not for the Bible and not a text that I really need to understand, like a driver’s manual or something... only for media, ads and films.

Some felt that a suspicious view of meaning can work to instantiate a suspicious attitude towards truth and therefore foundational thinking. BB explained that “if you take away the idea of absolutes, then we have nothing to base our beliefs on.” When I pressed the issue of whether he believed this came across in critical literacy, he said,

It depends on the level at which you’re doing it. In our school we don’t go that deeply. If you get the kids to start questioning absolutely everything though, how do you convince them that we do have an absolute [he speaks here of God]?

Others pointed out, in response to this question about first principles or foundations, that they saw foundational beliefs in critical literacy itself. AA said,

They have their own foundational positions... maybe feminist or postcolonial... like I'm going to read this text to see if there are misogynist views of women, if women push the narrative forward, if women are passive, if women are always confined to the home, to the domestic sphere. To me, that's a foundational way of reading a text. We're reading to find where women are oppressed. I don't see that as any different. That is the fundamental meaning we want to get out of the text.

AA was on the regional panel for English, and speaking about her experience there, she said,

Critical literacy has its own paddy wagon that it drags us along. Maybe their own hobby horses of race, gender, class and sexuality. These are the things they want you to look for in a text. But they're pretty cranky if you've got your own hobby horse that doesn't match theirs [amused and ironical laughter here].

DD also confirmed this foundational perspective in a critical reading practice:

When race, class and gender become the dominant ideologies in critical literacy they are no less foundational. In lots of critical literacy textbooks, that's what you're meant to read for. You're meant to read for class, for who's been oppressed, in what way, and gender, and race. This is a foundational position for them.

I expected to find that critical literacy, in its poststructuralist challenge to foundational thinking, might be rejected by Christian teachers, but I also found that some teachers envisaged positives in its anti-foundational thrust. FF claimed that,

Critical literacy does in some way challenge people who have foundational beliefs, but that is a good thing. Going beyond and deeper than what's written there, and having to challenge themselves with what's written there, and "why is she coming from that viewpoint? What viewpoint has she left out?" It is making them look at their own thinking. "Why do I believe this?" You've got to know where you're coming from in order to be able to judge somebody else or to judge another text, because you have to have a basis for your own beliefs before you can make a judgment on someone else's beliefs.

CC supported this view. She explained that "students must examine the way they are thinking. Some might have foundational beliefs without ever examining them or some might think they have them but under examination find that they do not." Some argue that critical literacy helps to "reinforce foundational beliefs because it forces the students to look at the fact that there are different ways to look at it or to read a text or reality," and that this "in turn can reinforce their own foundational positions" (FF). FF elaborated on this further:

It actually throws up the question of belief systems and enables a discussion of ethics and morals. It might help reinforce foundational beliefs because it would force you to look at the fact that there's different ways of looking at something. Let us say a moral issue in a text. In that sense it is positive, but in other ways it's destructive. If they [students] think there is nothing that is absolute or foundational to base their life on then that is negative.

GG said that he

can see how pluralism comes out of critical literacy. All views can come to the table. Probably that would not be a popular view amongst many Christians but I actually think our right to choose what we believe is undergirded by a fundamental principle that we all have that right and that means the right to reject. Individual choice is paramount in the Christian scheme of things. There are always consequences to choices, though. Our faith is strengthened when we choose to engage in those debates.

Behind all these reading practices that endeavour to demonstrate the lack of correspondence and the instability of the sign is the notion that it is language that constructs reality. If language is unstable and cannot be fixed at any point then the reader can feel quite comfortable about deconstructing it. They do not have to take up as true the ideas and values that are instantiated in the texts. After all, what is in the text is not reality but simply one version of many, and unstable at that. The reader can make up their own realities if they do not like what is presented in the text.

Denial of Stable Meaning

Hermeneutic of Suspicion a Default Reading Position

Many teachers considered that when a suspicious attitude to all texts becomes a default reading position it could be limiting in that it increases incredulity to all meaning and truth claims. Some even construe the passing of responsibility for meaning to the reader as dangerous. DD said,

If we teach students to deconstruct language all the time it is possible that we might also be teaching students to distrust language... to not be confident that language takes us to something that is real. Is it possible that students might come to seriously distrust language and only see it as something that seeks to manipulate or trick the reader into believing something that is detrimental?

Or as JJ said, "the whole treatment of texts in critical literacy as suspicious does pervade a student and teacher with incredulity towards meaning. We need to think about what the results of this will be." And CC explained that this has intellectual implications:

I can see that a student might become so suspicious that they never really look at what a text says. If we are not trying to understand what the text is saying but we are asking questions about why this was said, or who said it and whose interests are served, the student is not looking at the message of the text.

JJ claimed that a suspicious hermeneutic frustrates the formation of moral value:

What I see is a move away from meaning, well certainly any fixed meaning, the notion of multiple meanings, the idea that we read for what is not there... there is a shiftiness of truth. When thinking about high-school age in particular, we're talking about people who are, in a sense, still forming what those values are. So I think that a critical literacy approach can destabilize the formation of those values in people's lives... create an uncertainty... create a questioning that some parts of society would see as being appropriate and valuable, and I guess in some circumstances might be appropriate and valuable, but often it's not.

EE felt concerned that critical literacy could possibly have detrimental psychological and spiritual effects:

Even the question "what does a text mean anymore?" or "what does an author mean or intend here?" is out the door. While I can see benefits in the practices of critical literacy I can also see that it might make a student anxious about truth claims or wary about any authoritative meaning and I am not sure whether that will have good results both psychologically or spiritually.

With this idea in mind JJ said, "I would not encourage a suspicious reading of the Bible. The Bible critiques humanity, you know, and this can be missed to our detriment." I include here DD's comment, primarily because it was typical of many of the teacher's responses:

The default reading position in critical literacy is to read suspiciously for a start. I look at the Bible as a text that is not deconstructable... well it is but we should not do that. I see three sorts of texts... there is the Bible that we do not deconstruct, there is the media that really should be deconstructed, and there are texts that we really do need to know what it is that they are saying. It might be important for our safety. If we teach students to deconstruct everything then what are we trying to create? We do not want an ignorant society that arrogantly deconstructs every text without close reading. This whole process might have a negative effect on people's ability to trust texts in general. A text might have something in it that the reader must know. As I see it, some you do deconstruct, and some you don't.

Denial of Stable Meaning: Binary Oppositions

Not many of the teachers worked with binaries although a few did. DD said,

When we set out to deconstruct a text by examining binaries we bypass the author's meaning. It strikes me as rather arrogant in a way. People have important things to say and if you are only looking to subvert or disrupt the binaries you are not paying attention to what the text is about.

Many said they were not sure they understood them and so they "gave them a wide berth" (BB). JJ taught the notion of binaries, and said that she could see "how it might make language seem unstable" but she said that "the kids would not pick that up."

The Text itself Limits Significations

All the teachers held, at least to some degree, to the notion that a reader could determine the meaning of a text and that there is a correspondence between language and the world, even if it is not completely transparent. That language could, and does, take the reader to the real. I therefore questioned them about what it is that might limit the significations. When asked if there is anything that limits the interpretations of a text, some thought my question was

A bit silly...Yes, obviously. You look at the words on the page and you try to come to an understanding of what the author has written. The words that are there in the text limit them (JJ).

AA also explained that "It is the text itself that must limit them. Some things can be construed from the text, and others cannot, based on the choice of words that the author used." Or, as LL said, "they cannot go on forever because the text itself limits how many interpretations can be made without getting wide of the mark."

Every teacher variously claimed that meaning is in a text, and that what is present in the text limits the possible significations. BB felt strongly about this notion and expressed it this way:

I would say that we have almost a responsibility to name, label and limit the meanings to be worthy stewards of creation. We need to be aware that our thought processes can lead to real situations in the world where we are not really being stewards. I go through the process of stewardship with respect to global warming. As a geographer, I have to ask myself whether the activities of man are actually changing the face of the planet. Are our actions influencing or destroying a unique earth? Is this God's plan and is this a natural process? We cannot just keep interpreting the language in various texts that argue from different perspectives. With this issue we have to bring our thoughts down

to what is actually happening. More and more interpretations can sometimes simply mean that one never has to do anything about the situation; just keep interpreting and debating and nothing will be done.

The following point was raised in the literature in Chapter 9 (Jeanrond, 1991; Vanhoozer, 1998) and by many teachers. They said that readers need to determine what kind of text it is, or to quote Vanhoozer, what “kind of communicative act” a text belongs to, so that the reading response will be ethical and fitting. CC explained,

There is a movement away from looking at a text to see what knowledge/truth is in that text. In the reading it's not what truth or knowledge is in that text, but how is that text working to establish the truth? How is that working on me? Do I want to resist that? Do I read resistantly or not? There is a move away from a realist understanding of a text in that we're moving away from what's in the text to how the text works. There will be things lost in this move. Some texts, you need to know exactly what is in them. And in many, the reader *must* [strong emphasis] respond appropriately to its claims.

LL similarly said,

We do need to distinguish what sort of text it is and what sort of claims it might be making on us as we read. A legal correspondence would be read with very limited interpretative play, as opposed to a magazine advertisement. We would read the latter more suspiciously and not necessarily take up what it is telling us while the former we would be careful to ascertain exactly what it is saying and this would be limited by the words on the page.

And GG,

The text has to have some bearing on the limit of interpretations otherwise what is the point of knowledge claims about anything? If the text itself does not impinge on our interpretations, then anything is possible and that is just meaningless in the end.

BB comments on the idea of infinite readings:

The whole notion of endless readings is not something I want to teach my students. This is not a responsible approach to texts, or to any reality. If a text can mean anything that you like then eventually it gets so far from what is in the text that really one is just engaging in play. God's creation has a finite point in terms of how long it is going to last... it has a finite point in terms that it is something... it is not something else... a kangaroo is a kangaroo, it is not a wombat. Except for God, there is a finite point for most things. Even the sun, the gases that go into creating that enormous atom bomb that

goes off all the time. As we understand it, the sun will die in a certain time period. This is what a limited science tells us so far of our universe.

The teachers explain that readers must determine what sort of text they are reading so they can appropriately respond, that infinite readings are not representative of God's reality and that they enervate any knowledge claims.

Consensus on Most Signifiers

In Chapter 10 I showed that the critical literacy support materials taught the idea that there was no essential or natural correspondence between a sign and a signifier. They provided exercises for students that demonstrated that the relationship between a sign and the signifier is always an arbitrary matter of the will and linguistic convention. They have taken up the Saussurean notion of language and reality, in which there is no essential connection between a given word and what it connotes (Culler, 1976).

Every teacher, bar one, taught an exercise provided in Miller and Colwill (2004) that demonstrates how multiple significations can occur on one sign, and that the meanings, or more accurately the 'readings,' a reader brings to the sign are culturally and historically varied. The meaning is not present *in* the sign but *brought to* the sign by the reader.

In response to questions about this particular exercise, HH explained that even though she taught the Miller and Cowill exercise about the signifier 'kangaroo,' she did not understand from that exercise that meaning was indeterminate:

I taught that exercise, that you cannot fix meaning on the word kangaroo. The meaning, if fixed at all, is fixed within the cultural, historical connotations that a viewer or reader might bring to the word. You know... the context. I could see that a farmer, a Japanese tourist and an environmentalist might see a kangaroo differently, but I did not think that I was that we cannot fix meaning anywhere within language. I did not see that at the time but I can now that I think about it. I still think the meanings are more limited than what they suggest. Most people just know what a kangaroo is. They have the mental picture in their heads. When people read 'kangaroo', basically they picture in their minds the animal that is associated with that sign.

GG takes a view that was held by the majority of teachers, saying,

I still think there is a common consensus of interpretation on many signifiers. Even though we work to demonstrate in critical literacy that the word can mean many things depending on your discursive history and the context, I still think the significations are very limited on most signifiers. There's still a degree of stable knowledge.

EE supported this position when she said that,

Even after looking at the connotations on a signifier they are still limited in what they might connote. Mostly we still picture a kangaroo and know what that sign signifies, even if we have different emotive responses to the animal.

FF (with a degree of frustration), speaking about the notion of stable knowledge claims, insisted that,

There has to be some degree of stable knowledge in texts otherwise why would anybody write anything? Why communicate? If it's always going to be miscommunication, why communicate? I am writing for a purpose. And I'm reading to understand what you're trying to say. That purpose should stay put. Why bother saying anything in texts at all if it's just a whole pile of miscommunication or the meanings are so slippery? Why bother?

A few teachers extrapolated from instability of signification to a lack of direction in life:

If students cannot read a text and put an interpretation on it that they believe is the right reasoning in their analysis of the text, and if they take this notion into their life situation, then they are going to start believing that there is no right interpretation. There is no ultimate influence in their lives that can give them direction, and I really think that is a dangerous path to travel and I think young people, especially adolescents, need some sort of direction some stability and foundations... a star for them to walk by (JJ).

HH construed this similarly, saying,

No fixed answers to questions... It does come across a bit but there is a fixed order in creation. This can be very disconcerting for students. God did create, name and order existence. I would say that interpretation has to stop somewhere.

DD took a strong stand on the idea that there is still some stability in the meaning. She said that

The other thing that can happen is that we get caught up with little things like individual words, the binaries, the connotations and the way the signifiers work with connotations etc. What happens is that we completely miss what the text is actually about. We examine the component parts of the text only to see *how* meaning is made but doesn't that work to make students uneasy about deciding definitively on any meaning? It is like the meaning is irrelevant. Something might be lost here as well as something gained.

It appears that the teachers were not really aware that working with this exercise reinforced the essentially Nietzschean (1976) view, that the sign is unreliable to fix any definitive meaning. That it is only that the arbitrary connection of sound to object becomes an everlasting truth over

time. Even though they taught this exercise on signs and signification they took the view that there was still a common agreement on the meaning of many signifiers and that it was definitely possible to reach a degree of stable, if not perfect, knowledge. Some did raise the issue flagged in Chapter 9 that if the notion that meaning was indeterminate was gleaned from a critical practice, then that could have disconcerting material effects in the students. All held firmly to some degree of correspondence between the sign and the referent. They were not prepared to embrace a theory about language and reference that negated the relation of language to the world.

Denial of Stable Meaning: Authorial Intention

I found a clear disparity here amongst the responses. Some took, as a given, the idea that critical literacy taught the notion of death of the author. Their responses centred around shoring up the importance of the author's intention in having some bearing on the meaning of a text. For instance, EE said, "Once we get rid of the author it is possible that the text will just succumb to the politics and the fancies of the reader." Or, as FF explained in speaking about gaps,

If you always question what the author has written, you've just destroyed her work. She wrote a text for a purpose and for us to deliberately go and read for what's not in there, we're destroying what she set out to write. I know that it's what we are teaching the kids to do, but sometimes we just need to read what they wrote and understand what they wrote.

Along similar lines GG said, "to ignore what the author intended and simply bring texts down to the point where meaning is only in the interpretation of the reader/viewer... I think it is far too narrow an approach to reading," while DD agreed:

The intention of the author still has some bearing on the meaning made because he chose these words and not those. He put them together in this way and not that. I think to search a text for the intended meaning the author had is still important.

Some complained that the denial of the author's intention as having any bearing on meaning was really an evasion of authority in the text. KK said,

Well they're liberated from the authority of the author and the authority of the words on the page to limit that meaning. It is not much of a liberation though is it?

Others argued that critical literacy is not about the death of the author. Quite the opposite, it is about seeing very clearly what their intention is. They argued that this is the very point of critical literacy. Thus KK claimed,

Certain genres, newspapers, advertisements... it is still important to look for what the author intended. I think it is still important to see how they work... how they

manipulate. We do need to train students to see how manipulations in texts work...but not with the Bible and some other texts... treat them with respect.

DD agreed with this, that “it depends what sort of text one is reading whether one attends to the author’s intention or not.” Others said they were not aware of any notion of the death of the author in critical literacy, and thought it was exactly the opposite. EE explained:

Critical literacy is about questioning the author’s motives and looking at how the author uses language to convince or influence its readers. If we are questioning those things then certainly we are investigating and acknowledging that they had a purpose and an intention in writing it. That is exactly what we are trying to expose... the author’s intention.

AA linked the notion of multiple interpretations with the death of authorial intention. In speaking about whether multiple interpretations were infinite, she said that:

If we at no stage look for the intent of the author [to make meaning] students might get the idea that it is all interpretation. But generally I think this notion does not come across, although the support materials do not explain what it is that might limit the interpretation either.

A number questioned whether the rejection of authorial intention as determinate of meaning might have a negative effect on reading of scripture. DD considered that,

There are interesting side effects from this with respect to scripture. I think we need to fear God, and if we feel that we can bring our own authority and our own meanings to the scriptures this might not be productive.

It appears in this comment that DD thinks that when we read the scripture we are not bringing our own meanings to it.

Denial of Stable Meaning: Rewriting Texts Challenges Authority of Text

The support materials, in Chapter 10, demonstrate the critical practice of rewriting texts either by changing the endings, by adding or deleting characters, or by changing the message of the story to suit some current cultural dominance. EE spoke of the arrogant attitude in those who rewrite texts. She claimed that,

Rewriting texts is a bit of fun really but it does work to challenge the authority of the text. It is one thing to fracture a fairy tale and quite another to intervene in the Bible, or even Shakespeare for that matter. It is probably an arrogant approach to a text.

JJ agreed with EE:

We now have people rewriting sections of Shakespeare. We have done it in our own school. I think it happens in theology as well. You know, they rewrite sections of the scriptures that are oppressive to women. I see this as simply pandering to humanity's thought process... you know... no one is right... no one is wrong. There are no definitive standards, or the authority is dumped. I do not know what the long term effects on society will be if we take standpoints like that. I do not mind modern interpretations but to actually change the original writing of a text is a bit rude really. I think it is a bit dangerous really.

HH's response to the idea that the scripture could be re-written echoed every other interviewee, and on this point there was no equivocation or variation. She said, "The Bible is God's word. We are not free to rewrite it in a way that makes it more palatable to us. We do that at our own peril."

Denial of Universals

Rejection of Metanarratives

As I expected, every teacher agreed that "the gospel event is a universal story and the pivotal salvation event in history for all humanity" (KK). However, even though the teachers held this view quite adamantly, only one thought that critical literacy rejected universal explanations of reality. EE explained this:

Critical literacy does deny authority in the big story because it challenges the meaning of it. It is suspicious of any big story that belongs to everyone. It is always looking for gaps and the left out ones, the marginalised.

She did not however continue with this line of thought, to articulate how critical literacy's denial of universal metanarratives opposes Christianity's all-inclusive claims. None of the teachers did. To take the teachers further along this line of thought, I would have had to have led them quite markedly. I was extremely interested in exploring this tension further, but because they did not raise it themselves, I chose not to pursue it.

A couple of teachers raised the issue that the loss of universals, and the concentration on difference, is problematic because universal themes are necessary for liberation and ethical practice. CC points out that "movement away from examining texts for universal themes might work negatively in respect to liberation." She said, "I am speaking about learning from some literature. This transports us to view, to think, to feel like another person. Now that's freedom." DD also said,

The desire to work against unity, to constantly seek out difference, may not work to help the marginalized as well as looking for things which unite humanity.

KK also raised the concern that the concentration on difference leads to a diminishment of human connectedness:

There could be consequences that are not intended within critical literacy. Suspicion about universal themes might overlook the connectedness between humanity. It might not open up a loving embrace of other people.

BB also raised this concern: "Searching for differences all the time might enhance trouble and difference, causing more separation between peoples." Many thought that the development of universal themes in literature might facilitate better relations between people. This is summed up in the comments of JJ:

I think it is a good idea to read a text like Shakespeare and look at the unifying themes behind it, instead of always doing the narrow race, gender thing. Look at the bigger ideas that he presents in his writing, look for the universal themes that he presents. There are universal themes for humanity and these still need to be explored. They are often ignored now.

While the literature clearly articulated the rejection of metanarrative as an irreconcilable difference between Christianity and postmodernism, the teachers did not see that emerging in their critical literacy practices. There was only one that made the link between reading for absence and the rejection of metanarrative, and none expressed this as a challenge to Christian belief.

As I expected the notion of truth is crucial for Christian teachers because of their faith, because of the bible's claims about truth and because of what God the Son, Jesus, said about truth. While a couple of teachers saw critical literacy as a complete denial of truth, others saw it, and I think this is more in keeping with its actual agenda, as a reading practice that questions how regimes of truth become established as a forerunner to resistance. The teachers explain how the three denials of deconstruction are worked out in their critical reading practise and they point out that, as well as the gains in critical literacy, there are a number of possible disabling consequences in a reading practice that instantiates these denials. They raise concerns, also expressed in Chapter 9 that a denial of presence could lead to an evasion of textual authority, which they suggest might be detrimental when carried over to scripture reading, especially given that they posit God speaking through the scripture. God speaking through the scripture is something that they all regard as possible and life-giving. They also raise concern that critical literacy simply fills the reading gaps with its own politics where the class, race and gender trilogy establishes its own foundational ideas. They insist that deconstruction might work negatively to frustrate final meaning and that it might perpetuate the view that language cannot even point to the real. If deconstruction leads to incredulity of all truth claims, to distrust in

language, to a frustration of moral value, especially when it is textually formulated, then they argue that this could well have detrimental spiritual and psychological effects. They insist that there is still a common consensus on most signifiers and that we must not abandon the intention of the author of having at least some bearing on the meaning of a text. To do otherwise will have disabling effects on the reader. They also insist that the denial of metanarrative implicit in deconstruction might have negative consequences in that humanity needs overarching stories to place themselves within. They also assert that deconstructions particular penchant for difference might not support the oppressed as well as looking for what unites humanity.

Chapter 12

Conclusion

Did I Achieve my Original Intentions?

The original intention of this project was to remedy the gap in research at the interface of critical literacy and Christianity and I suggest that this has been achieved. My intention, to uncover the theological and philosophical assumptions behind critical practices, as seen from a Christian perspective, has also been achieved in Chapters 3, 6 and 9 at least to some degree. As far as I was able, given the parameters of my reading thus far, I have presented the tensions and the agreements at this particular interface as faithfully as possible. I also intended to explore whether Marxist and poststructuralist assumptions existed in the support materials and this I believe, is both clearly established and laid out in Chapters 4, 7 and 10. Finally I intended to ascertain whether the theoretical tensions, raised in the literature, were apparent for Christian teachers of critical literacy, and I believe this has been addressed in Chapters 5, 8 and 11, even given the fact that oftentimes I did not find what I thought I would.

Initial Expectations

When I began this project I assumed that the Marxist and poststructuralist lineage in critical literacy would be problematic for Christian teachers. My own insertion, in an earlier project, into Marxist and feminist poststructuralist thought, meant that for me these ideas were noticeably evident in critical literacy. The support materials, demonstrated a clear commitment to Foucauldian notions of being made subject to the discourses of a text and they presented language as crucial in the constitution of the human person. I expected the teachers would balk at this reconfiguring of the subject as a mere confluence of discourses or simply a pawn of state apparatuses. I also assumed the emancipatory imperatives behind Marxist and poststructuralist theories would create tensions for Christian teachers, who situate themselves as receivers of Christ's salvation, which they consider is *the* universal, emancipatory event of all time. I expected that they would evaluate the emancipation achieved through more equitable textual representations, proliferating interpretations, or refusing to fix meaning, to be extremely limited. And finally I thought that the denials inherent in deconstruction, and instantiated in critical literacy, would be anathema to Christians who hold to notions of truth, a degree of stable meaning and to the human need to inhabit metanarrative. What I found provided many surprises and led to some new insights, some of which necessitated a degree of calibration on my part. There certainly was not a simple linear agreement between the theoretical literature, the support materials and the Christian teachers. This was also the case from both the Christian 'side' and the critical literacy 'side'. There were disconnections and disagreements *between* the three sources of data and also *within* each. It was not a unitary, homogenized story.

Limitations of Study

There are limitations to this study in that only 12 teachers were interviewed and it was limited to Queensland teachers only. While this small number facilitated a more detailed and in depth exploration of their views, it is limited in that it does not provide a picture of a broad based response to the topic. Locating the study in central to north Queensland only, and then only in Christian schools, made it a more manageable research project, but also limited the findings. For instance the project could be improved by broadening the Christian base that the teachers came from. There might be interesting and instructive denominational specificities between Roman Catholics and Protestant teachers with respect to scripture, authority and hermeneutics. Another limitation is that the analysis of the theoretical foundations of critical literacy was conducted only via the Christian literature which discusses them. There is therefore no basis for concluding whether these accounts are themselves 'fair' to poststructuralism and Marxism. While I recognise that this limits the scope of any conclusions that can be made from the literature at this interface, in that it is only evaluated from a Christian perspective, it does achieve the original purpose, which was to examine a Christian response to poststructuralist and Marxist theories.

Methodological Revisions

As explained in chapter 2 I was forced to adjust my initial research questions because most of the teachers did not have a theoretical background in Marxism or poststructuralism. For instance instead of asking questions directly about presence, a notion of extreme importance in the realism, non-realism debates that have emerged in response to poststructuralism, I worked backwards from their own critical practices such as reading for gaps and silences to show how they instantiate non-realist notions by reading for absence instead of presence. That way we could explore some of the tensions that arose with these practices, and articulate them in a way that was deeply linked with their own critical practices but also begin to see the philosophical/theological lineage.

Two Distinct Tensions

This project established that the intersection of Christianity and critical approaches to literature generates two kinds of tensions; tensions at the theoretical interface between fundamentally different ideas and tensions about what the consequences of a critical practice might be.

Different Ideas

Revival of Self

My expectation, that teachers would balk at the poststructuralist notion that the self is discursively formed by immersion into language were borne out to a limited extent only. The teachers resisted the notion that the self was completely mastered by socio-economic conditions

or by language, although they retained the idea that texts do influence the reader and that the reader is always situated. They preserved the view that there was something inherent within the self that was pre-discursive in nature and constituted outside of language, history or power. They drew on Christian doctrines of creation, to explain a given and created identity as gift from God and the doctrines of regeneration and sanctification to explicate at least some stability in the Christian self. They were adamant that an adequate account of self does not stop with the situatedness of shifting discursive flux.

However, they expressed these views, not because they wanted to unmistakably deviate from the poststructuralist or Marxist notions of self that they found in critical literacy, but because of the direction the questions took and the subsequent discussion that followed. Most had not heard of the term subjectivity and they certainly did not think that critical literacy promoted the idea that human being was merely a confluence of discourses. They were certain about this, even though they taught the notion of positioning in texts. They held to the view, that even given the voluminous number of societal texts clamouring to manipulate and persuade the reader, they could still, to a fair degree, trust their consciousness to determine rightly, the text at hand.

At no point, unlike many cited in the scholarly literature, did the teachers indicate that they saw their own critical practice, as part of a wider postmodern move that chastens the modernist, self-centered Cartesian ego. As Christians, they certainly advised a corrective to the arrogant modernist ego, that sets itself apart from its Creator, and they recognized the overdose of self that exists in human being, but they did not perceive their engagement with critical practices, to be part of this postmodern critique of the modernist self. They challenged the modernist view of humanity, claiming that human being does not exist solely in its cognitive dimensions, and that dimensions of reality are also received through revelation and appropriated by a person's spirit, but they did not articulate their own critical practices as a critique of impure reason or a challenge to self consciousness. This attests to a resistance amongst the teachers to any depreciation or decentring of self. They understood humanity as having a unique presence that stands outside socio-economic and language systems and they accepted as a given that consciousness could be relatively transparent to the self, although not with absolute perspicacity. They resisted the Foucauldian refusal of essential nature, implicit in critical literacy, and did not take up a technology of selfhood. This supports Cunningham's (2002, p. 143) view, that the negative place assigned to the self in poststructuralist theories, will "just will not stick." The teacher interviews support his prediction, that the persistent self will just not "quit the critical stage."

Emancipation in Christ

While I saw tensions between Marxist, poststructuralist and Christian views of emancipation, the teachers were generally not aware of the underlying philosophies or the tension that they created

for some Christian thinkers. They were generally unaware of this lineage in critical literacy even though the support materials did evidence this. They did not see that the very broad imperative of critical literacy to subject all texts to criticism and dissection, was done in the name of liberation. When I pointed out places where the support materials spoke about critical literacy working towards justice, broad societal change, or more equitable relations of power, they were somewhat surprised. While they understood that texts were products of the culture, they thought it was far too ambitious a claim to assert that structural inequities could be reconstructed through language. They also challenged the notion that making visible the social determinants of reading enabled readers to escape from them or that critical literacy would transform consciousness. They held this attitude, not because they had taken up Foucault's historicism that perceives unconscious humanity bound in the historical moment, but because they did not see how pervasive textual meaning and signification might actually be in the service of power. While they spoke of a text's influence, they had not taken up the real depth of the critical challenge, that texts are actually agents of domination and control, and that work in subject English must make visible and demystify deeply entrenched power relations. Even though they said they taught critical literacy, the majority had not taken up many critical notions for themselves and they certainly did not construe themselves as liberators of the oppressed through subject English.

Salvation Through Interpretive Strategies?

The scholarly debate made it clear that different moralities animate Marxist, poststructuralist and Christian notions of emancipation. Most Christian theologians, philosophers and certainly the teachers interviewed, regarded personal regeneration and transformation, followed hopefully by societal change, as the ultimate emancipation, and Bible reading as pivotal for both exposure to the gospel of redemptive salvation and for an ongoing life of faith and discipleship. They eschew the notion that salvation comes through various interpretative or reading practices. While the teachers acknowledged that critical literacy might make some gains, where social inequities are made visible through textual critique, and where the marginalised might be restored in reading for gaps and silences, they construed this as very limited. It is not that they were opposed to emancipatory discourse per se, but they saw themselves situated already within an emancipatory discourse that stood sovereignly above all politically constituted emancipation. They spoke of a freedom in Christ that surpasses any politically constituted freedom and they spoke of sin, as a result of the fall, something that could never be reversible through critical reading practices or the political efforts of humanity. Because emancipation for the Christian is grounded in this biblical view of sin and redemption they understand that they are called to be shaped by biblical language, not to evade it, or bury it under ideological or political readings. They view biblical formation in a positive constructive

light. It was obvious that Christian teachers drew boundaries if the cultural ideologies, including those embedded in critical literacy, were in conflict with biblical themes.

Rewriting Texts does this Emancipate?

One of the concerns raised in the literature and also in the interviews was whether the ‘writerly reader’ is freed only to negate existing cultural forms but not to create any of their own. The support materials provide students with tasks that encourage them to rewrite existing cultural texts so that the authority of the original is undermined and questioned. While the teachers did construe this as a subversive activity, and a bit of play, they did not see this in any sense as emancipatory. They felt that for some texts we should not intervene to destabilize its ideological ground, undermine its norms or contest its representations and that much might be lost in doing this. They insist that texts in a deconstructive milieu are not given proper respect and attention and that writerly readers do not attend to the communicative action in the text because they choose not to hear its communication. The scholarly debate also highlights that although some theologians engage in creative re-writing of the scriptures, others oppose this. They insist that theology written this way severs itself from the authority of the scripture, becomes simply creative imagination, and ultimately defends itself against God’s word. They are not alternative readings, but brand new stories that arrogantly dismiss the original. Many Christians see God at the heart of scripture, not metaphor and language, so they do not feel free to change the biblical language at will. The teachers were incredulous to hear that some write theology in this way and every one of them opposed this practice of rewriting scripture. They see the gospel message of salvation, when believed, as the ultimate emancipatory story, so they are opposed to any rewriting of the scripture that interferes with or lessens its efficacy. When readers ignore the integrity of the bible and write counter constructions to disturb its textual norms teachers viewed this as arrogant.

Critical Literacy language Marginalizes

Many scholars raised the concern that critical literacy will not achieve emancipatory results if it engages in poststructuralist language. They claim that it is oftentimes elitist, exclusionary, and designed to overwhelm and confute, especially in its construction of neologisms. They charge poststructuralists with writing incomprehensively and with establishing small intellectual elites that use important sounding rhetoric while marginalizing the outsiders. Some teachers agreed that this occurred in critical literacy, explaining that students are often marginalized, and teachers isolated by critical literacy terminology although others said that the language was manageable, and certainly useful, once understood. The suggestion was made that the major psychological appeal of deconstructionist language is that it provides a perceived credibility in

subject English and that while this might be deeply gratifying for the initiated, it is marginalizing, ironically I might add, for the Other.

Truth and Meaning

I noticed that it was only after the interviews that teachers began to say that Christian schools need to make the assumed philosophical positions in critical literacy clear. I suspect that this is because in our discussions in the context of the interviews, and in their immersion into these new discourses, they began to formulate a clearer theoretical position, rather than just the vague sense of unease that was anecdotally expressed to me at the beginning of the research. Early in the interviews the teachers expressed a generalized concern that critical literacy promoted the view that truth does not exist, although a good number were not able to explain exactly how they thought that was achieved. I also observed that the stronger the tertiary background in critical literacy, the more likely they were to construe it as both opposed to truth and anti-foundational. Those without any background in critical literacy were more able to engage with practical critical exercises that created a break between the word and the world without really being concerned about the implications for meaning and reference or for wider truth concerns.

Revelation

The support materials present truth claims as social constructions to serve those in power and therefore the role of the English teacher is to deconstruct these constructs in order to liberate society, especially the oppressed and powerless. The teacher interviews consistently demonstrate that Christians do not believe that the Christian gospel is oppressive or that it is a socially constructed truth. They present it as objectively, historically and universally free and something that, when believed, sets sinners free. The teachers did not surrender the claim that the gospel is universally true and objectively established, even given their awareness that this conviction is deeply offensive to the postmodern world view. The teachers were unaware of the deconstructionist subjection of the bible to radical reinterpretation because of political or ideological bias, however they were, with one exception, not prepared to subject the bible to deconstruction and the reason for this is that they all said that divine revelation came from the scriptures even though they recognised that revelation itself would be written off as another projection of oppressive power.

Derrida's alterity/Christian Love

The literature and the interview transcripts also revealed a noticeable correspondence between Derrida's concern for the other and the Christian call to love ones neighbour. However the teachers did not articulate critical literacy's reading for absence as being in any way Derridean, because they were not aware of the particulars of his thinking. Consequently, even though the literature evidenced this comparison, and the support materials definitely substantiated

Derrida's alterity in their retrieval of the textually marginalized, I was unable to explore this very clear connection any further because they did not associate foregrounding the marginalized with Derrida's deconstruction.

Presence and Meaning

Rather than viewing deconstruction's rejection of realism as liberating, many Christian scholars construe it as an attack on the very foundation of Christianity with some calling deconstruction a denial of the incarnation. The Christian teachers however did not articulate awareness of this debate and they did not situate their critical practices within the wider philosophical debates about presence, realism and antirealism. The debates about whether metaphysical realism and logocentrism are crucial to Christian faith, or whether the logos can be discarded in favour of the trace, were certainly not part of the teachers' understanding of critical literacy. Although many teachers worked to actively engage with seeking out the silenced voices, because they saw value in making space for otherness to speak, when it came to establishing meaning (s) for that text, they wanted to concentrate on what was there in the text, not what was absent. Working with absences was construed as play to a certain extent, but reading for meaning (s) required attention to the presence of words in the text. They did insist that with respect to the scripture there is a transcendent and authenticating presence behind the language. They unanimously posited the bible as having its own sovereignty, explaining that God's presence is behind the word, speaking through it, in revelation to the reader. If readers come to think that meaning is not there in the text, but brought to it by the reader the text itself loses any significance or claim on the reader. While deconstructionists deny presence, and pay attention to absence, many others insist that the restoration of the marginalised is better served by paying attention to presence.

Revival of Author

The complex debate in the literature about authorial intent and its bearing on textual meaning indicates that many are not prepared to completely discard the author's intention as a metaphysical anchor for meaning. While many of the support materials took up the death of the author, others insisted that it is not a given, and it is still a contested space. Teachers retained the notion that an author's work is to some extent original and not just discourses speaking through them, even if textual subjectification happens to a limited extent. They were not prepared to discard the presence of the speaker in the speech act. This I believe is in line with their notion of the self. They still hold to a notion of presence both in the self, in texts and in the author. While the intentions of an author might not be the only home of meaning, the teachers insisted that it is still significant. For them, it was a given that an author has moral rights and that a reader must respect them. Every teacher said that to take the bible as God's word, one cannot jettison authorial intention because God stands behind and accompanies His word. For the scripture to function authoritatively in the disciple's life it must originate from the authority

of the divine author. They definitely posited transcendence in reading where they read and do find something other than themselves. The denial of transcendence implicit in poststructuralism is not something that the teachers embraced.

Possible Consequences of Critical Approaches

One of the stated intentions of this project was to ascertain what kinds of ‘truths’ are produced in critical literacy and through what technologies. When teachers work with the practical tools of critical reading such as gaps and silences, binaries, intertextuality and marginalisation they are actually engaged in producing truths that impinge on notions of self, emancipation and truth and meaning. It is premised on the view that critical approaches to literature will have long term affects so, as educators, we are beholden to examine what is lost as well as what is gained in its appropriation.

Poststructuralist Self / Limiting?

The literature demonstrated that some Christian scholars posit a harmful legacy following from poststructuralist conceptions of self. I anticipated this problematic as a very fruitful area of tension, and my intention was to explore these notions further in the teacher interviews. The scholarly claims made are that the poststructuralist construal of a free floating lack of fixed identity might lead to diminishment of human being, not liberation, or true freedom. When deconstruction calls into questions internal foundations of identity, this could aid in promoting uncertainty and meaningless, lead to a radical sense of disconnection, produce detrimental side effects on a person’s sense of agency, leave humanity bereft of origin and purpose and expedite adverse effects on a person’s sense of moral responsibility and basis for ethics. Many Christians insist that people cannot survive without definitive clarity on questions of self. I was interested to tease out these notions in the interviews, only to find that poststructuralist notions of self in critical literacy were not apparent for the teachers. I was unable to develop these ideas any further in the interviews without driving my own agendas.

Evasion of Textual Authority / Emancipatory?

The evasion of authority implicit in deconstruction has important implications with respect to the bible because multiple interpretations or the notion of infinite signification could simply be an excuse to avoid the claims that Christ makes on humanity. The teachers pointed out that because critical literacy liberates the reader from the text, places authority in the reader, and rejects the notion of textual truth, biblical authority could be undermined and, for them, that is not liberating or advisable. The teachers claim that it is a very limited emancipation if all that happens in critical literacy is that the reader is liberated from the authority of the text and what is present in the text to make a claim on their life. Although there was much variation in the debate about the value of multiple interpretations of the scripture many of the teachers felt that it might not be productive of

true freedom if it simply led to a loss of meaning. Every teacher bar one argued that the bible should not be deconstructed; claiming that the bible critiques humanity while also declaring the gospel of salvation so if it is read suspiciously, this could be missed to the reader's detriment. They, along with a number of scholars, challenge the aspirations of limitlessness implicit in deconstructive thought and insist that liberation from all restriction and restraint in the name of human freedom is not necessarily productive. This vision of liberation frees the reader from tradition, truth and authority but fails to free the reader from themselves.

Epistemological Privilege / Self Justification

Many Christians claimed that granting epistemological privilege to the marginalised when reading the scripture, or any text for that matter, is problematic because it simply fosters self justification. The teachers insisted that critical literacy carries its own exclusions, ruling regimes of thought and essentialisms that often were oppressive. In both the secular and Christian literature, and also the interviews, many charged critical literacy with carrying its own exclusions and with being closed to multiple theoretical reflections. Critical approaches valorise Feminist, Marxist, gay and lesbian, ethnic and post-colonial readings, and they have become the new ruling orthodoxy. Teachers complained that academic success in senior English was highly dependent on trotting out critical literacy's trilogy of oppressions. If openness to difference is truly going to serve emancipatory goals then educators need to expose the fact that critical literacy often works to shut off theoretical reflection, legitimate learned responses and provide a mouthpiece for the reader's own politics. One who reads this way is nowhere near flexible enough to be critical and if reading for specific oppressions marginalizes the themes in the text, this could well be to the reader's detriment, especially when a text could lead a person into new places of freedom.

Indeterminate Meaning Emancipatory?

Not only do both Christian and secular literary theorists now raise doubts about the emancipatory possibilities in critical literacy, many suggest that the consequences of critical reading practices might not be what its enthusiasts imagined. Many Christian scholars insist that if we take up the notion of freeplay of the sign, language is deprived of any authentic metaphysical, epistemological or moral consequence. There will be a breakdown in confidence of communication, both written and verbal, and it will lead to an inflexible scepticism, where truth claims, and universal claims, lose their significance. They suggest that the rights and voice of the other is protected more responsibly when the reader accepts that there are limits to the interpretative possibilities. They ask whether the loss of definitive meaning, perpetuated within the notion of infinite signification, is really productive towards human freedom and flourishing.

One crucial issue that arose in the course of this project was that the support texts taught the notion of multiple interpretations but did not posit anything which would limit them. The

teachers pointed out this silence and they explained that there was much about the text, including the words on the page, which did limit signification. While the teachers expressed some sympathies with why the signifying power of a text ought to be kept open, especially when it opened space for the marginalised, they still advocated a cessation of interpretation at some point. If the text or the language itself does not impinge on the reader's interpretations, then anything is possible and that is meaningless in the end. The teachers insisted that there is something liberating about getting to the truth of a text, that there are some better interpretations than others, that unlimited interpretation demeans textual authority and that the reader is only liberated from the authority of the text. They still posit a common consensus of interpretation on many signifiers and texts, and they insist that if interpretive multiplicity leads to a refusal to fix meaning, this might not be liberating. While deconstructionists view indeterminacy of meaning as emancipatory, in that it makes space for otherness to speak, many others insist that we can go at least some way to establishing an adequately fixed meaning and that liberation is more properly served by doing so.

It is interesting to note here that while the teachers taught critical reading practices of reading for absence and marginality, reading for intertextuality and polysemy and breaking down a sign into its constituent connotation and denotation, they not envisage themselves to be establishing or furthering notions of indeterminacy. I initially suspected that the reason they thought truth was disparaged in critical literacy was because of the indeterminacy in deconstruction. They did not make that connection. However they did make the general point that when deconstructions scepticism towards language becomes scepticism towards meaning, then it is problematic. They resisted categorically any notion that linked indeterminate meaning with liberation. In direct opposition to the deconstructionists, they did not view 'correct interpretation' as totalitarian. They were not prepared to take up infinite signification and they saw arrival at truth to be freeing, as opposed to its constant deferral.

Death of Author / Interpretive Violence?

While poststructuralist's regard any reliance on authorial intention to determine meaning as authoritarian, the teachers thought that discarding the author could actually lead to a politics of authoritarianism. If the text is anchored nowhere in terms of meaning, and readers can ignore authorial intent, that could lead to its own violent totality where the reader simply stamps the text with their own politics. They are accountable to nothing, not the words on the page, or the intention of the author who chose those particular words and not others. A number expressed concern that a complete disregard of the author's intention, even given that it is difficult to know absolutely, could lead to an evasion of textual authority and an ethical vacuum where everything is permitted. Not one teacher felt that deconstruction of the author was in any way emancipatory. They supported Vanhoozer's (1998) insistence that the death of the author might not be a

liberating hermeneutical event, and many pointed out that to discard the authorial intention with some texts could be simply dangerous. Every teacher supported the view raised in the literature (Jeanrond, 1991; Vanhoozer, 1998) that one must determine what “kind of communicative act” the text is, so that the reading response will be ethical and fitting. The reader will respond differently to an advertisement as opposed to a legal document or a medical procedure.

Denial of Presence

Numerous concerns were raised about the long term consequences of deconstructions denial of presence. Some insist that it results in a rupture between the word and the world, a disdain for textual accountability and a belief that reality is not accessible. An epistemology that rejects any sort of realism will leave a legacy of enervating solipsism, and it is simply not responsible to deny objective truth, or to make the human knower the arbiter of reality. Readings, based on the reader’s own extra-textual discursive history, undermine what is in the text, dissipate the text’s authority, degrade the text’s proper significance and weaken the reader’s ability to reach any ultimate meaning. Rather than promote justice, this could accelerate indifference to the world and the other. Some fear that what deconstruction really proffers humanity is a gnawing lack of significance with respect to self, texts, authors and truth. Some teachers felt that critical literacy encouraged a detrimental emphasis on the self, particularly in its marginalization of presence in texts, and its valorization of the reader in the determination of meaning. The teachers still felt it was important, when interpreting, to look at what was *in* the text and they lament that now, when a text is read, it is only a political task of imbedding the reader’s own discursive history. They express apprehension that in reading for absence something crucial might be missed, in that it bypasses the author’s intention and the crux of what the text is about. To fill absences with one’s own politics creates a situation where the reader misses the emancipatory possibilities in the text itself. Others raised the salient question of who makes the decision about what fills the absent spaces, are these spaces simply filled with the new dominating orthodoxies? Many insist that it is an error to assume that the existence of textual gaps and silences necessarily evidences tacit acceptance of the status quo. Some Christian scholars suggest that reading in such a way that one *creates* rather than *discovers* meaning actually seems more in line with a will to power, precisely what the deconstructionists seek to avoid. When a reader accepts that there is a presence there in the text to which they are responsible it is more likely that they will respect the rights of the text and the author and allow the text to make its claim on them.

Critical Literacy / Default Distrust / Limiting

In both the literature and the teacher interviews concern is raised that critical literacy, particularly in its deconstructive thrust, leads to a default distrust of language. Teachers ask

what the material effects might be if we teach a generation of students to approach texts with suspicion and distrust. Teachers insist, and they are the ones that see these theories at work in the classroom, that deconstruction can be alarming for students because it frustrates the referential nature of language and therefore readers become completely disillusioned with reading. They posit the critical predilection for deferral of meaning and rejection of totalised conclusions as psychologically, intellectually and spiritually harmful. Students lose confidence that they can find anything of deep significance in the text. They raise concerns that we might be in danger of creating a generation of cynics who demystify everything and are unable to sustain an argument from a close reading of what is *in* the text. Both the literature and the teachers raised concerns that a generalized suspicious hermeneutic might encourage increased suspicion and defiance towards the scripture. Many said this hermeneutic is in tension with a Christian view where disciples' are called to hear the word and *do* it. That involves trust that God has spoken through the scripture to the disciple/reader. All the teachers commented that it was in knowing Christ, and in being obedient to His word, that they experienced freedom. They do not construe ideological reading of the scripture as emancipatory if it thwarts transcendence and negates an encounter with Christ.

Some teachers however saw the suspicious attitude to texts as an important part of *all* Christian reading because readers' need to actively discern the ideologies underlying all cultural texts, so they are not coopted by the culture. This suspicion is not premised on a desire to be free from any textual constraint, which I suspect is the Foucauldian idea, but to be transformed, not to the culture, but to the Word of God. The difference that exists for the Christian teachers, as opposed to those committed to a secular critical approach, is that most Christian readers use the bible as a plumb line for deciding whether textual representations about God, humanity and the world are correct or not. Every interviewed teacher acknowledged this.

Further Avenues of Research?

This project highlights the existence of some measure of tension for Christian teachers of critical literacy but it further suggests that people of other faiths, particularly those who adhere to absolute truths and scriptural authority and teleology might also experience some apprehension. A multi faith examination of this issue could render very useful and fascinating data which might be especially helpful for teachers of other faiths to locate themselves in theoretical spaces where they find their voices marginalised. An examination of race and gender specificities might also be interesting to explore here as well. It is also apparent to me from the experience of the interviews that further studies might benefit from more extended interviews. There was a complexity and depth that I was aware of, and that we touched on in the interviews, but I feel I did not mine it sufficiently, in an effort to broadly flag broadly the type of tensions that the interface of Christian faith, Queensland English and critical literacy produce. This study also points to the need for a

larger scale study, both within and beyond Queensland, and beyond the specifics of the Senior English syllabus, to address relations between faith and ‘contemporary culture’ more broadly. It might also be important, given the fact that worldviews or visions of life and reality are determinate of ideas values and actions, that the intellectual structure and epistemic sources that support critical literacy are more systematically and thoroughly examined. Surely an archaeological and genealogical analysis of the origin and content of such systems will also reveal their true nature and how they have functioned and are functioning socially in the shaping of the self and in the fundamental categories of human experience.

My own Struggles

I experienced a degree of tentativeness in the initial interviews because, having been immersed in the poststructuralist scepticism of language in earlier studies, I was certainly aware of the ambiguities and limitations of language. This led to a degree of epistemological angst both in the designing of interview questions and in the reading of transcripts. I became painfully aware of the Derridean notion that we push to the margins that which does not fit so we can establish centred positions. As I explained in chapter 2, I was deeply self conscious of this urge to ask questions that might produce what I was looking for and also the desire to read transcripts in such a way that I found what I want. However I worked hard not to do this because to constrain the project in a way that only supported my preconceived views would have denied their silences, their resistances and their differences, a right to ‘speak’.

I found that ‘I’ personally was a site of intense struggle as I grappled with poststructuralism’s dismissal of Christian teleology as too totalising. While I appreciated the Christian thinkers who saw a dark side to absolute truth, I was not prepared to move to the other end of the spectrum and embrace infinite signification. There had to be something in between, or somewhere along that spectrum between an irreducible plurality and endless play of signifiers and a firm, absolute and nailed down centre. I felt this tension throughout the entire project. While I saw the need for a more self conscious and less arrogant approach to language and reference, and while I was able to embrace a degree of play and ambiguity in language, I could not embrace the notion of *infinite* signification. Throughout this project, and in particular, in response to poststructuralist ideas, I was encouraged by a Christian teleology that speaks of the possibility of fulfilment both spiritually and linguistically (Ringer, 2003). I also came to see that while it certainly requires faith to believe Marxist, poststructuralist or Christian views about the world and reality, I ground my belief in Christ because of presence; His presence in my life, through regeneration and ongoing revelation and impartation.

The Practical Implication of this Work for Christian Schools

A number of themes emerged in this project that I feel work as a counter to what at times can be the more negative aspects of critical literacy. I draw from the practical implications of this project and make suggestions for Christian schools to consider in their curriculum and work unit development and also in the foundational emphases of the school.

Continue to Examine Underlying Theories

Christian schools need to examine the theories underpinning the literary theories that dominate subject English. They do not come without theological import, and they will have materials effects, even if teachers are not clearly aware of what these effects are. Educators need to assess what is lost as well as what is gained. This is important work for the English educator given that the assumptions behind critical literacy will have their own constitutive effects. Although I often point out that teachers were not able to articulate exactly what the underpinning theories behind subject English were, they were still affected by them and concerned enough about these ideas (it was this concern that originally catalysed the project) that they suggested these needed to be made explicit to students. Where these ideas were actually apparent to the teachers in their critical practices they did not receive the embedded philosophical /theological implications without some resistance. The *possibility* of resistance needs to be presented in professional development and in internal work unit development so that the philosophical ideas that are instantiated in syllabus documents are not simply naturalized and taken up as a given. These need to be made explicit so that Christian educators can decide where they stand on them. One thing that was apparent in the interviews was that the more professional development and university access to these theories a teacher had, the more concerned they were about the effects of a sustained critical approach to reading and the corollary was true also that the less exposure, the less concerned they were about its genealogy or its effects.

Teach the Scriptures

It is crucial for Christian schools to teach the scripture. The number of times that teachers drew from biblical doctrine, themes and narratives to counter aspects of Marxist and poststructuralist ideas of self, emancipation and truth /meaning points to the fact that Christians construe biblical truth as authoritative. In fact the bible was the only text that was presented as being authoritative in the life of a believer. If indeed, as various theorists suggest, “poststructuralist thinking now functions much like a worldview” (Erickson, 2001, p. 182), that poststructuralism has gone “beyond aesthetics and philosophy to the very texture of everyday life” (Fish, 1994, pp. 54-55) and now “reached the streets” (Meek, 2003, p. 7) then it is crucial that Christian schools teach from biblical perspectives to counter domestication and accommodation to these notions. Christian faith has always been forged in the shadow of empire (Walsh, 2001) and

while empires maintain their sovereignty by monopolizing markets, power and political and military structures they also get established by monopolizing the imaginations of their subjects. Christian schools need to remember that they are people in refusal of oppressive empires, including those of the mind. This is fundamental, because if orthodoxies produced via various literary theories have now reached ‘empire status’ (Patai & Corral, 2005), and if these orthodoxies continue to proffer metaphysical absence and focused undecideability as a means to liberation, then Christian schools must be very clear about their own transformational view of education, that it is grounded in a biblical worldview that proffers presence in the incarnation and therefore limits to significations. In the particular case of critical literacy this project points to the need to teach biblical notions about self, emancipation and truth/meaning. If, as it appears in Ephesians, it is the only defensive weapon in the Christian arsenal, then it needs to be read, laid up on hearts, meditated upon and used in the battle of ideas. A biblical imagination must be formed. Ideas do have consequences and the only grounding that a Christian has to counter these ideas is one that is grounded in the scriptures.

Regard Textual Discipline Positively

The teachers articulated textual discipline positively, with respect to the scriptures, and explained that this must be made evident to Christian students as they interface with critical approaches that tend to evade textual authority. This was an important point that arose in both the literature and the interviews that Christians do not construe all textual formation and discipline negatively. A number of Christian scholars pointed out that the critical practice of exposing institutional ideologies in texts is only a liberating insight if you want to shun the text’s authority to make a claim on your life. The teachers had not taken up the liberal notion of self as an autonomous agent who must resist any form of control. They pointed out that there is a moral relation between the disciple and the biblical text, that scriptural reading is *meant* to shape the disciple’s mind and heart, and that biblical reading is meant to be a transformative spiritual discipline. It is important therefore for Christian schools to uphold the value and significance of the bible as authoritative for the Christian because many believe that a reader can come to a saving faith in Christ through reading it; what they see as the ultimate and most primal emancipation.

Revive the Wonder and Healing of Language

Language and texts are more than something that just seduces and manipulates and Christian schools should confidently present the idea to students that language also brings healing, hope and love as a counter to the hermeneutic of suspicion embedded in critical literacy. The teachers certainly posit the scripture in particular, as a text where they find faith, hope and love. They also posit language as a gift from God, and they call teachers to use this gift responsibly. They view words as important, not just instrumentally but also metaphysically, not just for their

power and effect on people, but because of their source and foundation. For Christians a word was the origin of the world, (In the beginning was the Word... and God said) so the teachers decry a reading strategy that produces so much scepticism that readers come to disbelieve everything and that destroys any conviction about what can be known. They certainly see it as detrimental to construe words, language and texts as the enemy. Christian schools could be part of a necessary larger move to liberate texts from the political theoreticians so that they are able to speak. Texts need to be able to say what they want to say unhampered by the ruling political orthodoxies of the day. Yes the reader must exercise caution over the manipulative capacity of texts and their ability of the text to serve dominating political interests. This is an essential part of learning to read in a mature manner. However there are other positive aspects of words, texts and language which Christian schools must redeem. If we recall Lewis's (1961) test for the measure of a great book as one that elicits great reading, and great reading as reading that conjures up great wonder, joy and glory, we might as Christian educators, want to emphasise the beauty of language instead of concentrating on the suspicion, caution and dead ends that deconstructive reading often produces.

Although Christian teachers applaud some aspects of critical literacy, tension arose for them particularly with its poststructuralist lineage. Teachers resisted theories that conflicted with their already held strong views, even when these ideas are mandated in curriculum documents or sustained in the support texts. This was acutely evident where the teacher's thoughts were tempered and constrained by biblical insights. Even though the teachers did not articulate a deep knowledge of the philosophical commitments behind critical literacy, or any sense that they were "anti-theologies in disguise" (Vanhoozer, 1997, p. 133), they were concerned that critical reading degraded notions of truth and they were reticent to sink all reading into political oppression and resistance. They strongly held to the notion of presence in self, texts and author and they maintained an interest in truth, value and reference. They preserved a respect for the primacy of the texts over all theorising and advocated a degree of hermeneutical humility in all reading. This approach to text and language, sits much easier with the Christian disciple who is called to a life of faith, hope and love, than the suspicion distrust, and perhaps even despair, that can be embroiled in deconstructive reading.

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