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Autobiography as a way of knowing: A student-centered curriculum model using Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Williamson, Marie Solomon, Ed.D.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1987

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A WAY OF KNOWING: A STUDENT-CENTERED CURRICULUM MODEL USING MAYA ANGELOU'S I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS

by

Marie S. Williamson

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
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Approved by

Elizabeth A. Bowles
Dissertation Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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WILLIAMSON, MARIE SOLOMON, Ed.D. Autobiography as a Way of Knowing: A Student-Centered Curriculum Model Using Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. (1987) Directed by Dr. Elisabeth A. Bowles. 146 pp.

The major purpose of this dissertation is the construction of a curriculum model for the teaching of autobiography. The study is based on the contention that learning is rendered more meaningful when instructional practices attend to both the cognitive and affective development of the student. It offers a methodology which utilizes the personal experience of the learner while teaching a traditional discipline.

Chapter One establishes a need for student-centered curricula and suggests autobiography as a viable vehicle for exposing students to conventional subject matter and allowing them to explore their own existence at the same time.

Chapter Two investigates the genre in terms of definition, structure, and accessibility. This section presents as a basis for a pedagogical model the theories of Susanna Egan, who recognizes and explains four fictive patterns that characterize autobiography; Janet Varner Gunn, who contends that an interpretive understanding of autobiography may be realized through the processes of poetics and hermeneutics; and William Pinar, whose currere requires consideration of the learner's personal biography in a search for self-enlightenment. Chapter Two also introduces the five-volume autobiography of Maya Angelou

as examples of texts appropriate for application of the model.

Chapter Three explains the design of the model which has three parts. Stage I utilizes poetics in an effort for perceptual understanding; Stage II employs hermeneutics in an attempt to achieve interpretive understanding; and Stage III involves currere as the reader searches for personal significance among the meanings of the text. Structurally, the model derives from ideas advanced by Hans Robert Jauss in Toward an Aesthetic of Reception.

Chapter Four applies the procedures of the model to I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, the first volume of Maya Angelou's autobiography. Stage I takes the form of a hypothetical teacher-student dialogue which recognizes the generic properties of the work; Stage II presents an interpretation of the text by means of an expository discourse; Stage III demonstrates the ultimate actualization of meaning that is achieved when textual meaning translates into personal significance. This stage is in the form of autobiographical essays written by the "student" reader.

Chapter Five concludes the study with observations concerning the overall experience of designing and applying the model and offers suggestions for effective implementation of the paradigm.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although this dissertation bears my name as author, it could not have materialized without the influence and support of more people than can be named here. I must give credit to those instructors over a life-time of schooling whose love for academia I have found contagious; and I would be remiss to ignore the impact on my career of the hundreds of students who through the years have looked to me for guidance and instruction, and whose expectations of me and curiosities about the world never allowed my inquisitiveness to stand still. There are persons, however, whose support, guidance, and help during this project I feel compelled to acknowledge specifically. I am indebted to the following people, and to them I say thank you:

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Cecyle--whose interest, concern, and friendship were a sustaining force.

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My parents, sisters, and brothers--who started me on this journey long ago.

Lawrence, Marc, and Michael--who anticipated the completion of this paper impatiently but proudly.

Curtis--who has done more than I can or dare express.

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To the memory of . . .

John, our beloved brother.

"There was a man sent from God,

whose name was John" (John 1:6).

Mrs. Doretha Henderson Black

whose words--"I know you can do it."--

are a challenge to me still.

> The fact that one can reflect and understand a matter that was misunderstood does not imply that one is understanding nothing, rather it suggests a certain evolution of one's powers of understanding. This evolution can be conceptualized as a slow, continual emergence from reality, a transcendence of self from circumstances. This process is tantamount to what is called humanization, and it is precisely that, a becoming of what we are, a bringing out of what is there but obscured if not buried by conditioning. That sense of bringing out of course recalls another term: <u>education</u>. (Pinar, 1975, p. 394)

INTRODUCTION

How can the bird that is born for joy
   Sit in a cage and sing?
How can a child, when fears annoy,
   But droop his tender wing
And forget his youthful spring?

O! father & mother, if buds are nip'd
   And blossoms blown away
And if the tender plants are strip'd
   Of their joy in the springing day,
By sorrow and care's dismay,

How shall the summer arise in joy,
   Or the summer fruits appear?
Or how shall we gather what griefs destroy,
   Or bless the mellowing year
When the blasts of winter appear?
(from "The Schoolboy" by William Blake, printed in Perkins, 1967, p. 63)

Maintaining a wholesome, satisfying, and successful existence can be challenging and difficult for young people in today's world. Even the well-adjusted and self-assured who are intellectually and psychologically mature encounter a certain amount of stress as they make daily commitments and decisions about their lives. For those who know the self-doubt and fears that accompany real or imagined inadequacies of mind and spirit, the burdens of independent thought and action are even more taxing. Yet those who escape altogether the problems that attend decision-making are not to be envied, for they are the ones who relinquish the right to help shape their own destinies. They make no

choices because they have come to believe either that they should not or that they cannot or that what they think will make no real difference. Young people in every category--from those that experience a minimum amount of stress as they try to cope, to those who move unresistingly with the flow of things--can benefit from the sense of self-worth that comes with heightened self-consciousness.

Responsibilities for the affective aspects of child development have been bandied between home and school with the result that in many instances little deliberate attention is paid to the emotional well-being of the young in our society. Schools can address this problem by presenting prescribed curricula in a manner that considers the idiosyncracies and utilizes the personal experiences of the learner. The language arts classroom seems an ideal setting for the creation of situations that allow students to get in touch with their feelings and gain a sense of who they really are while learning established subject matter. The ultimate purpose of this project is to suggest a way to create such a situation. Generally, I am looking for a means to offer regular, approved subject matter using a methodology that will result in the student's possessing enlarged knowledge of the discipline and of the self. Specifically, I am seeking a way to interpret literature

based on a humanistic approach which validates the learner's experience while recognizing built-in textual constraints that prevent the dangers of extreme relativism and solipsism. My investigation follows the organizational pattern detailed below.

Chapter One presents critical assessments of the schools as influences on the present and future circumstances of young people. With the intention of establishing a need for the present study, I confine my observations to those relevant areas that demonstrate room for improvement. As a graduate of and veteran teacher within the public schools, I can attest to the many positive aspects of the American educational system, but to do so in this context will defeat more than serve my purpose. I offer these criticisms in the same spirit that a concerned parent or teacher addresses the weaknesses of his or her charges. The first chapter ends with a plea for increased humanistic educational practices, offers as a solution relevant student-centered curricula, and suggests the study of autobiography as one means to this end.

Chapter Two, an investigation of autobiography as a possible vehicle for a student-centered approach to teaching literature, begins with an overview of the discipline in terms of definition, which includes possible forms it may

take and its status as genre. This chapter also offers motivations for the existence of the genre. Definitions include those from George Mish (1951), "chief historian of the subject" (Fleishman, 1983, p. 1), James Olney (1972), who recognizes "the importance of metaphoric language in autobiographical self-creation" (Fleishman, p. 25), and Roy Pascal, whose book Design and Truth in Autobiography "moves to redefine the terms of its title by replacing the familiar correspondence norms of truth with those of coherence" (Fleishman, p. 11).

A part of Chapter Two deals with the structural content of autobiography and presents the theory set forth by Susanna Egan (1984) who, believing that "archetypal forms serve as efficient purveyors of personal meaning" (p. ix), posits four "dominant narrative patterns that are common in autobiography" (p. 3). In Chapter Four, Egan's theory is supplemented by the thoughts of other writers who share her thesis.

A further subdivision of Chapter Two explicates the hypothesis of Janet Varner Gunn (1982) who speaks of an autobiographical situation comprising three moments: impulse, perspective, and response. Gunn divides the response component into two processes, poetics and hermeneutics. In this section I explain all three aspects

of the autobiographical situation for the sake of continuity even though the eventual model which is the purpose of this project explicitly utilizes only the response moment.

The last part of Chapter Two suggests the construction of an instructional model for teaching autobiography which incorporates ideas presented earlier and offers the several volumes of Maya Angelou's autobiography as prototypes suited to application of the model.

My research deliberately avoids the fecund area of critical theory concerning autobiography, partly because of its magnitude, but mainly because it seems irrelevant to this study.

The next two chapters present the three-stage model, first abstractly through explanation in Chapter Three, then concretely through application in Chapter Four. Stage I aims to understand the literary text as genre; Stage II seeks to derive meaning from the text; and Stage III attempts to translate the discovered meanings from the previous stage into personal significance for the reader. Theoretically, the model involves the concepts of poetics in Stage I, hermeneutics in Stage II, and <u>currere</u> in Stage III. These concepts are explained as they appear within the essay; however, additional delineations of these and other terms are included at the end of this section to clarify their use further.

The design of the model presented in Chapter Three evolved from an extensive search that ended somewhat ironically. The poetics and hermeneutics of Gunn's bipartite autobiographical response gave initial insight into the possibility of a paradigm sufficient to my requirements. Poetics, concerned with the general principles and organizing features which produce the text, assures built-in constraints that limit the possibilities of pluralism; while hermeneutics, necessitating involvement of individual understanding, admits the relevance of the reader's experience. Both poetics and hermeneutics seem compatible to the processes that constitute currere whose objective is heightened self-awareness. How could I synthesize these three disparate elements into a working, successful unity? Further investigations into the theories of poetics and hermeneutics led eventually to Hans Robert Jauss (1982) whose Toward an Aesthetic of Reception contains a chapter in which he performs a "hermeneutic experiment," applying the theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer "that the hermeneutic process is to be conceived as a unity of the three moments of understanding (intelligere), interpretation (interpretare), and application (applicare)" (p. 139). Jauss's experiment provided for my abstract and seemingly untenable notions of a solidifying anchor as his study became

a model for my model, with the three-step procedure as a major similarity between the two. While my design is derivative, several modifications were made to Jauss's example, and the applications that form the third part of each are entirely different. Jauss's process has one theoretical basis; my procedures are founded on three concepts. Jauss applies his formulae to "Spleen," a poem by Baudelaire; my application is to I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, the first book of Maya Angelou's five-volume autobiography. My search for a model that began in skepticism was in the end unexpectedly and pleasantly fruitful.

Chapter Four tests the model. Stage I examines the book's structure by means of a hypothetical teacher-student dialogue which explains concepts, establishes expectations, and reveals possible discoveries. Stage II, abandoning the dialogue of the first step, unravels meaning in a discourse that encompasses discussion and application of relevant principles. Stage III translates textual meaning into personal significance as I, in the role of informed student, apply the method of currere in search of self-knowledge.

Chapter Five looks back at the procedures of the previous two chapters critically, noting my personal

impressions of the experiences and offering suggestions for implementation of the model.

It is expedient at this point to comment on the terminology I have used so far and that appears in the succeeding chapters. I offer Tzvetan Todorov's elaborations of the concepts of genre, interpretation, and poetics because the explanations he gives in Introduction to Poetics seem to parallel Gunn's apparent use of the terms and inform my comprehension of them. I use "genre" and "type" interchangeably. Todorov makes a distinction between the two which for my purpose is insignificant. In his thought "type" is the broad term which encompasses the second, narrower one. I include only his explanation for genre here.

> In every period, a certain number of literary types become so familiar to the public that the public uses them as keys (in the musical sense) for the interpretation of works; here the genre becomes, according to an expression of Hans Robert Jauss, a "horizon of expectation." The writer in his turn internalizes this expectation; the genre becomes for him a "model of writing." In other words, the genre is a type that has had a concrete historical existence, that has participated in the literary system of a period. (Todorov, 1981, p. 62)

> Interpretation . . . is defined . . . by its aim, which is to name the meaning of the text examined. (Todorov, pp. 3-4)

> In contradistinction to the interpretation of particular works, [poetics] does not seek to name meaning, but aims at knowledge of the general laws that preside over the birth of each work. . . . It is not the literary work itself that is the object of

> poetics: what poetics questions are the properties of that particular discourse that is literary discourse. Each work is therefore regarded only as the manifestation of an abstract and general structure, of which it is but one of the possible realizations. (Todorov, pp. 6-7)

The terms "hermeneutic" and "hermeneutics" appear in several contexts throughout the latter chapters of this paper. In expressions such as "hermeneutic experience," "hermeneutic experiment," and "hermeneutic understanding," the word is used in its broad sense as applicable to any situation which involves interpretive effort to acquire meaning. "Hermeneutics" (with the "s") refers to the methodology of interpretation of texts. "Gadamer's hermeneutics" makes reference to the specific philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose Truth and Method is internationally recognized as one of the most important contributions to philosophical hermeneutics. I have included explanations of Gadamer's theory in the appropriate contexts within the essay.

> Currere is a research method proposed by William Pinar
>
> that requires autobiography, a review of the subject's educational experience; a phenomenological description of the subject's present situation, his historical, social, physical life-world; and a record of the subject's response, associations and intellections, to a literary work. (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. 33)

My use of the concept is faithful to this description.

Other terms that may warrant elucidation are "text," "work," "meaning," and "significance." "Text" and "work" both refer to a literary composition, an aesthetic object. The distinction between "meaning" and "significance" as I use them is this: meaning is that which is represented by the signs of a text; significance is the relationship between that meaning and a person or something outside the text.

PROLOGUE

Epiphany

With your indulgence, I shall begin this essay with a little story. Perhaps I shouldn't use the word "little" because it is my story, and all my life I have tried to fight against things that diminish me. Even before I knew what I was doing. And now as I look back, I can understand to a degree why I made the choices I did, why I formed some of the habits I have, and even why I so much enjoy reading the poetry that seems to allow a freedom of spirit that I feel life has denied me in body, action, and choice.

Growing up in a neighborhood where whites were rarely seen, I only knew that as a colored girl I was not as good for some reason as a white girl. Nobody ever said that to me, but back then it was a given. Something in the air, in the way things were, just said it. If you look a little like them you are luckier than those who look less like them. If you speak correctly, you are trying to talk like them. If you make good grades in school, you are extraordinary, not like the average Negro. You are lucky if your folks work for some of them who will give you their old, no-longer-wanted clothes; and if one of them happens to smile on you, you are blessed!

These thoughts were embedded, and even before someone or something shook them awake, the sleeping feelings of resentment were there, unrecognized, unacknowledged. I know it now even though I don't remember having strong convictions one way or the other as a child. I guess I just supposed we'd always live in two separate worlds: I and mine on one side of town, and they and theirs on the other side of town. Our only meetings would occur when we'd both go into town on Saturdays to shop at their stores--I, riding a bus that stopped just on the edge of town to let me off in front of the black-owned shoe shop, drug store, and barber shop, and then walking the long block to get to Sears, Woolworths or Thalhimers; and they, coming from the opposite direction on buses or cars that began their return trip several blocks before reaching "our part of town." Or I'd see them when they'd come to our house once a month, carrying in their arms the big thick book in which they'd write down the amount of money my daddy paid their companies for insurance for his large and still growing family. I don't remember ever seeing a rent man. (We moved into our own home when I was seven and Daddy must have gone to an office somewhere to pay the bill.)

I remember the day I discovered me. I don't mean the day of the week or the time of year, but the moment. That

instant when the thought occurred to me that I am a person with a mind of my own is still clear in my memory. It dawned on me that I had something that could be mine and only mine if I wanted it to be. My mind was a precious private gift bestowed only to me and no outsider could force me to let him in to manipulate it his way. The "mind choices" would belong to me and that delicious knowledge seemed to make that a Spring day. Yes, now that I think about it, it was definitely a Spring day--a new birth, a re-beginning, a renaissance. My "birth" day. The beginning of ME!

That knowledge fostered an attitude that has served as my "equalizer" in a world whose message has been my infericrity and the inferiority of my people. The attitude has manifested itself in many ways. It was the influence behind my choices of graduate schools; it has been the careful attention to correctness that I try to give to tasks assigned to me; it is the resentment that rears its head whenever I believe that "someone is trying to tell me what to do."

But as I reflect on it, I'm not so sure the attitude is a wholesome one. Of course, a person's mind is his own--to keep, to lend to others for shaping or destroying, to cultivate, to use. And just as certainly, the belief that

one race is superior to another is ridiculous. Yet there is the possibility that I've misconstrued the real reason for the scheme, that it's all a fake, a facade to hide true feelings, not of inferiority, but of insecurity borne of a deep-seated secret uncertainty. There is also the possibility that the strategy has worked against me. How I envy people who seem content with themselves, who live lives of gentle, quiet complacency! Me, I've always got to be doing something as if to prove a point. Are my "doings" for my own gratification, or are they my way of trying to prove something to the world, or worse than that, something to myself?

These confused feelings, motives, and actions had their beginnings somewhere. Were they potentially present on my real birthday, or is this what society has done to me? Were they forced by an environment that refused to see me as a person of value, or were they created by the conflict between a survival-seeking personality and an unrelenting world?

Whatever the answer, one thing is certain. A dichotomy does exist. I seem driven at times to act when I'd really rather just sit. I seem to be playing the same game that is being played by the man in Sartre's Being and Nothingness. The man is a waiter in a cafe who at first appears to be extremely efficient, but keener observation reveals his

mechanical, almost mimicking motions. The man is playing at "being" a waiter (quoted in Pinar, 1975). It can be said that both the waiter and I have a carefully arranged facade, a glossing over what is really underneath. Perhaps we are each trying to camouflage what Pinar sees as "dissatisfaction with oneself" which almost always is "the introjected non-acceptance by a significant other" (Pinar, 1975, p. 363). In any case, even while the exterior coat, the glossing over, shines, the "underneath" coat can do with a bit more sanding, to smooth out the bumps and knots which blemish even while they glisten.

And that--the point of my story--illuminates the purpose of this essay: to examine some of the negative effects of schooling and to explore the medium of autobiography as a viable instructional methodology for alleviating those effects. I have intimated the effect that society has had on my life; I am suggesting that school may have a similar and perhaps a more devastating effect on students. I do not separate the two--society and the schools--since they are mutually sustaining. Society dictates to the schools, and the schools reflect society.

CHAPTER I

PURPOSE/NEED

The Child, Life, and the School

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

These lines from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard" (Woods, 1950, p. 60) imply the obscurity that results from being born into an environment void of opportunity and encouragement. They stir up images of some far away rustic place untouched and unspoiled by technology and evoke a feeling of mild compassion for the imagined "mute inglorious Milton" and "Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood" who by pure circumstances of birth never realized their potentials for good and for evil, having been denied the benefits of science. For me the lines have another significance. They are sadly and ironically a metaphor for what is happening to children in many classrooms in many schools today. The child, the flower, is often rendered invisible by dehumanizing practices that ignore and waste his potential within an environment of sere, non-producing curriculum. And the unseen power that wills it all, the oppressive hand that controls it all, is society.

Billie's Story

Billie joined my class late in the second quarter, a hostile, non-threatening type whose whole demeanor said, "Leave me alone. If you don't bother me, I won't bother you." We all got his message and acted accordingly. Nobody bothered Billie. On days when he decided to come to school, the students respected his presence by being distantly polite, and I allowed him to just be there, occasionally calling on him and accepting his shrug or "I don't know" as assurance that I had done my part and it was up to him to do the rest.

It was obvious he was on drugs. By the time he reached my class each day, the uppers he had taken were wearing off and he was listless, uncaring, and often sleepy. Office records indicated that he had been expelled from one school for drug-related problems, and the general consensus now was to tolerate him but not disturb him. So I joined the rest of his teachers. After all, I had 30 other students in that class who were more willing and easier to work with. Billie came to class, sat and stared or slumped and slept. Then came the surprise.

The annual talent show was presented late in the school year. All the rehearsals were held after school, so it was a big shock to Billie's teachers to see him singing, cavorting, and just enjoying himself as lead singer for the featured band on the day of the show. The students went wild. Billie loved it.

After that, Billie came to school almost every day. He talked to students before class and even exchanged phone numbers with some of the girls. One day during a writing activity, he was busy at his desk with pen and paper which he covered as I walked by. I suspected he was writing a personal note, but I smiled to let him know I was pleased to see him writing anything.

The next day we were to share orally the writing of the day before. Stephanie, who sat next to Billie and who had somehow gained his trust, said, "Let Billie read his paper. He's got a good one."

"Billie?" I said tentatively, asking if he wanted to share.

"Come on, Billie," urged the class. And he read.

> The essay he'd written wasn't half bad. He finished reading, and before I could give my approval, the class spontaneously applauded. Billie beamed.
>
> During the remaining few weeks of school, Billie participated in class activities more frequently even though there were still days when he sent out his leave-me-alone signal. But it was too late for Billie that year. By then he had failed all his subjects and had to repeat 10th grade.

Billie's story can be told over and over again. Only the name needs to be changed to fit the sad lot of boys and girls lost to themselves and to the world because some thoughtless person in their lives was guilty of blindness and inaction. Billie did not produce in school because he believed he could not. He did not believe in himself because no one else seemed to believe in him. He was like many of the drug-dazed students who slump in classrooms today.

> So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing, and are incapable of learning anything--that they are sick, lazy and unproductive--that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness. (Freire, 1983, p. 49)

The escape from this harsh reality of worthlessness is the drug-induced stupor, or a tough exterior that deceitfully

says, "I don't care!" and manifests itself in unruliness and disruption.

As Billie's teacher, I was a participant in his self-deprecation through my cowardly decision not "to rock the boat." I required nothing of him. He asked nothing of me. Or so I let myself believe.

There are hundreds of Billies in hundreds of classrooms who are reminded daily of their inadequacies. Even the "A" student is sometimes made to feel guilty when his grades slip or he fails to meet standards set by a system which rewards achievement and condemns failure. "One's sense of worth, one's love for oneself, contingent as it has become upon performance and resulting attitudes of others, is bound to be diminished" (Pinar, 1975, p. 368).

Teachers can further disconfirm students by assuming that the role of the teacher is solely that of "depositor of facts" to "student depositories." In the banker-depositor concept of education, polarized roles of teacher and student allow the teacher to "issue communiques and make deposits" while students "receive, memorize, or repeat" (Freire, 1983, p. 58). Under these conditions, when the teacher is impersonal banker and the student is unresponsive receiver, there can be no interaction, no confirmation, only desiccation. "Any school whose operative principle is

the banking concept of education necessarily ignores the child" (Pinar, 1975, p. 378). Such practices are decidedly dangerous, for

> in the last analysis it is men themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, men cannot be truly human. (Freire, 1983, p. 58)

As William Wordsworth said, "The Child is father of the Man" (Woods, 1950, p. 308). If the child is conditioned to be adaptable, manageable, passive, non-creative, non-transforming, the adult will likewise be adaptable, manageable, passive, non-creative, non-transforming.

School=Life=School

"Can we conceive of school as part of life rather than what prepares us for life? (McNeil, 1981, p. 89).

> For two semesters I taught a course designed to help prospective content area teachers make their subject matter more accessible to high school students. The course was listed in the college catalogue as Reading Instruction for Secondary Teachers of Content Area and Other Special Subjects. With such a formidable name, it's no wonder that students usually had a preconceived notion that they wouldn't like it. At the end of

one semester, a music student confessed via remarks prefacing a final oral report,

> At first I felt the only reason I was made to take this course was the fact that it's written somewhere in our textbook that North Carolina is one of several states that require that future teachers take a reading course.

From the beginning I had felt that perhaps if the name of the course could be changed to omit the term "reading," it might dispel some of the prejudice that the teacher had to confront and somehow overcome. I discovered early that students tend to think of their content area as separate from reading, that the "reading" part can somehow be extracted and what is left is "content." One of my tasks was to show that reading is an integral, non-extractable part of any discipline that depends on symbols for communication and explication.

Just as students in Educ 470 were unable to see reading as an integral part of their various areas, some makers of curriculum seem to have trouble seeing school as an integral part of life. They insist on separating the two, and at times their dichotomy has entities that appear not only separate but unrelated. It can even be said that they go a step further to a three-part division. The trichotomy: life/school/the child.

Life, school, and the child are inextricably interwoven and interacting. Yet the fact of this interrelatedness seems to be a missing component in much of today's curriculum. Two of the three--life and the child--are by nature changing, active, evolving. It seems only logical that the third should be compatible with the others. However, much of what is included as curricular content is static, passive, and moribund. This disparity is recognized as one of the main problems confronting education today, and critics are expressing concern for a situation which, if unchallenged or unchanged, spells potential disaster for today's youth and foretells possible devastation for tomorrow's society.

Those concerned about the staid condition of today's curriculum fear its dehumanizing and oppressive effects. Freire believes that only when education involves action and reflection can it overcome its oppressiveness. As he puts it, "Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferral of information" (Freire, 1983, p. 67). He implies that when education is mainly memorization, the learner has no reason or opportunity to interact or respond to what is being learned. Such learning can be dangerously constraining and oppressive--constraining because it prohibits growth and transformation, oppressive because it

can lead to control of the learner. Maxine Greene (1974) acknowledges the potential oppressive quality of schools, perceiving the possibility of what she calls a "persisting Malaise" evidenced by "a sense of powerlessness, expressed in cynicism, and privatism, a loss of trust tinged with despair" (p. 70). Purpel and Belanger (1972) express further concern that in many instances present ways of knowing seem dominated by the needs of the industrial society and that imposition on curricula of a single framework, particularly the scientific view, may result in unproductive curricula in the face of social change or of changes in conceptions of knowledge and knowing (p. 71).

William Pinar (1975) thinks that dehumanizing school experiences may lead to psychic deterioration or madness. He believes that many schools utilize Freire's banking concept and he also speaks of the "digestive" concept which he explains is Sartre's term for the process in which information is fed to pupils by teachers in order to "fill them out" (p. 360). Pinar concludes that the cumulative effect of such schooling can be devastating, and recognizes that something must be done to address the problem. Although he has no explicit solution, he surmises "that an intensive adherence to one's 'within' forms the basis of renewal strategies" (p. 382).

"The child is the starting point, the center, and the end," says Dewey (1902, p. 14).

> Not knowledge or information, but self realization is the goal. . . . Learning is active. It involves reaching out of the mind. It involves organic assimilation starting from within. (p. 14)

This urging for attention to the child's inner being, his personal experience, is repeated by those who are disturbed by excessive attention to external, irrelevant facts and figures. Greene (1974) advocates curricula that provide opportunities for people to view their own worlds, to see themselves as self-determining human beings, exploring, questioning, and co-existing in a subjective community. Such curricula "enable students to take action against powerlessness, to take action to transcend what they now vaguely refuse" (p. 70).

Purpel and Belanger (1972) call for more curricula characterized by "person-oriented values, person-centered concerns, self-learning, and self-growth" (p. 65). They offer the following insight:

> Future curricula will need to reinstate the person as the main agent in the construction of knowledge. Not only should the student understand the ways of knowing of others, but . . . the student should come to view himself as a contractor of knowledge. . . . In addition, the ways of knowing would necessarily be an avenue for exploring not only the processes of others, but also the processes of self. (p. 71)

Self awareness is prerequisite to all other awareness. There can hardly be assimilation of new knowledge where there is no association with prior knowledge. There can be little comprehension of strange concepts where there is no connection with familiar concepts. There can be no awakening to "now" experiences if there is no revival of "then" experience. One way of bridging the gap is to offer curricula that provide a means for utilization of the students' personal experience, that will offer opportunities for the development of self awareness, that enable them to understand their potential and limitations as they interact with subject matter that is immediate, relevant, and meaningful. It is essential for learners to look within themselves in an attempt to understand their beliefs, reactions, and aspirations. The look within must peer backwards as they try to discern and ascertain relationships among the many experiences that together have made them their present selves. As Greene (1974) puts it,

> Each learner must explore his own background consciousness. . . . If he does not, he will be unable to perceive the possibilities in the subject matter made available to him. The self consciousness deriving from self-recovery may at least enable him to feel himself "to be a subject" and thereby to escape, on his own initiative, from molds, labels, and control. (p. 76)

The suggestion that the learner explore his own background recalls Pinar's theory of currere which, according

to Grumet (Pinar & Grumet, 1976), "focuses on an individual biography, forsaking general structures to discover the path of existence that has led a particular person to a specific choice, place, cognitive style" (p. 84). This process uses the individual's own perception and understanding of his experience, suggesting that "in reflexive process reside both the energy and direction for continued growth" (p. 84).

Both Greene and Grumet imply that reflection of past experience illuminates present circumstances, attitudes, and knowledge. Both specify the study of literature as an avenue for the series of occasions for students to review their existence. According to Grumet,

> Currere proposes to use literature as a foil for one's own reflection. As a reader voluntarily recreates that which the writer discloses, he too creates a fictive world, drawn from the substance of his experience and fantasy. (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, pp. 41-42)

Greene believes that

> Encounters with literary works of art make it possible for us to come in contact with ourselves. . . . To enter into the illusioned world of the novel, we must break with the mundane and the taken-for-granted. We must . . . bracket out the ordinary world. (Greene, 1978, p. 2)

This blending of the reflected experience of the reader with the recorded experience of the writer suggests the study of autobiography as a viable step toward making the school experience more personal, more meaningful, thus more valuable.

Know Thyself

"Knowledge of the world requires knowledge of self-as-knower of the world" (Pinar & Grumet, 1976).

> The young kindergarteners--seated in a semi-circle on the carpeted area of the colorful classroom decorated with ABCs, weather charts, numbers, and shapes--listened with heads raised toward the teacher who sat above them on a stool, the falsetto pitch and sing-song intonation of her voice as patronizing as her pedantic pedagogical perch. Little hands shot eagerly into the air each time a question was asked and automatically dropped when the teacher acknowledged a correct answer from the one lucky enough to be chosen. It was apparent that everybody could not be given a chance to recite during a session, but it was just as apparent that some students were being called on more than once while others were being ignored. On my bi-weekly visits as University supervisor of student teachers, I began to pay special attention to the cooperating teacher's pattern of recognizing the students who volunteered to answer questions. I noticed that the few minority students were seldom recognized and that

> two children--a girl and a boy, both black--were never given the chance to contribute even though their hands were constantly in the air. When the student teacher assumed teaching responsibilities, it was obvious that she was adopting the same practice of partiality the regular teacher exhibited. During an afternoon conference with both teachers, I suggested to the student that she make special effort to allow each child the opportunity to be involved as much as possible, mentioning that I had never seen some children participate in the question-answer sessions. The cooperating teacher, hastening to justify their actions, stated, "You don't understand. You see, there are certain kids we don't call on because they won't know the answer and we don't want to embarrass them."

According to T. S. Eliot (1965), "a formal definition of education, and a generalized statement of its purpose, is (sic) not to be easily come by" (p. 72). Eliot is correct in his implication that a clear-cut concise explanation of the meaning and purpose of education is virtually impossible. He is also correct that we "produce definitions which are valid within a limited but unstable

context" (p. 75). One such limited but prevalent definition of the purpose of education is "to prepare boys and girls to function in society." In the kindergarten episode cited above the definition seems further to include the unspoken qualification: "and in their rightful, pre-designated places."

Michael Apple (1983) discusses the crucial importance of kindergarten years in the schooling process. It is during these early instances of socialization that children "become competent in the rules, norms, values, and dispositions 'necessary' to function within institutional life as it now exists" (p. 89). The kindergarten experience serves as a foundation for the years of schooling to follow and ultimately for the years after schooling is over.

Through hidden curricula that may begin as early as kindergarten and last throughout the educational experience--curricula in which different kinds of students get not only different kinds of knowledge but different kinds of treatment (which in some cases amounts to "no treatment")--through such curricular practices as these, it is conceivable that society by way of the schools

> maintains a cohesion among its classes and individuals by propagating ideologies that ultimately sanction existing institutional arrangements that can cause unnecessary stratification and inequality. (Apple, 1983, p. 97)

What may such insidious methods of control mean to students like the kindergarteners Marvin and Yolanda whose teachers under the guise of "protecting" them from embarrassment, denied them the privileges of making the mistakes which necessarily precede and attend growth? They may very well become conditioned to passivity and to categorization, being no more than society expects or allows them to be. They may never be the existential man or woman who is a free person, rather than a mere part of a group. They may never make free decisions, set their own goals, or find out for themselves what meanings their lives have. They may be unable to "exist" in the fullest sense of the word, unable to engage in lives of reflection, and unable to commit themselves to their own projects. Their hearts may never "vibrate to that iron string," because they will be unable to accept the invitation to self-reliance that Emerson (1979) extends to every man when he exhorts: "Trust thyself" (p. 134). For to answer the call: "Trust thyself," they must first have the chance to accept the challenge: "Know thyself."

What is society's responsibility to Yolanda and Marvin and others like them? What role should education play in preparing them to fit comfortably in society? How can schooling empower them to "know themselves?" Barnes (1967),

speaking from an existentialist view, offers this suggestion:

> The ideal would be a state providing for the maximum opportunity for the free development of the individual's creative possibilities and happiness which is consistent with protecting the same opportunities for all others. (p. 283)

She elaborates further that society has a "responsibility to correct inequities and to foster freedom, not merely to refrain from interfering with the profits of free individuation" (p. 283). This responsibility requires rethinking the educational needs of the individual, whether child or university student.

Barnes advocates equal educational opportunity for all, recognizing that such a revision would require totally different attitudes concerning the proper relationship between curricula and individual needs and interests. She proposes, not the elimination of subject matter in the interest of emotional self-expression, but the integration within the study of recognized disciplines of ways by which each person may learn in the most effective manner, obtaining knowledge that can be used actively rather than stored away passively.

An essential component in Barnes' scheme is a school environment which fosters the views that each person is a never-ending open process who must choose freely the paths he wants to follow based on the sort of person he wants to

be; that to be different is not automatically a sign of inferiority; and that self analysis is necessary if one is to comprehend the full meaning of one's own growth. She asserts that unless society makes it possible for students to internalize these concepts, it is guilty of ignoring three basic rights of the child: "the right to live the extreme choice, the right to change, and the right to spontaneous self-realization" (Barnes, 1967, p. 296).

Greene (1974) shares the belief that schools should strive to offer educational experiences that are liberating, challenging, and interesting. She believes it possible for teachers and leaners together to recover a "lost humanity" by being in touch with their own lives and with the hopes, feelings, and actions that all men have in common. Her contention is that subject matter can be made relevant and exciting when it is presented in conjunction with self exploration and evaluation, and she sees the study of literature particularly appropriate in this context. She feels that when students are encouraged and directed to approach literature from the vantage point of their own particular biographies, they are more likely to find that fixed point external to themselves that Spengemann (1980) calls "the center of reality--the point where all things have their true eternal being, where nothing is lost and

everything can be truly known" (p. 77). Spengemann recognizes "the need to locate this fixed personal center that lends pattern and value to unstable reality, and the necessity of approaching that center through one's own experience" (p. 77). He stipulates autobiography as a prime instrument by which a person can find and reveal his inner self.

Through carefully planned activities that invite reaction to literary works of art, learners can uncover their real beliefs and honest feelings and an understanding of the ways in which they obtained them. By examining formal autobiographies and assessing the courses of action outlined by well known personalities, students can recognize the presence or absence of similarities among their life styles, capabilities, feelings, and aspirations and those of others. And through revelation that comes from glimpses into their own past experiences and present situations, they can begin to approach self understanding as their life stories become liberating lenses through which they view the world and themselves. It is hoped that the mental adventure that results from responding to teacher-posed questions, engaging in teacher-student dialogue, challenging newly encountered horizons, and journeying to affinitive private landscapes will transform the learner by

reconditioning the passive into the active, the acquiescing into the questioning, and the oppressed into the emancipated. Then will the Yolandas and Marvins of the world be able to echo the statement Misch (1951) makes concerning the self confidence attendant to self consciousness:

> To stand as an I, or, more exactly, as an "I"-saying person, over against other persons and living beings and the things around us implies that we are aware of our independent existence, we do not merely impart impulses and perform acts as things of elementary existence, but as living beings we have knowledge of our impulses and actions as our own. (p. 9)

Then will they be empowered to add their own declaration: "We have attained self-awareness. We have approached the challenge: 'Know thyself.'"

CHAPTER II

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

What It Is

Conventionally autobiography is defined as "a life story authored by the person whose life is being described," and etymologically the word supports this definition: the description (graphia) of an individual life (bios) by the individual himself (auto). However, many variations of meaning have been attached to the word. While there is consensus concerning the self-portrayal aspect of the genre, differences occur in definitions relating to the forms it may take.

Misch (1951) includes the following literary types among examples of the forms of autobiography: historical records of achievements, epigrammatic descriptions of character, lyrical poetry, prayers, soliloquies, confessions, letters, memoirs, narratives, and drama (p. 4). In his description, autobiography is distinguished from other literary forms by its unique unity which derives from the author-subject point of view. The autobiographer views his life as a unit, with facts and feelings, actions and reactions, exciting incidents, interesting people, and important transactions in their definite significance in relation to the whole.

Pascal (1960) discriminates between literary forms that have autobiographical content (i.e., diaries, letters, memoirs) and "autobiography proper" or "true autobiography." He bases his distinction on "what principle is the content of a life organized" (p. 2). To him the autobiographer shapes the past by imposing patterns, establishing stages, and defining relationships between the self and the outside world. "The writer takes a particular standpoint, the standpoint of the moment at which he reviews his life, and interprets his life from it" (p. 9). In other words, true autobiography involves a distinctive attitude and mode of presentation on the part of the author. Whether or not the assumed attitude and imposed patterns represent authentic reality is not important since the discovered design is the central truth of autobiography.

Olney (1972) sees autobiography as a "metaphor of the self," or a unique record of an individual's life and lifework. In his view, a person's lifework expresses and reflects that person and consequently is his autobiography. This representation prevails whether the work be

> history or poetry, psychology or theology, political economy or natural science, whether it take the form of personal essay or controversial tract, of lyric poem or scientific treatise. (p. 3)

Definitions given by Buckley (1984) are similar in some aspects to the three cited above. Taken in light of

its etymological meaning, autobiography may take "many shapes and guises--the diary, the letter, the journal, the formal self-history, the subjective poem, the short or long fiction" (p. 39). But as a form, a literary genre, there are conventions and expectations, one of which is "a retrospect of some length on the writer's life and character, in which the actual events matter far less than the truth and depth of his experience" (p. 39).

The definition of autobiography as it is used within this paper varies and is made clear by the context in which it appears. At times it may refer to formal, published narratives that, not unlike Pascal's "true autobiography," meet the description of a deliberate shaping of past events into a meaningful unit; or it may in other instances refer to the more informal essays, letters, diaries, or journals that relate personal experiences, reflections, attitudes, and feelings. However, the salient element in all references to the term is the previously mentioned commonality of self-inspection, self-reflection, and self-revelation.

Even though autobiography as we know it today is relatively new, self-knowledge has been a quest of mankind for centuries. "In a certain sense the history of autobiography is a history of self-awareness," contends

Misch (1951, p. 81), who proposes a direct correlation between the development of the genre and the evolving concept of individuality. Maximizing the influences of external circumstances on man's conceived relationship between himself and his world, Misch designates three points within European civilization as foundations of the history of autobiography: Classical Antiquity, which encompassed the free Hellenic spirit prevalent in the centuries that followed the age of Homer; Christianity, which initiated a climate of emancipation and creative power; and the Renaissance, which fostered conditions conducive to man's greatest awakening to self. Buckley (1984) feels that the intellectual foundations for modern autobiography were laid during the eighteenth century when individual man began to discern himself as distinct from all other men. He points out, however, that it was the nineteenth century which was first "to speak self-consciously of the self as a major source of literary material, and the first beginning with the Romantics, to write a great deal subjectively" (p. 3). By the twentieth century, self-scrutiny was a popular avenue to self expression, and autobiography became an established category of literature.

Why It Is

"O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!"

While we may or may not agree with the Scottish poet Robert Burns (Woods, 1950, p. 19) about the desirability of having the power to see ourselves "as ithers see us," we cannot deny the tendencies we have of reviewing our lives and interpreting them as "we" see us. We tend to think back over our existence and relive within our minds past events--smiling to recall certain ones, and thinking we could have handled certain others differently. We enjoy telling other people about things we have done, things we have thought, how we reacted in particular situations. We tell our stories to family, to friends, to strangers. The telling is very often oral, but there are times when the revelation takes written form--a diary, a letter, or a narrative, for example. We expose our lives for many reasons: for the pleasure of self-communication, for the comfort of sympathy and understanding aroused in others, and because of a need for self assertion. But as authors of self histories, we reap benefits other than these. For while the autobiographer is giving accounts of personal actions and motives, he is unveiling an idiosyncratic personality; and, more importantly, he is wittingly or unwittingly seeking the true self beneath it all and the means of coming to terms

with that self. The desire to share experiences seems a human instinct; it is unquestionably a natural inclination. As Misch (1951) puts it, "It seems to be agreed that men must reveal their souls, and the only question is how to do it" (p. 62).

Just as we take pleasure in "revealing our souls" to others, we gain a certain satisfaction from being allowed a glimpse into the private thoughts and actions of someone else, especially when the insights are presented through the medium of autobiography. There are, of course, certain aesthetic dividends for the reader of autobiography as there are for the reader of any interesting, well-written literary work. However, as we read about the lives of others we may do more than satisfy normal curiosities and aesthetic appetites, for as we travel through the pages of someone's life, we may gain insight into our own. Olney (1972) sees this self-searching motive as a prevailing reason for the popularity of autobiography:

> What one seeks in reading autobiography is not a date, a name, or a place, but a characteristic way of perceiving, of organizing, and of understanding, an individual way of feeling and expressing that one can somehow relate to oneself. (p. 5)

How It Is

> I saw that my lot was the human lot, that when I faced my own unvarnished likeness I was one among all men and women, all of whom had the same desires and

> thoughts, the same failures and frustrations, the same unacknowledged hatred of themselves and others, the same hidden shames and griefs, and that if they confronted these things they could win a certain liberation from them. (quoted in Egan, 1984, p. 202, from Muir, Edward. An Autobiography)

To assume the possibility of a subliminal relationship between the autobiographer and the reader is to suggest the existence of a field of experience common to human nature. Susanna Egan (1984) supports the idea of shared human experience when she argues that many writers of self histories tell their stories by using certain stereotypical fictive patterns with conventional, familiar meanings. These forms she calls "mythic metaphors" because they are effective analogies that clarify and make comprehensible recurrent complex experiences that are crucial aspects of human development. Her premise is that "there are dominant narrative patterns that are common in autobiography" (p. 3), and these patterns, representing various stages of a person's life, "derive from the psychological imperatives that determine a man's perception of himself and of his world" (p. 5). Egan's stages and their respective metaphors are Childhood : Paradise or Eden; Youth : Journey; Maturity : Conversion; and Age : Confession.

The Edenic myth with its symbols of simplicity, stability, and security is a prevalent analogy for childhood innocence. The writer who recounts his childhood often

recalls some aspects of that early existence that were carefree, peaceful, and assuring. And he can usually point to the persons, places, and attitudes responsible for the haven which safeguarded his tender years. It is during this springtime--this idyllic phase of life--that, psychologically, the child perceives the world as a single and stable extension of himself. He has no concept of mediation, seeing things only in extreme opposites. Primitive explanations satisfy his curiosity about the mysteries of life. When circumstance forces the discovery of inevitables such as birth, death, sexuality, and change, Eden begins to slip away and is eventually lost. Revealing and enlightening experience gradually invades and ultimately destroys the shield which naivete has provided against what Langston Hughes might describe as "the too-rough fingers of the world" (Carlsen, 1979, p. 329). In a sense then, Paradise can exist only as long as immaturity and ignorance exist.

Even before Paradise is completely lost, the search for a true sense of self begins. The journey motif, with its rites of passage that transform the child into an adult, represents the second stage and explains mainly those experiences important in adolescence even though the analogue may refer to a life time of searching. Who am I?

Where am I going? What will I be? How well do I relate to members of the opposite sex, to members of the same sex? These are some of the questions that the young adolescent struggles to answer as he explores, evaluates, chooses, or rejects the numerous roles open to him. No longer limited to concrete representations, now able to engage in self-watching and to imagine various possibilities and capabilities for himself, he satisfies the psychological need for self-regulation and self-control. If he copes well with the stress and confusion of adolescence, he emerges with a sense of self that is satisfying and acceptable. The autobiographer who reports a successful journey "describes the main achievement of every mature adult: securing an identity that is of value to himself and to his society" (Egan, 1984, p. 135).

By describing the process of self-discovery, the journey motif crystallizes the quest for identity. Stage three is the conversion myth which also explores identity and purpose, but it concerns a transformation of self resulting from newly acquired special knowledge which gives a fundamentally different meaning to some aspect of life. A central experience in self-discovery, it is part of the journey metaphor, representing maturity. It has as its psychological basis the identity crisis which, although not

inevitable, is a common human occurrence. First comes the crisis, then self-doubt, then the dramatic awakening to a new awareness, a clear purpose, a re-formed self.

> By replacing identity crisis with a sense of self and of purpose, conversion centers on the realization of that crucial aspect of the maturing process, . . . the satisfactory harmony between the individual and his environment. (Egan, 1984, p. 137)

Confession, the fourth stage and final metaphor, represents autobiography as a whole, describing the entire journey of life. It usually occurs in later life and may serve several purposes that include pursuit of self-truth, personal cartharsis, or the rather lofty sacerdotal intention of providing for humanity the true picture of man. The confession myth derives its immediate meaning from the religious confessional, but it has clear psychological implications. In later life there is a need for retrospection, evaluation, and assurance. Through analyses of past experience, a person can decide if his life has been worthwhile. He recalls and assesses actions and resolutions.

> Most important, he describes, and therefore must know, who he is and what his purpose is in life. He has made realistic sense of his inner life and of the world around him. He has matured to the point at which he can function sensibly as a complex individual in a complex society. (Egan, 1984, p. 194)

He has somehow and to some degree regained Paradise.

Egan points out that the myths she describes are convenient because they so aptly reveal and clarify what both the autobiographer and the reader can claim as personal experience. Even though all autobiographers do not necessarily include all of the four metaphors, a knowledge and understanding of the stages, crises, and courses of action they substantiate make easier the study of lives of others and the recounting of one's own life. The student of life histories--his own and those of others--using guidelines based on Egan's four patterns, can look for omissions as well as commissions, for the exceptions as well as the rules, to arrive at reliable biographical data.

Responding to It

Janet Varner Gunn (1982), in her book, Autobiography: Toward a Poetics of Experience, offers an alternative theory to the classical notion of autobiography as a private act of a self writing, contending that it is instead, a cultural act of a self reading. This reading takes place at two moments: first, by the writer of the text and again by the reader of the text. Between these two moments is a third in which the writer brings his life "to language." These three interrelated moments Gunn calls the autobiographical impulse, the autobiographical perspective, and the

autobiographical response; and together they make possible what she calls the autobiographical situation.

> The impulse arises out of the effort to confront the problem of temporality and can be assumed operative in any attempt to make sense of experience. The perspective shapes autobiographical impulse by bringing it to language and displaying it as narrative surface; it is informed by problems of locating and gaining access to the past. The response has to do with the problem of appropriation and the reader's relation to the autobiographical text. (Gunn, 1982, p. 12)

These moments, as stated before, are interrelated; "each rests on and assumes the other," and because they represent different levels of interpretation, they constitute a "hermeneutics of restoration" (p. 12).

Autobiographical impulse is the basic level which anchors the other two. It is the level at which the autobiographer "reads" his or her life in an attempt to recover past experiences, to make explicit that lived depth which time has buried. The act of self-reading is a cultural act "since self knowledge . . . is always grounded in the signs of one's existence that are received from others, as well as from the works of culture by which one is interpreted" (p. 31). The fact that a person can never fully recover the past is no deterrent, according to Gunn. In fact,

> the very indeterminateness or opacity that characterizes our relations with the past enjoins and supports the act of autobiography--not as an invasion of depth, but as testimony to its enlivening presence. (p. 15)

Autobiographical impulse then, is the latent, pre-textual level whose "latency comes to enactment in the move from life to text" (P. 15). It is in this move from life to text--this moment when the exhumed past is interpreted and shaped by language--that autobiographical impulse becomes autobiographical perspective.

Autobiographical perspective is the level at which the writer presents his or her lived depth as "narrative surface." The narration reveals recovered meaning and imposes structure, but it is more than a mere recounting of past experience. It is, in Gunn's terms, a "placing" and a "presencing." The placing occurs when the writer establishes his or her special connection with the world in relation to the past and from a particular standpoint in the present. Presencing happens when a new reality to which the past has contributed confronts the autobiographer. Gunn stresses that the processes of placing and presencing are on-going and are as much concerned with future realization as with past experience and present reality. She asserts: "The autobiographical effort at possessing one's life must be understood as a movement toward possibility as much as a turning around to the already achieved" (p. 18).

The third level of a autobiographical situation is response. More explicitly interpretive than the others,

this is the stage at which the reader attempts to extract meaning from the text to make it his or her own. This reading combines two methods of interpretation which Gunn identifies as poetics and hermeneutics. Poetics "enables the reader to look at the universe of common experience from a perspective different from his or her own" (p. 19); while hermeneutics allows the reader to experience the autobiographical text "as an occasion of discovery: seeing in the text the heretofore unexpressed or unrecognized depth of the reader's self" (p. 19).

Gunn explains poetics by referring to a process of "schema and correction." The reader approaches the text with certain anticipations and assumptions based on pre-knowledge and past experience. When the text fails to satisfy these expectations, and traditional habits and responses are disturbed, new values and new images of self are made possible. When assumptions are thus tested and corrected, the reader becomes aware of the "fit between old schema and new events" and can then claim the experiences of the text as his or her own (pp. 25-26).

Poetics requires the reader to distance him or her self from the text, seeing his or her life through the eyes of someone else. Hermeneutics, on the other hand, is participatory: the reader goes beyond the work in search

of meaning by way of a question and answer dialogue with the text. Through the tension that results from this dialogue, the reader evidences the significance of the statement by Hans-Georg Gadamer that the

> nature of the hermeneutical experience is not that something is outside and deserves admission. Rather, we are possessed by something and precisely by means of it we are opened up for the new, the different, the true. (quoted in Gunn, p. 116)

Gadamer's statement, in suggesting that the text, not the author, communicates with information which is tacitly or cognizantly present in the reader, implies a belief in the indeterminacy of meaning. When the message of the text and the reality of the reader integrate, the "fusion of horizons" informs a unique, personal discovery on the part of the reader. In short, the reader, through interpretation, discovers self.

Such a method of responding to literature is reminiscent of Pinar's currere mentioned earlier in this essay. Currere is a phenomenological approach to self-knowledge and understanding, focusing "on that which presents itself in our consciousness" (Pinar, 1975, p. 405). It involves four steps: regression, progression, analysis, and synthesis--all of which require recording and consideration of reflected experience. The first step recalls past events; the second looks into the future; the third considers the interrelations

among the past, the present, and the future; and the fourth brings the parts together as a whole. "As the body is a concrete whole, so what occurs within and through the body can become a discernible whole, integrated in its meaningfulness" (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. 60).

Grumet recommends the use of Pinar's method in conjunction with the study of literature to arrive at the reader's autobiography. The literary text serves as a stimulus to recollection and reveals through the recorded lived experience of the reader those recurring forms that are essential and telling. The text to which the reader responds could very well be the autobiography of some significant person whose life report serves to awaken critical consciousness and provoke self-awareness. Thus,

> the reflection upon reflection that is autobiography offers a process that may recover the intentionality of the prereflective, incarnate self and reestablish the connections between those intentions and the structures of objectivity (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. 79)

as they are experienced by the reader.

A Prototype

Most autobiographies can be analyzed using the metaphoric schema advanced by Egan and aspects of the autobiographical situation outlined by Gunn. While the life of any well known person may be worthy of evaluation, admiration, and often, emulation, certain stories would

perhaps be more appropriate and appealing than others to today's youth. The several volumes which comprise the autobiography of Maya Angelou seem to be typical and excellent vehicles for directing students to look at another person's life and ultimately at their own. Miss Angelou, a recognized poet, dramatist, composer, actress, and dancer, candidly reveals her past in a literary style that is imaginative, concise, and rich. As a black female in a society that is struggling to recognize minorities, she has a message for those young people who are in the midst of resisting and attempting to destroy limitations imposed by society, nature, or their own personal inadequacies.

> While she often deals with the black experience, she herself once explained that her portrayal of life is a broad one, "I speak to the black experience, but I am always talking about the human condition--about what we can endure, dream, fail at and still survive." (Dillon, 1978, p. 631)

Each of the five books that make up her biography seems to fit certain of Egan's mythic metaphors. The first volume, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969), the story of her first 16 years, describes her childhood and early adolescence spent in Stamps, Arkansas, and St. Louis and San Francisco. It details incidents which contributed to her loss of innocence and depicts situations which invaded the security that she felt from the warmth, love, and encouragement from those around her. This volume also

includes aspects of Angelou's journey or quest since the search for identity was forced on her at an early age by both society and an unstable family situation. Volume Two, Gather Together in My Name (1974), covers her life from 17 to 19 years of age or late adolescence. It continues the journey myth begun in the first book, telling of an episodic searching and wandering period of her life when she tries on roles that include mother, Creole cook, madam, tap dancer, prostitute, chaufferette, and others. Volume Three, Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas (1976), depicts a single young woman who seemingly has found the answers to many of the questions that confront maturing young adults, who apparently has made the transition from being a "nobody" to being a "somebody." This volume fits neatly into Egan's maturity or conversion motif. Volume Four, The Heart of a Woman (1981), further chronicles the adventures of the maturing Angelou who, nonetheless, is still seeking and trying on roles, this time as wife and newspaper editor among others. The confession myth can be explored in this book as well as in the previous three. Volume Five, All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes (1986), displays elements of both the journey and the confession metaphor, with the search this time appearing to be a quest for spiritual and historical roots.

Maya Angelou's story and other such autobiographies can be examined with curricular materials and practices which incorporate the procedures of Pinar's currere, the suggestions explicit and implicit in much of Greene's writings, and the problem-posing education advocated by Freire. These concepts, used in conjunction with the ideas and strategies of innovative, skillful, and capable educators in the interest of energetic, waiting, and wanting young people, can result in learnings that liberate and attitudes that activate.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF A MODEL

Introduction

The preceding chapters examine autobiography in terms of its content (What It Is), its raison d'etre (Why It Is), its structure (How It Is), and its accessibility (Responding to It). The sections on structure and accessibility explicate theories and procedures that seem particularly adaptable to the development of a pedagogical model that will help students acquire analytical skills and provide them with a viable method of critical response to autobiography. This chapter will offer suggestions for the construction of a model designed to enable learners to extract meaning from vicariously shared experiences of others and obtain significance from actually lived experiences of their own. The special ability to grasp overt external truth, educe latent personal reality, and effectively fuse the two will depend upon certain competencies which the paradigm will introduce, inculcate, and refine. Not the least among these competencies are the willingness and capability to be curious about the work, to engage in dialogue with it, and to suspend the systems of expectations and knowledge to admit the disrupting influence of a non-conventional text.

The model is divided into three stages that are not discrete, but which are in a sense hierarchical; for while they are not separate and distinct, they do follow a rank order. They are, in fact, interrelated and interdependent since each stage informs the succeeding one. Stage I must necessarily precede Stage II, and Stage II provides data for Stage III. Briefly described, the model works in the following manner: In Stage I the student encounters the work as genre and aesthetic literature; Stage II involves interpretation and reconstitution of meaning; and Stage III uses newly acquired understandings gained in Stage II as bases for reflection, application, and search for personal significance.

Stage I

The objective of Stage I is that the student understand the work as literature--to be appreciated as genre, to be enjoyed as art. This step relies on presuppositions and expectations which the student brings to the reading as a result of knowledge from past experience and instruction provided by the teacher. It combines the poetics aspect of autobiographical response set forth by Gunn (1982) and the patterns of experience delineated by Egan (1984) and requires a certain distance between reader and text. The student, using Egan's metaphors as mediating

devices, seeks to view the "universe of common experience from a perspective different from his own." Considering the work in light of expected form, language, and other properties, the student discovers what satisfies and what betrays his or her horizon of expectation. When the written text resists or rejects these expectations, the reader is forced to notice the discrepancies. It is at this point that Gunn's process of "schema and correction" begins to operate:

> Only when our assumptions about the way things are are tested and corrected, rather than simply corroborated, do we become aware of having these assumptions in the first place. And only when the "fit" between old schema and new events is missing can these new events come into our field of attention. Otherwise, they pass unnoticed and therefore unexperienced. (Gunn, 1982, p. 26)

The text with its gaps of indeterminacy benefits the student by calling attention to assumptions and beliefs that otherwise may have remained forever untapped. Further, this act of awakening enhances understanding of the work as genre and precipitates enjoyment through what Hans Robert Jauss (1982) defines as <u>catharsis:</u>

> <u>Catharsis</u> . . . corresponds to the ideal object of all autonomous art which is to free the viewer from the practical interests and entanglements of his everyday reality and to give him aesthetic freedom of judgment by affording him self-enjoyment through the enjoyment of what is other. (p. 35)

In summary, the ideal results of the activities described in Stage II are first of all, a comprehension of the work as representative of a particular type of literature; and secondly, the pleasure attending the achievement of such an understanding.

Stage II

Stage II aims for interpretive understanding. The student, by analyzing "what is other" about the text in relation to preconceptions and expectations, attains understanding which restructures experience and reconstitutes meaning. This process of enlightenment is the aspect of Gunn's autobiographical response which she labels hermeneutics. Broadly defined, hermeneutics is the study of interpretation of texts. Originally the concept referred almost exclusively to biblical writings; however, the theory has broadened to encompass textual interpretation in general. For her purpose Gunn adopts the hermeneutical theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer that interpretation can be neither objective nor permanent since every re-interpretation of a text is shaped by the historicity and prejudice of the interpreter. According to Gadamer (1975), "history is not only not completed, but we stand within it as those understanding, as a conditioned and finite link in a continuing chain" (p. 175). And when we attempt to unravel

meaning from the printed word, we place ourselves "within a process of tradition in which past and present are constantly fused" (p. 258). It is this integration, this "fusion of horizons," to use Gadamer's words, that results in understanding. Interpretation cannot be fixed or unchanging since it results from the reciprocity of the open historical context of the interpreter and the on-going past tradition of which the text is a part.

Although Gadamer's theory embraces the idea of indeterminate textual meaning, it avoids being overly subjective or solipsistic since the reader approaches the text with preconceptions or prejudices influenced by the tradition of the work. Anticipation and expectation grow out of historical consciousness of what the work as a whole should be like.

> A person who is trying to understand a text is always performing an act of projecting. He projects before himself a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the latter emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. The working out of this fore-project, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 236)

The "working out" of preliminary projections becomes necessary when a part of the text fails to concur with anticipation. The reader is compelled to revise the original projection to accommodate the new experience.

Thus the whole is understood in relation to its constituent parts, and the parts are known in relation to the whole. This reciprocity of understanding is a basic principle of hermeneutics often referred to as the hermeneutic circle.

In describing the interpretive process, E. D. Hirsch (1967) suggests that it is more accurate "to define the hermeneutic circle in terms of genre and trait instead of part and whole . . ." (p. 77). The reader begins with expectations based on the genre idea that certain types of utterances foretell certain types of traits. He attunes himself to encounter definitive elements that may include--besides content--contextual, linguistic, and grammatical characteristics that are apparent or implied in the work.

Gunn (1982) also recognizes the role that genre plays as an instrument of interpretation. According to her, "genre is what enables the reader to locate himself or herself before the text, and thereby to have access to the possible meaning of the text" (p. 21).

The reciprocal action between reader and text is the hermeneutic process in which each contributes to and learns from the other. The reader, "coming into conversation with the text," begins a dialogue by asking: "What question does this text answer?" This query is open to several answers and in essence asks a question of the reader, thus evoking

discussion to which the reader contributes. The dialogue continues as the reader converts assertions of the text into questions and the text raises open questions for the reader's consideration. "Thus the question raised by the text merges with the interpreter's own questioning in the dialectical play which Gadamer calls the 'fusion of horizons'" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 211). The object of the dialogue is a mutual realization of meaning which evolves, not from deliberate efforts to reach a pre-determined goal, but as a consequence of a common language created by the conversation itself.

The reader initially "comes into conversation with the text" because of some element or aspect that has thwarted expectations engendered by pre-understanding and awareness of particular generic norms. The frustrating element or aspect represents the "what is other" about the text; and through analysis informed by the question and answer dialogue, the reader knows reconstructed experience and attains reconstituted meaning. Hirsch (1967) gives the following description of the way meaning is constituted as a result of generic expectations:

> We construe <u>this</u> meaning instead of <u>that</u> meaning because <u>this</u> meaning belongs to the type of meaning we are interpreting while <u>that</u> does not. If we happen to encounter something which can only be construed as <u>that</u>, then we have to start all over and postulate

> another type of meaning altogether in which <u>that</u> will be at home. (p. 76)

Succinctly stated, expectation influences discovery and discovery influences expectation, the circularity of learning reaffirming old understandings in some cases and establishing new ones in others.

<u>Stage III</u>

The first two stages of the model involve textual analyses, with Stage I attempting to establish the work in a certain tradition, and Stage II seeking to determine how the text achieves its distinction. Stage III on the other hand becomes reader-centered, having as a goal heightened consciousness for students who use discoveries about the text to confront themselves. Through free association with encountered content, language, and meaning, readers reflect upon personal experience, examining and questioning what is found in an effort to uncover hidden values, feelings, motivations. This step in the model borrows from "the method of <u>currere</u>, regressive-progressive-analytical-synthetical in procedure," which is "a systematic attempt to reveal . . . individual life history . . ." (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. 106) and which uses self-reflection, recorded experience, and analysis.

As students communicate with the text, they write down general impressions evoked by the interaction. The recorded impressions are set aside to allow time for the advantages of distance and as much objectivity as possible. After several days, students react to their initial responses by choosing for reflection, questioning, and possible understanding those that seem most important.

Grumet (1979) recommends the shift back and forth between the distanced view and one that is close, believing that each informs the other and as a result informs personal understanding. It is her contention that

> Tied to only a distanced view, we stray too far from our actual experience, lost in thought in hypothetical worlds, we forget the real one. Limited to only a close view, we are attentive to the present, to detail, to the clarity of our initial response, but we are pawns of feelings and events, unable to perceive the relationships that exist between different portions of our experience, unable to imagine alternatives to the actions we have taken. (p. 212)

The initial responses result from free association with certain aspects of the text. The second reaction requires students to write about incidents and attitudes from their lives that relate to the responses to these associations. Such personal accounts are most revealing when they avoid the extremes of being too general or too specific. When recorded experiences are very general, "they bury their questions in cliches and happy endings,"

and when they are extremely detailed, "they often exclude any reference to the writer's response to the events that are chronicled as well as the meanings that have been drawn from them . . ." (Grumet, 1979, p. 209).

Students seek meaning by looking for patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting that emerge in their writings and by attempting to answer questions explicit and implicit in their responses. The analyses become self-revealing when recurring themes that are discerned and examined unveil new and telling discoveries about personal ideals, preferences, and realities.

The model is designed to yield significance of a literary work on several levels. Parts one and two deal with structure and theme, respectively; part three aims for actualization of meaning. Even though each stage has been described separately, the three steps must work together to effect interpretive understanding. The larger, whole meaning of a text is realized only when the prescribed procedures overlap. In truth, aspects of the processes can and sometimes do occur simultaneously, and there are common aspects among them. For example, presuppositions create anticipations of both structure and theme, products of Stages I and II; and any of the three components may suggest the free associations that provide content for the writings produced from phase three.

Role of the Teacher

Success of the methodology depends heavily on the guidance of a teacher experienced with the literary work in its generic tradition, including language and background information. The teacher would have to be familiar with the general concept of hermeneutics and be able to help students decide what questions and answers concerning a text will lead to hermeneutic understanding. Also the teacher should be skillful at motivating students to write openly about sensitive matters and should be discrete when reacting to written personal accounts entrusted for analysis, insight, and enlightenment. Teacher effectiveness is of course enhanced by teacher attitude, classroom atmosphere, and student awareness.

Positive teacher attitude is a factor in any successful educational setting, and it is of prime importance in a context which recognizes the student as the center of activity and experience. Carl Rogers (1969) defines the teacher's role as that of a facilitator who exhibits genuineness, acceptance, and empathic understanding, and who can function only in an interpersonal relationship with the learner. To Greene (1974), the teacher is a "co-investigator" who creates for students "a situation in which they will freely reach out for their own new perspectives and try to discover the nature of their own

worlds" (p. 80). Such an ambiance invites students to be open to experience, to be free to exist subjectively, to be, as Greene puts it,

> . . . aware of their role in constituting meanings, in making their own existence articulate. If they become so aware, they may come to the point of choosing themselves as questioners, perhaps as inquirers, for the sake of increasingly explicit disclosures of their worlds. (p. 73)

In the next chapter I shall demonstrate the effectiveness of the model by applying it to I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. The application is specifically geared to the cognitive level of high school students, but the procedure can be adapted for use with almost any autobiographical text and with younger boys and girls.

CHAPTER IV

APPLICATION OF THE MODEL

General Comments

To demonstrate the model, I have chosen I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou, black female autobiographer, poet, dramatist, composer, actress, and dancer. As the story of Miss Angelou's life from age 3 to 16, this volume depicts stages of development, experiences, attitudes, and emotions well within the range of the empathic understanding of the young people who will be studying it. While some activities described are traditionally associated with growing from childhood into adolescence, other events detailed can be considered extraordinary. And while some of the situations presented may be peculiar to a black female in American society in the early 1930s, the incidents chronicled, whether common or unique, translate into the search for identity, the need for love and acceptance, and the fight for self-esteem that is relevant to all people. Backgrounds for the book's various scenarios include the several geographical settings of the writer's childhood: Stamps, Arkansas, the small segregated town where, as a 3-year-old, Marguerite (Miss Angelou's given name which she uses in this book) and her

4-year-old brother are sent by their estranged parents to live with their father's mother; St. Louis, where the two children return to live again with their mother only to be sent back to Stamps soon afterward; and finally, San Francisco, where they rejoin their mother who has now moved to California.

The student reader will be prepared for the encounter with the autobiographical text because of previous experiences with similar writings and as a result of instruction and guidance from the teacher. Pre-reading instruction should include information concerning contextual conditions that are both apparent and implicit--conditions dealing with language, functions, forms, roles, and purposes assigned to the text by social and literary conventions that define it as a particular type or genre. For even though much about what constitutes the autobiographical act is unspecified and not absolute, there are distinctions which, when recognized as constraints and guideposts, can provide a context of experience for the student. Apparent among such specifications are the use of the first person narrator, eyewitness testimony, direct observation, and detailed personal events presented in narrative form. Not so apparent and perhaps warranting special attention are such implicit features as the differences that exist and

the relationships that are established among the "I" as narrator looking back on a life, the "I" as character or the life being looked at, the "I" that is author, and ultimately, the "I" that is in coalescence of all of the others.

Aside from the unique situation of having one person fill the roles of author, narrator, and character, autobiography has other "major distinctions which have survived and which continue to be observed." This according to Bruss (1976, p. 14) who offers the general rules paraphrased below as conditions which must be "satisfied by the text and the surrounding context of any work which is to 'count as' autobiography" (p. 10):

> Rule 1. The autobiographer, as the source of both the subject matter and structure of his text, is assumed to be susceptible to appropriate public verification.
>
> Rule 2. Information and events reported in connection with the autobiographer are asserted to be true.
>
> Rule 3. Whether or not what is reported can be discredited, the autobiographer purports to believe in what he asserts. (pp. 10-11)

Students should be made aware of these rules which emphasize the responsibility of the author and create the rights of the reader. By confronting the legitimacy of the "I," these principles influence expectations brought to the text.

Another distinct property of autobiography--and one that is especially relevant to the implementation of Stage I of the instructional model being applied here--is the use by its practitioners of a special language for telling their histories. Fleishman (1983) recounts a plausible theory concerning the language of autobiography that assumes self-writing to be an emanation of an author, revealing his or her uniqueness by an automatic process which is neither designed nor intended (p. 19). The idea is that the writer's expression combines intrinsic, personal essence with an individual linguistic style to form a "natural" language. This natural language, however, is very often augmented by some analogical rhetorical device to render the narration more specific and perceptible. Fleishman declares:

> One does not sit down to write an autobiography without a narrative language in which to compose the sentences of one's life story. Where do the expressions of that language, the supplement of one's "natural" language, come from? (p. 471)

Among the answers that Fleishman gives to his question is the idea that the writing of autobiography very frequently involves "archetypal figures corresponding to universal forms of thought or grammar" (p. 471). This view is founded on a belief that it is human nature to experience cycles that go from innocence through adversity to eventual

reconciliation. Because they are so widely experienced, the cycles are often connected with distinct times of life or "developmental stages" where each time period "centers around the salient and distinct emotional concerns stemming from biological pressures from within and sociocultural expectations from outside a person" (Santrock, 1983, p. 37). These stages have been found convenient and conducive to concretizing the language of self-writing.

Fleishman's response echoes the theory posited by Egan (1984) which embodies schemas of personal existence based on dominant narrative patterns common in autobiography. The patterns, which will guide the student's response to the text in the first phase of the model, were briefly explained earlier in this paper and will be further identified and detailed as it becomes necessary and appropriate.

Pre-reading activities will also involve students in the practice of recognizing within the stated patterns, embedded questions that will direct their investigation of the text.

Introduction to Stage I

Stage I of the model is an example of what can happen in the classroom when the objective is to understand autobiography as genre and aesthetic art. It relies on the assumption that predispositions based on projected

metaphorical patterns will shape expectations and lead to a search for certain textual properties. The example is given in the format of a hypothetical classroom situation in which an enlightened teacher guides a receptive student through a first reading of I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. Generally, the procedure for this part of the paradigm is as follows:

Teacher commentary will 1) present and describe appropriate metaphorical patterns used in autobiography and explain their usefulness as guides to meaning and understanding; 2) demonstrate by example how the language of the patterns can be transformed into questions to provide substance for a dialogue between the reader and the text; and 3) offer any other pertinent information and instruction.

Student commentary will represent 1) reactions, 2) answers to questions, and 3) expected and unexpected discoveries resulting from the exchange with the text.

The anticipated, ultimate outcome of the intercommunication among student, teacher, and text will be 1) an answer to satisfy the question, "What does the text say in the light of what it is expected to say?" and 2) the gratification and pleasure that attend the acquisition of knowledge through deliberate mental activity and effort. In other words, it is expected that the student will be

directed to a perceptual understanding of the text as genre that will consequently constitute an aesthetic experience of the work as art.

For this section, the script will differentiate between the commentaries of teacher and student by rendering student participation in indented passages. The commentaries do not pretend to be the exact words expected from either the teacher or the student. Rather, the teacher passages will include examples of the types of information that can be communicated to the student to provoke certain thought processes. The student passages, admittedly, are not typical of the quality and type of response expected from the ordinary student. It should be understood that they are designed to represent suggested, possible content in much the same way that subjective responses are offered in a teacher's manual. The teacher, having prepared her classes with information and with techniques for transforming statements into questions, will still need to probe for appropriate, extensive replies.

In most of the autobiography Miss Angelou calls herself Marguerite, her given name. In the following analyses I use the name Marguerite to refer to the child and the name Angelou to refer to the writer. References to page numbers from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings are to the 1969 edition

published by Bantam Books. Teacher commentaries will be preceded by the designation TC; student commentaries will have the marker SC.

Application of Stage I

TC The title I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings poses several initial questions for the reader. What clues to the book's content does the title give? What is the significance of the imagery of the title? Is the writer speaking metaphorically? How does the book relate to the source from which the title is taken?

SC It seems highly unlikely that the title has a literal meaning. However, its significance can only be achieved as it unfolds through a reading of the book. Since titles are often suggestive, one would expect to find some implicit connection between the plight of the bird and the circumstances of the writer.

TC I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, in recalling Maya Angelou's life from age 3 to 16, can be expected to include specific kinds of information, presented in very definite ways. The chronological periods covered in the book--childhood and adolescence--are two of the four patterns of experience that Egan (1984) designates as universal among mankind and common among autobiographers seeking to concretize the abstract medium of language. The pattern

that is analogous to the childhood experience Egan calls Paradise or Eden in reference to the time when life is generally free from concern and when actions and motives are innocent. Richard Coe (1984) is among many critics who agree with Egan that the Edenic metaphor can be found in some form in just about every recounted life. Coe makes the following assertion:

> Few childhoods, even among the most sordid and the most degrading, are entirely without some experience of paradise; in fact, the more dreary and oppressive generally the atmosphere in which the child lives, the greater the intensity with which isolated episodes will stand out, illuminated with a brilliance scarcely of this world. (p. 67)

Eden is first and foremost a place, a haven, a respite from the "too-rough fingers of the world."

SC Marguerite's Eden is the Store ("always spoken with a capital 's'"), the source of livelihood and the site of living quarters for the family whose other members are her grandmother (called Momma), her Uncle Willie, and her brother Bailey. Miss Angelou remembers the Store as her "favorite place to be," describing it in tones that are almost reverent. Through her depiction, the Store and its contents take on a rather ethereal, spiritual essence, resembling an unexpected unopened gift in the mornings, revealing an uneasy fatigue from a job half completed in the afternoons,

and reverting into "the promise of magic mornings" to become a panacea for the world's wrongs in the evenings. As the setting for the intimate family supper of crackers, onions, and sardines, the Store seems to cure temporarily Uncle Willie's "affliction" as well as obliterate all other ills of the day, bringing the "assurance that the covenant God made with children, Negroes, and the crippled was still in effect" (p. 13).

TC Aside from being a special place, Eden is also a special attitude toward life. "Paradise belongs to a divinely comic vision of the world. . . . The myth . . . provides the primitive and childish explanation of the facts of life, its origins, and its end" (Egan, p. 70). The child views the world simplistically, displaying little awareness of the scientific "way" of things.

SC To the very young Marguerite, creation, death, and the state of life between the two seem to be controlled by capricious forces whose motives often are to punish or to seek revenge. She imagines that she has been created by a cruel fairy stepmother who has enviously changed her from a young girl who was actually white and beautiful, into an unattractive "too-big Negro girl, with nappy black hair, broad feet and a space

between her teeth that would hold a number-two pencil" (p. 2). She envisions a God who is white and vengeful, who will allow her to choke on the sin of mocking the preacher who is God's representative (p. 21), who sent such excruciating physical pain because of the terrible thing she had allowed Mr. Freeman to do (p. 68), and who would turn His back on her for lying just as "Christ Himself turned His back on Satan" (p. 72). Death in her thinking is a fitting punishment for irresponsible acts like trying to be "womanish," and showing herself to be embarrassed in front of certain people. "Death would be too kind and brief" (p. 82) for atrocities such as abusing a book of Mrs. Flowers'.

Marguerite also harbors illogical concepts of the realities beyond her immediate world. Especially are her ideas concerning white people irrational. In fact, she is unable to view them as people.

> People were those who lived on my side of town. . . . These others, the strange pale creatures that lived in their alien unlife, weren't considered folks. They were whitefolks. (p. 21)

Another example of Marguerite's naivete is the feeling of anger aroused within her when her father reveals that he can both understand and speak the Pig Latin she and Bailey share. His action destroys her

belief that the language is a secret communication created by her brother and his friends and that it belongs exclusively to her and them. His intrusion into their private world "was simply another case of the trickiness of adults where children were concerned" (p. 49).

TC "Many autobiographies include . . . references to earlier days when life seemed simple, harmonious, happy, and without the pressure of time" (Lifson, 1979, p. 45). The simplicity, harmony, and happiness reflect an apparent conformity and congruence that exist between the child and his or her environment to create Edenic bliss and timelessness.

SC Happiness in Marguerite's life derives from the comaraderie she shares with her brother Bailey; and, to a lesser degree, from the security that her grandmother automatically emanates and the limited but genuine watchfulness that her Uncle Willie struggles to provide. "Bailey was the greatest person in my world" (p. 17), is the way Miss Angelou sums up her feelings for her brother who was one year older than she; who, in her words, was "small, graceful, and smooth"; and who had "velvet-black skin," and hair that "fell down in black curls" (p. 17). Bailey is to

Marguerite more than a physically beautiful sibling. He is a confidant to share secrets; he is a protector to avenge hurts and insults; and--most important of all--he is the sole person to fill the need that is "the one that must be satisfied, if there is going to be hope and a hope of wholeness" (p. 19). He is the one constant, consistent, unshakable friend in her life. So strong and complete is her dependence on and faith in her brother that she compares him to God: "My pretty Black brother was my Kingdom Come" (p. 19). Marguerite and Bailey share a mutual affection and dependence even though through her self-deprecating eyes her brother's love for her had to be a condescension. "And yet he loved me" (p. 17) she remarks incredulously.

The sister-brother relationship is for a time the stabilizer in Marguerite's young life. She co-exists with Bailey in almost complete harmony even when the situation demands that she yield to his wishes to maintain the orderliness. The relationships among Marguerite and the adults in her life are not so harmonious, however, because they of course lack the common circumstances of age and need that fix the bond between her and Bailey. Momma and Uncle Willie belong

to another generation, to a degree, to another world; and they impose grown-up standards which they enforce with the switch when the tongue proves inadequate. And there are times when their responses to certain aspects of their world prove painful and confusing to Marguerite. Once she watches with wonder, pity, and sadness as Uncle Willie, crippled since infancy and often the helpless "whipping boy and butt of jokes of the underemployed and underpaid" (p. 9) pretends to strangers in the Store that he is not lame. On another occasion, Momma's constraint and seeming submission to the taunts of "a troop of the powhitetrash kids" from the community are not quite comprehensible to the young girl who knows the elderly woman to be strong, powerful, and proud. Yet because she does love and respect her uncle and her grandmother, there is no real discord among them.

The happiness that comes from harmonious co-existence with non-human surroundings had to be for Marguerite her feeling of compatibility with the Store, her avowed "favorite place to be." The Store emitted an atmosphere that seemed to be synchronous with her needs and moods and for which she had a secret understanding. She alone could hear its "slow pulse"

and sense when "it was tired." She enjoyed the opportunities for mental adventure the Store offered as she

> developed an eye for measuring how full a silver-looking ladle of flour, mash, meal, sugar, and corn had to be to push the scale indicator over to eight ounces or one pound. (p. 12)

Her disposition responded in kind to the gladness of the Store's undisturbed morning odors and sounds touched with the supernatural and to the sadness of its late afternoon grumblings and complaints of workers beaten by harsh reality. The harmony that she feels for her immediate environment does not extend beyond this narrow context, however. The Store is located in the larger geographical environment of Stamps, Arkansas, a cocoon-like town where "nothing happened." Nothing that is except segregation and racial prejudice. "People in Stamps used to say that the whites in our town were so prejudiced that a Negro couldn't buy vanilla ice cream" (p. 40), is the way Miss Angelou describes the town. Missing from her description of Stamps are the paradisaical images of country or garden scenes that appear in many autobiographies detailing childhood experiences. In her account, Stamps is barren, with "obscure lanes and lonely bungalows set back deep in dirt yards" (p. 74). One

of the few references to vegetation in the book is Angelou's mention of "the field across from the store" which she watched "turn caterpillar green, then gradually frosty white" (p. 5). The changing hues of the field announced the prevailing schedules and activities of her life, foretelling the time when "the big wagons would pull into the front yard and load on the cotton pickers at daybreak to carry them to the remains of slavery plantations" (p. 5). As the herald of cotton-picking time, the field proclaimed what Angelou calls "the harshness of Black Southern Life" and can hardly be considerd a paradisaical image.

TC Lifson (1979) makes the observation that traditionally, imagery of light, fruit, abundance, timelessness, order, and water appears in autobiographical works using the childhood-Edenic motif. She contends that "the Edenic quality of childhood is clear: it is timeless, bright, full of treats, especially peaches, and peaceful" (p. 64).

SC The images of light, fruit, and abundance appear in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings and all are in some way associated with the Store which has already been established as Marguerite's Eden. In two separate passages, the store is described as it appears beneath

the transforming effects of illumination--first from the artificial glow of a lamp:

> The lamplight in the Store gave a soft make-believe feeling to our world which made me want to whisper and walk about on tiptoe. (p. 6)

and secondly from the natural light of the sun:

> The light would come in softly. . . . easing itself over the shelves of mackerel, salmon, tobacco, thread. It fell flat on the big vat of lard and by noontime during the summer the grease had softened to a thick soup. (p. 13)

TC Whatever the reason, when authors turn to describe the bliss and harmony of their childhoods, even those authors whom one might label urban or urbane, they turn, among all other traditional images, to images of fruit (Lifson, p. 46).

SC Marguerite's passion is for the pineapple rather than the peach, and her memory holds clear images of the fruit, not in its natural state, but as commercially prepared products that "sat in their exotic cans on our shelves year round" (p. 12). "My obsession with pineapples nearly drove me mad," she said. "I dreamt of the days when I would be grown and able to buy a whole carton for myself alone" (p. 12). The "syrupy golden rings" were delicacies reserved for Christmas when Momma would use the juices to make fruit cakes and the rings to make up-side down cakes, giving Marguerite and Bailey one slice each. Miss Angelou recalls:

> I carried mine around for hours, shredding off the fruit until nothing was left except the perfume on my fingers. I'd like to think that my desire for pineapples was so sacred that I wouldn't allow myself to steal a can (which was possible) and eat it alone out in the garden. (p. 12)

It is noteworthy that this statement alludes to the eating of stolen, thus forbidden, fruit within the confines of a garden to further suggest the myth of the Garden of Eden.

TC How is the idea of abundance made manifest in the story? Are there passages that establish a sense of order and timeless peace?

SC Even though the Store is filled daily with cotton pickers whose fingers have been cut by "mean little cotton bolls" and workers who are "without the money or credit necessary to sustain a family for three months," the general impression is that Marguerite and her family have an abundance of life's necessities, including food, with meat from the smokehouse and vegetables from the little garden near the Store and from the shelves of canned goods in the Store. The source of the cornucopia is the Store which Momma has owned some twenty-five years and whose financial success has enabled her to help her less fortunate neighbors by extending credit when possible, lending

money to the town's white dentist, and allowing poor white families to live on her farmland behind the Store.

The aspects of Marguerite's life that impose any semblance of timelessness and order are the Store and her brother Bailey. Several passages establish this fact. At one point, Marguerite refers to the time before she and Bailey "became familiar enough to belong to the Store and it to us" (p. 5), implying that they eventually developed a reciprocal give and take with the place. When Bailey's actions toward Marguerite deviate in the least way, when she cannot correctly anticipate his behavior, she becomes confused and frightened and uncertain about what she should do. Once he is in danger of being punished for returning late from the movies and she wants desperately to warn him to create a good alibi, but he spurns her attempts to hold his hand and for some reason is unable to talk to her. Bailey's aloofness for several days afterwards not only disrupts the usual pattern of their lives, but it also changes the whole ambiance of the Store:

> For days the Store was a strange country, and we were all newly arrived immigrants. Bailey didn't talk, smile or apologize. His eyes were so vacant, it seemed his soul had flown away, and at meals I tried to give him the best pieces of

> white meat and the largest portion of dessert, but he turned them down. (p. 98)

TC The autobiographer tends to emphasize the salient features of a childhood paradise by the very process of attempting to recover it for retelling. Memory, perception, imagination, and creativity are important aspects of childhood, and they are the same activities used by the storyteller as he or she recaptures early perceptions to convey them imaginatively and creatively. Egan (1984) expresses this idea when she says, "The qualities that enhance Eden also enhance the written word" (p. 76). The writer often further enhances his work by the use of vignettes and anecdotes, literal, specific situations or objects that encapsulate the mood or emotion remembered by the writer and aimed for in the reader.

SC Angelou demonstrates a gift for recapturing remembered emotions and transmitting them to her reader through stories that subtly suggest a particular feeling or perception. This ability is especially apparent in the vignettes and anecdotes that relate Marguerite's feelings for her grandmother and her uncle and their feelings for her. Marguerite loudly, almost blatantly declares her undying love and devotion for her brother and she states outright that he loves her. Yet she never once says that she loves Momma or Uncle

Willie or that they love her. However, the perceptive reader can infer their mutual affection that is ever present but remains unverbalized and is quietly evinced in rare, poignant moments.

Marguerite has occasion to confront her feelings for Uncle Willie one day after she surprises him in the Store, pretending to strangers that he is not lame. Miss Angelou recalls the pitiable, heart-rending efforts of her father's brother to recover his cane after the strangers leave and he thinks he is alone:

> Uncle Willie was making his way down the long shadowed aisle between the shelves and the counter--hand over hand, like a man climbing out of a dream. I stayed quiet and watched him lurch from one side, bumping to the other, until he reached the coal-oil tank. He put his hand behind that dark recess and took his cane in the strong fist and shifted his weight on the wooden support. He thought he had pulled it off. (pp. 10-11)

Through this description and the comments that follow, the writer evokes within the reader a sympathy and compassion that seem to underlie her final statement concerning the episode: "I understood and felt closer to him at that moment than ever before or since" (p. 11).

Marguerite reveals throughout the book that she loves and respects Momma, but the message is always directed to the reader, not to Momma. There is one instance, however, when, through an act of kindness,

she tries to communicate her feelings of love, pride, and support to Momma who has just withstood the mean, degrading, and harsh mockery inflicted by the poor white children who live on her land. Marguerite cannot interpret her grandmother's actions and lack of reaction, but she can sense that "whatever the contest had been, Momma had won":

> She stood another whole song through and then opened the screen door to look down on me crying in rage. She looked until I looked up. Her face was a brown moon that shone on me. She was beautiful. Something had happened out there, which I couldn't completely understand, but I could see that she was happy. Then she bent down and touched me as mothers of the church "lay hands on the sick and afflicted" and I quieted. (p. 22)

To show her pride, approval, and respect, Marguerite gives Momma a special display of affection, creating for her in the yellow-red dirt of the back yard a unique design:

> It was a large heart with lots of hearts growing smaller inside, and piercing from the outside rim to the smallest heart was an arrow. (p. 27)

This precious, powdery valentine was her way of saying "I love you."

Momma never openly admits her love to her grandchildren, not even in later years when she is pointedly asked about her feelings. Yet Marguerite knows that Momma

loves her, for "a deep-brooding love hung over everthing she touched" (p. 47). The assurance of Momma's love comes in many guises--in her teachings, her caretaking, even in the punishments she metes out. But the most telling display of her devotion is forced upon her by the desire to see Marguerite rid of two decayed teeth and the pain they are causing. She feels compelled to insist that the town's white dentist, who "owed her a favor," attend to Marguerite's need. He refuses and she must resort to asking him to reconsider, putting herself in the disparaging role of beggar. Later, as they travel the twenty-five miles to the nearest black dentist, Momma gives Marguerite another assurance of her love:

> She asked if I was scared. I only shook my head and leaned over on her cool brown upper arm. There was no chance that a dentist, especially a Negro dentist, would dare hurt me then. Not with Momma there. The trip was uneventful, except that she put her arm around me, which was very unusual for Momma to do. (p. 163)

Not only is Miss Angelou successful in arousing a sense of pathos and affection through these delicate sketches of her loved ones, but she skillfully recreates humorous incidents through anecdotes involving outsiders. The reader laughs with her as she recounts an episode at a church service in which

> an over-zealous member, yelling, "Preach it!" runs to the pulpit and slaps the minister, knocking his false teeth onto the floor near Marguerite's feet. The whipping administered by Uncle Willie in the parsonage next door abates only temporarily the fits of uncontrollable laughter which have overtaken her and Bailey. For weeks Marguerite "stood on laughter's cliff," and Bailey had merely to say "Preach it!" to hurl her off the edge.

TC The autobiographer whose childhood in any way compares favorably with the idea of Paradise reports events, circumstances, surroundings, and emotions that reflect happiness, harmony, abundance, and light--no matter how limited or small the instances may be. Outstanding traits of the child during this idyllic, Edenic state are innocence and naivete. Little by little the child matures and innocence and naivete are replaced by experience and sophistication. Lifson (1979) believes that after the blissfulness of Paradise-experienced, comes the reality of Paradise-lost. "What occurs next," she says, "is the fall from Eden, the loss of harmony and a new and sharp experience of pain, death, chaos, darkness, sin" (p. 50). Egan (1984) explains that loss of Eden coincides with the change of the child's perception of his surroundings, when

events introduce ideas and emotions that are alien, unfriendly, and frightening, forcing a new identity that is individual and apart from the world. According to Egan, this separation results from shocking events that reveal the world's impermanence, insecurity, and flaws. In her words, "In terms of the universal myth, such separation results from discovery of the most alarming changes that man's mind can encompass, those of procreation, birth, and death" (p. 73).

The discovery or realization of death destroys the innocence of childhood more frequently and with greater trauma than do procreation or birth, for death can touch the youngest life and proves the world to be alien and uncontrollable. If a result of the world's alienation is the development of an individual identity for the child, "the discovery that this not-yet-realized identity is doomed to distinction must necessarily be one of the most tragic crises of childhood experience" (Coe, 1984, p. 199).

SC Although Marguerite had seen pigs slaughtered, had read books in which characters died, and had often imagined herself being erased from the face of the earth for some insignificant infraction, until she was eleven years old, death was "more unreal than frightening." Before then, dying was something that

happened to the very old and was not even faintly connected to her, so when old Mrs. Taylor died and Momma insisted that Marguerite sit through the funeral service, it seemed a waste of a good afternoon. But it was this occasion that gave the young girl her first real glimpse of her own mortality. Everything about the service was painful. The hymn was tedious and shattering; the sermon put within her "the fear of the cold grave"; but the most traumatic experience came when she had to look into the face of the dead woman. Hypnotized by fear, she had to grasp the side of the coffin to keep from falling. She resigned herself on that day to the "inevitable destination of all living things":

> Instantly I surrendered myself to the grimness of death. The change it had been able to effect in Mrs. Taylor showed that its strength could not be resisted. (p. 137)

Marguerite's acknowledgement of death's irresistible, uncontrollable force signals a departure from childish notions, and consequently, from Eden.

TC "The young man and woman who are metaphorically cast out of Eden undertake an inevitable journey" (Egan, p. 104). The journey metaphor, like that of the Edenic myth, has certain features that recur again and again within the human experience, its descriptive and explanatory powers

making it an excellent tool for autobiographers. Also like the Edenic myth, it derives from the story of Adam and Eve who must make a new life in the wilderness after certain knowledge has made them unsuitable for the innocence and freedom of Paradise. The analogue describes situations that initiate the young child into the adult world, often entailing pain, stress, separation, and rebirth or return. Although it is especially applicable to activities associated with adolescence, "it does not limit its usefulness to this phase of life. It suggests, indeed, a movement that lasts until death and the adventures that occur may occur at any age" (Egan, p. 106).

SC Both the Edenic and the journey metaphor apply to a significant incident in Marguerite's life. Her journey begins when she is a very small child shuttled back and forth between parents and grandparents with no real sense of belonging or acceptance. This loneliness forces her to seek affection and attention where it seems available and sends her to the warmth and pleasure of the physical contact provided by Mr. Freeman, her mother's live-in lover who eventually rapes the eight year old girl, transforming her into a "child-woman." Miss Angelou reports, "I was eight, and grown" (p. 70).

The pain that is a characteristic element of the journey motif results from Mr. Freeman's violent act upon her; the guilt comes after he is killed by her uncles, and she believes that she is to blame because she lied when asked if he had tried to touch her before the time he raped her; and the separation occurs when she remains silent for almost a year, refusing to speak for fear that to open her mouth would be to "flood the world and all the innocent people" with the evilness within her, dooming them to destruction just as she had doomed poor Mr. Freeman. The return begins with Mrs. Flowers, "the aristocrat of Black Stamps," who convinces her that words need "the human voice to infuse them with deeper meaning" (p. 82), and the return is completed with Louise who becomes the best friend who helps her learn again "what girls giggled about":

> Louise would rattle off a few sentences to me in the unintelligible Tut language and would laugh. Naturally I laughed too. Snickered, really, understanding nothing. I don't think she understood half of what she was saying herself, but, after all, girls have to giggle, and after being a woman for three years I was about to become a girl. (p. 120)

Thus, one incident involves first, the journey as Marguerite's quest for permanence; second, Eden-lost in the form of a vicious act which robs her of her

innocence; third, the journey again as she searches for a return to the state from which the atrocity propelled her.

TC Adolescence is the period of transition from childhood to early adulthood, entered approximately at eleven to thirteen years of age and ending at eighteen to twenty-one years of age. This period is characterized by dramatic changes in appearance, personality, and attitude. It is a time when the young person seeks to formulate a self-theory, to discover through decision-making and action that "I am competent," or through interaction with other young people that "My peers like me." It is also a time when the youth longs for freedom and independence from adult control, "when the individual pushes for autonomy (or for the perception that he or she has control over behavior) and gradually develops the ability to take that control" (Santrock, 1983, p. 403). The autobiographer who writes about such periods in his or her life recounts experiences and patterns that are common to most people and is intentionally or coincidentally fitting those parts of the story to the journey metaphor.

SC Several events in Miss Angelou's story deal with attempts to establish an acceptable theory of self. When she accompanies her father to Mexico, she makes a

startling, pleasant discovery that elevates her self-confidence. Although she has no driver's licence, has never in fact driven an automobile, she is forced to chauffeur her drunken, sleeping father about fifty miles to get back home. As she successfully, at times almost disastrously, maneuvers the unfamiliar, bucking car over dusty roads and down the mountainside, she enjoys a feeling of excitement and triumph:

> It was me, Marguerite, against the elemental opposition. As I twisted the steering wheel and forced the accelerator to the floor I was controlling Mexico, and might and aloneness and inexperienced youth and Bailey Johnson, Sr., and death and insecurity, and even gravity. (pp. 202-203)

Marguerite's newly found autonomy no doubt encourages her later decision to walk away from the home of strangers, friends of her father in whose care he has left her after she has been stabbed by his fiancee. Because she dare not go home to reveal her injury to her mother and risk another violent episode like the one involving Mr. Freeman years before, her eventual destination is a junk yard of old cars where she chooses a "cleanish one" to furnish her shelter for what she thought would be one night. A month later she says goodbye to her temporary haven and to the several friends she has made among the "collage of

Negro, Mexican, and white faces" that were also residents of the "ad hoc community." Aside from giving her an exhilarating sense of freedom ("I was a loose kite in a gentle wind floating with only my will for an anchor" [p. 214]), the sojourn bolstered Marguerite's confidence in herself and in her fellow-brothers and sisters:

> The unquestioning acceptance by my peers had dislodged the familiar insecurity. Odd that the homeless children, the silt of war frenzy, could initiate me into the brotherhood of man. . . . The lack of criticism evidenced by our ad hoc community influenced me, and set a tone of tolerance for my life. (p. 216)

Back at home with her mother, the metamorphic Marguerite realizes that after the excitement of the drive down the mountain and the month in the car lot, she can never return to the same routine. Her decision to get a job is hampered by racial discrimination, but she persists and is finally hired as a conductorette on a streetcar. She leaves the job to return to school "so much wiser and older, so much more independent, with a bank account and clothes that I had bought for myself" (p. 230).

TC The search for identity that characterizes the adolescent years involves an awareness of and questions concerning one's sexuality. Changes in the body--height,

weight, sexual traits--as well as changes in temperament and interests that may be genetically influenced, are usually more distinct during this period. The young person is often doubtful about the effects of such spurts in growth and pubertal changes, especially in terms of social acceptance. The autobiographer's account of the adolescent years almost always contains references to this period of sexual doubt and maturation. Coe (1984) has discovered from his study of the childhood genre that

> the final achievement of sexual maturity involves not one, but at least four stages of self-discovery, each one of which is, in all essentials, quite distinct and independent. Moreover, they do not follow each other in the same order. There is the physical discovery of the self as a sexual identity. . . . There is the discovery of the possibility of sexual contact with another human being. There is the first realization of that contact. And there is the first experience of "falling in love." All four are, or can be, equally traumatic. (pp. 180-181)

SC Characteristically, Marguerite experiences adolescent doubts about her sexuality, with her deep voice, too-large feet, and un-girlish figure causing her to fear she may be becoming a lesbian. Her mother's explanation concerning the female anatomy assuages her fears only briefly, and Marguerite decides that what she needs is someone to help prove her femininity:

> What I needed was a boyfriend. A boyfriend would clarify my position to the world and, even more important, to myself. A boyfriend's

> acceptance of me would guide me into that strange and exotic land of frills and femininity. (p. 238)

Deciding to take matters into her own hands, she seduces a neighborhood boy, finds the whole experience empty, disappointing, and she was convinced, a failure because her "normalcy was still a question." Three weeks later she discovers that she is pregnant. Far from being traumatic, the pregnancy recovers for her some of life's lost magic. Her explanation:

> I credit my new reactions . . . to the fact that during what surely must have been a critical period I was not dragged down by hopelessness. Life had a conveyor-belt quality. It went on unpursued and unpursuing, and my only thought was to remain erect, and keep my secret along with my balance. (p. 243)

When her son is born, Marguerite's reaction is one of happy possessiveness. He was totally hers and he was beautiful. He was also very small and she was afraid to handle him or have him sleep with her. One night Marguerite puts the infant in her bed; and when she awakes to find him sleeping, unharmed, under the tent of blanket which she had instinctively formed with her arm, she touches his body lightly and goes back to sleep, suggesting a deep satisfaction and quiet concurrence with the words her mother has just spoken to her:

> "See, you don't have to think about doing the right thing. If you're for the right thing, then you do it without thinking" (p. 246).

TC Coe (1984) defines the childhood genre of autobiography as one

> whose structure reflects step by step the development of the writer's self; beginning often, but not invariably, with the first light of consciousness, and concluding, quite specifically, with the attainment of a precise degree of maturity. (p. 9)

SC I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings reflects Marguerite's development from a small, insecure, misplaced child into a sixteen-year-old adolescent who has attained a degree of maturity. The story begins with Marguerite in the midst of a devastating experience that one critic suggests is "the 'epiphanic moment' of her youth" that "presents the two dynamic operatives that circumscribe Angelou's self: her blackness and her outcast position" (Arensberg, 1976, p. 279). This "first light of consciousness" propels the young girl on her quest for self by way of a search for love and acceptance from those from whom it is due, especially her mother.

Marguerite struggles through one traumatic incident after another and eventually transforms from a young Negro girl who hates the reality of her color,

who interprets the attentions of a lecherous old man as genuine affection, who cries to see her grandmother teased by white children, who remains silent for almost a year to keep her "evilness" locked inside into a teenager with enough courage to drive a car down a mountainside even before she has learned how to handle a car, with enough security to live in a car lot for a month, with enough confidence in her ability to demand the job she wants, with enough sense of responsibility to "heft the burden" of her pregnancy onto her own shoulders, and with enough maturity to accept motherhood with love, possessiveness, and anxiety. Marguerite Johnson is among those

> children and adolescents for whom the realization of an identity presented a struggle, often a fierce one, but who in the end come to know themselves as having a full, real, and positive existence in the world. (Coe, p. 54)

TC To investigate a work's authenticity as a particular genre, a person examines it for evidences of characteristic rhetorical devices that signal an author's awareness of working within a tradition and which condition the reader's expectations in receiving the text. Coe (1984), speaking of autobiography as genre, observes that "myth clearly exerts a primary influence on certain ways in which the self is restructured in its literary context" (p. 179).

SC I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings supports the theory that certain narrative patterns recur in life histories, illuminating personal experience and establishing a pattern of identification between the autobiographer and mankind in general. The patterns relate to certain myths that are cognate with man's experience in the various aspects of life. Miss Angelou is not openly committed to a figurative treatment of her personal story. She does not explicitly codify her life through any overt typological characterization. However, the fact that aspects of her life seem to parallel or be consistent with the ideas embodied in the myths may be evidence of a selective use of certain organizing schema that suggests adherence to tradition. At any rate, the presence of what appear to be controlling metaphors gives significance to separate incidents and heightens the accessibility of the work as a whole by placing certain expectations before the reader. The ideas elaborated here give credence to Coe's statement that myth exerts primary influence on the structure of autobiography, and underscore the necessity of characteristic rhetorical devices to the understanding of a work as genre.

Introduction to Stage II

The objective of Stage I is a perceptual understanding of the text as aesthetic art. I have demonstrated this phase of the model by using a hypothetical classroom situation with a scholarly teacher and an informed student exchanging commentaries about expectations and discoveries within the text, the dialogue leading to understanding and appreciation of the work in its generic tradition and ultimately attempting an answer to the question posed at this level: "What does the text say?" Stage II seeks an interpretation of the work, to understand its meaning. This second phase borrows from the philosophical hermeneutic theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer who contends that

> a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained mind must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's newness. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality" in the matter of the object nor the extinction of one's self, but the conscious assimilation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 238)

The text presents its newness when it fails to coincide with the fore-meanings and prejudices of the reader. The work's "own truth" is the interpretation which results from a retrospective analysis of that newness and is the meaning

which is the objective of Stage II. This meaning is capable of several realizations since

> not only does the text, at all times, represent more than the author intended, it is also read differently in different circumstances and understanding is, therefore, a productive endeavor. (Bleicher, 1980, p. 111)

Understanding, then, is not merely reproductive, it is productive since the reader produces meaning when he comes face to face with the tradition of the work, when there is a unification of two parties, an integration of two horizons--one past and one present. This "fusion of horizons" creates a dialogical hermeneutic experience in which the reader and the text pose questions of each other, opening up possibilities of meaning with language as the medium of the agreement that emerges from the dialogue between them. "This between," Gadamer writes, "is the true locus of hermeneutics" (p. 264). In other words, an attempt to understand the text is not an attempt to reproduce the author's opinion, but an attempt to assimilate what he says as truth. In this way, understanding is never final. It is, however, subject to limitations imposed by the projections and fore-meanings the interpreter brings to the reading.

How does the reader embark upon the hermeneutic experience? How does he or she succeed in achieving what

Gadamer describes as "coming into conversation with the text" (p. 331)? The reader becomes involved with the text when it says something interesting and relevant. The involvement becomes reciprocal as the reader transforms the assertions of the text into questions to develop a conversation which brings the past and present together. Wolfgang Iser (1974) explains the exchange between reader and text, the fusion of horizons, this way:

> Once the reader is entangled, his own preconceptions are continually overtaken, so that the text becomes his "present" while his own ideas fade into the "past;" as soon as this happens, he is open to the immediate experience of the text, which was impossible as long as his preconceptions were his "present." (p. 290)

Stage II is the occasion for looking back at what Iser (1978) refers to as "blanks and negations" in the text which were revealed during the first reading. In considering these "missing links," "the reader's attention is now fixed not upon what the norms represent, but upon what the representation excludes" (p. 200), and "meaning thus emerges as the reverse side of what the text has depicted" (p. 225). This retrospective analysis will proceed backward from the end to the beginning

> so that, from the perspective of the achieved whole of the form, the still indeterminate particulars might be illuminated, the series of conjectures clarified in their contexts, and the meaning still left open sought within the harmony of a coherence of meaning. (Jauss, 1982, p. 161)

The questions before the reader during this stage are "What does the text say to me?" and "What do I say to the text?" I will demonstrate this step by means of a running commentary, a composite of the thoughts of both the teacher and the student which combines the same competent direction and informed reception which were presented separately in the preceding section. In Part I, the procedure is to let anticipation of particular segments lead to a perception of the work in its fulfilled generic form. In this section, the procedure reverses. The analysis starts with the work in its wholeness and proceeds backward toward an understanding of the "indeterminate particulars." Whereas in Part I the direction is from beginning to end, in Part II the direction is from end to beginning.

Application of Stage II

"See, you don't have to think about doing the right thing. If you're for the right thing, then you do it without thinking" (p. 246).

These words, spoken to Marguerite by her mother, suggest the role that instinct may play in a person's life. Instinct, in psychoanalytic theory, is generally defined as "an unconscious drive that supplies energy and direction for behavior as one of the biological forces that shape human destiny" (Santrock, 1983, p. 35). In unscientific

contexts, the term often designates any pattern of behavior that appears to be inborn rather than learned, and in some instances, the more informal designation of natural "knack" is used to refer to behavior that reflects special tendencies or aptitudes. No matter what denotation is assigned to the word as used in the above quotation, it seems appropriate that Miss Angelou would end her book with this platitude, for the truth that it embodies seems to have been the main force behind most of Marguerite's actions and decisions in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. While instinctual energy is responsible to some degree for all development in all people, it appears quite pronounced in Marguerite because of the absence of more deliberate overt motivations. Throughout the book she is thrust into situation after situation where she must act on her own initiative to save herself; and even when she makes a conscious choice, it appears to be the eventual behavior resulting from an unconscious, instinctive drive that impels her to act. It is through this inner motive force that Marguerite is able to survive and to develop from a lost, confused child into an assertive, maturing adolescent.

Several incidents demonstrate Marguerite's instinctive, at times impulsive, response to situations that threaten her physical, mental, or social existence. One such

response is spurred by her doubts concerning her own sexuality. Already fearing that she may have latent lesbian tendencies, the young girl is confused by the feelings evoked in her by the sight of the bare breasts of an overnight guest:

> Had I been older I might have thought that I was moved by both an esthetic sense of beauty and the pure emotion of envy. But those possibilities did not occur to me when I needed them. All I knew was that I had been moved by looking at a woman's breasts. So all the calm and casual words of Mother's explanation a few weeks earlier and the clinical terms of Noah Webster did not alter the fact that in a fundamental way there was something queer about me. (p. 238)

Her consequential behavior is both rash and unorthodox:

> I was being crushed by two unrelenting forces: the uneasy suspicion that I might not be a normal female and my newly awakening sexual appetite.
>
> I decided to take matters into my own hands. (p. 239)

Taking matters into her own hands means offering herself to a neighborhood boy for her first voluntary sexual experience. Her scheme, although deliberately charted and rehearsed, grows out of an instinctive urging to do something to change the course she feels her life is taking. The action and its outcome--that is, the seduction, the pregnancy, and the baby--add a welcome dimension to Marguerite's lonely, search-filled life, a dimension that signals a new self-confidence, self-pride, and self-consciousness.

When she is 8 years old, Marguerite is raped by her mother's live-in lover. The most traumatic experience of her childhood provokes the most drastic self-preserving tactic her desperate young mind can devise. Her uncles brutally kill the rapist, and she is thoroughly convinced that Mr. Freeman is killed because of a lie she has told. What can she do to prevent the evilness within her body from escaping through her mouth and destroying others around her? From somewhere within her comes an answer:

> The only thing I could do was to stop talking to people other than Bailey. Instinctively, or somehow, I knew that because I loved him so much I'd never hurt him, but if I talked to anyone else that person might die too.
>
> I had to stop talking. (p. 73)

For almost a year, Marguerite allows her tongue to be silenced by the dread of hurting others, because "instinctively, or somehow," she knew that she must. If any positive outcome or development can be associated with her long silence, it would be the beneficence of Mrs. Flowers, the gracious lady who coaxes her into speaking again and of whom Miss Angelou recalls: "She had given me her secret word which called forth a djinn who was to serve me all my life: books" (p. 170).

Two other incidents provide evidence of Marguerite's almost uncanny ability to overcome adverse situations by

actions that seem impulsive and even foolish at times. On one occasion she must choose between two perilous alternatives: what, in her mind, will be certain death in a Mexican dirt yard and a not-so-certain drive down a mountainside with her at the controls of a car she has never driven. In fact, she has never driven an automobile before. Her choice of the latter surprises even her: "It is hard to understand why my vivid imagination and tendency toward scariness didn't provide me with gory scenes of bloody crashes on a _risco de_ Mexico" (pp. 201-202). The adventure, foolhardy and dangerous though it is, leaves Marguerite with a feeling of excitement and pride. But even more important, it raises her self-esteem and initiates an autonomy that characterizes her future behavior.

Soon after the car-driving incident, Marguerite's inner voice directs her actions again. This time she identifies the impulse as promptings from her absentee brother who is somehow communicating with her. She is unwilling to remain at the home of strangers--friends of her father--where she has been left to recuperate from a knife wound inflicted by his irate fiancee, but she is quite undecided about what to do: "The thought of my brother made me pause. What would he do? I waited a patience and another patience and then he ordered me to leave" (p. 212). It is only after she has

closed the locking door behind her that Marguerite seriously considers her next move: "Now that I was out free, I set to thinking of my future" (p. 213). The move is, in spite of its initial recklessness, a step toward an independence and attitude that will "set a tone" for her life, for she sleeps that night and every night for a month afterward in an abandoned car in a junkyard among her peers, "the homeless children, the silt of war frenzy" who initiated her into "the brotherhood of man" (p. 216).

A natural bent for survival affects Marguerite's attitudes as well as her actions. Living in a segregated town where racial prejudice is manifested each day by threats of lynchings, overt denials of privileges and rights, and race to race hostile confrontations, she must adjust to this unfriendly environment. Her mode of coping is to distance herself from the harsh reality of her surroundings.

> Resentment of the whites, and the necessity to break through their closed walls of hostility, are forced on her from time to time because she must live in relation to their world; she experiences often the humiliation of their scorn without being able to make an honorable response. But her primary reasons for living, her happiness, sorrows, lessons, meanings, self-confidence, seem to come from within her private circle of light. (Butterfield, 1974, p. 208)

The necessity of a buffering strategy is reflected in the way that Miss Angelou the writer recalls the life of

Marguerite the child. Even though her story deliberately or coincidentally contains examples of the narrative patterns common in autobiography, the substance of the metaphors as evinced in the book is not consistent with the constituent elements found in the traditional myths. An example of this discrepancy is the manner in which the Edenic myth unfolds. According to Egan (1984), Lifson (1979), and Coe (1984), the Edenic childhood is often a natural paradise. Depictions of this simple, harmonious, happy time usually include scenes in gardens, abundant fruit, and light, with apparent emphasis on the idea of naturalness. Marguerite does in fact have an Eden, a favorite place to be that lends a sense of security and safety to her world. She enjoys a degree of compatibility with certain elements in her daily surroundings. And there are happy times as well as sad times. However, in recalling this period of her life, Miss Angelou reveals a lack of naturalness in Marguerite's Eden, almost as if it were a fabricated, forced haven.

Miss Angelou's prose transmits sensory perceptions skillfully and effectively. Her reader sees, hears, smells, tastes, and feels with her through phrase after phrase and passage after passage of the rich imagery that endows the work. The sections recreating the Store and its essence

radiate a special flavor, a gentle fondness that captures emotions that apparently are among the writer's cherished memories. There is no doubt that the small establishment qualifies as Marguerite's Eden; descriptions of the Store contain many aspects of the paradise motif--references to light, abundance, fruit, happiness, harmony. The quality that becomes conspicuous by its absence is naturalness. There appears to be an aura of make-believe, an ambiance of artificiality reflected in comments concerning the Store. This unrealness is made especially apparent in the author's use of images involving light. The Store is most inviting to Marguerite in the early mornings and late evenings, times when the interior is illuminated by lamplight rather than the natural, revealing light of the sun, suggesting a need for camouflage and concealment. The appeal of these dimly lit hours is implied by connotatively pleasant words such as "tender," "magic," and "new." "In those tender mornings the Store was full of laughing, joking, boasting and bragging" (p. 6). In the evening, "just before bedtime," "the promise of magic mornings returned to the Store and spread itself over the family in washed life waves" (p. 13). But "the late afternoon had all the features of the normal Arkansas life. In the dying sunlight the people dragged" (pp. 6-7). The notion that natural light makes no pretenses

while artificial light appeases the senses is further expressed in these lines:

> In cotton-picking time the late afternoons revealed the harshness of Black Southern life, which in the early morning had been softened by nature's blessing of grogginess, forgetfulness and the soft lamplight. (p. 7)

Another passage supports the contention that Miss Angelou associates light with the negative realities of life. While Bailey, Momma, and Uncle Willie enjoy the quietness of a lazy Saturday afternoon, Marguerite loses herself in reverie:

> I thought of myself as hanging in the Store, a mote imprisoned on a shaft of sunlight. Pushed and pulled by the slightest shift of air, but never falling free into the tempting darkness. (p. 94)

Sunlight imprisons; darkness frees.

Even the abundance that Marguerite enjoys in her Eden has an ironic element:

> We were among the few Negro families not on relief, but Bailey and I were the only children in the town proper that we knew who ate powdered eggs every day and drank the powdered milk. . . . We were always given enough to eat, but we both hated the lumpy milk and mushy eggs, and sometimes we'd stop off at the house of one of the poorer families to get some peanut butter and crackers. (p. 42)

Her abundance, in part, consists of man-made, non-natural subsistence. Also, the pineapples--the conventional paradisaical fruit of the metaphor--that she so much enjoys are not in their natural state, but have been canned and stored on the shelves of the Store.

The reader who recognizes the Edenic metaphor in Miss Angelou's work also recognizes the omission of the traditional paradisaical scenes of gardens, fresh fruit, and natural light. This ironic rendering of the myth may suggest that Marguerite's natural environment seems alien and unfriendly to the extent that the conflict between her instinct for survival and the reality of her existence forces a compromise. She will have her Eden even if it means looking at her world through the flickering, transforming glow of a lamplight.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings fails to satisfy the reader's expectation in another way besides the one detailed above. The tone that Miss Angelou adopts in telling her story adds another ironic element to the autobiography. When one considers the truth about Marguerite's life as a young Black in Stamps, Arkansas, in the 1930s; as a displaced child whose parents seem more interested in their pleasures than in her welfare; as the 8-year-old victim of a depraved old man's lust, it seems natural that bitterness, hatred, and self-pity would permeate her life story. The reader who expects an overt display of these emotions is disappointed. "Every autobiographer, black or otherwise, must find a guise or voice with which to come to terms with himself and his world" (Rosenblatt, 1980, p. 176).

Marguerite's guise is distance; Miss Angelou's voice is humor.

> The style by which Angelou describes her youth seems counterpoint to the meaning of her narrative. It is written with a humor and wry wit that belies the personal and racial tragedies recorded. Since style is such a revealing element in all autobiographies, hers, especially seems a conscious defense against the pain felt at evoking unpleasant memories. (Arensberg, 1976, p. 276)

Miss Angelou's humor at times causes the reader to smile, sometimes to chuckle, and still at other times to laugh openly and loudly. The comical sketches of Marguerite and Bailey involved in the devious exploits common among all children are mildly provocative. It is easy to smile at the situation when Bailey steals pickles from the barrel, stuffs them into his pocket, and runs outside, unaware of the telltale stream of the pickle juice on his ashy legs. And the game that the two devise so that Bailey can listen to the "grown-up part" of the adults' conversations while Marguerite provides background noises to give the impression that they are studying is amusingly reminiscent of pranks played by most children. Chuckles and laughs come from imagining hilarious scenes like the one involving the purse-slinging Sister Monroe who rids Reverend Thomas of his false teeth with a slap on the back of the head. Still, humor of a different nature quietly suggests that some situations, although ridiculous and perhaps even laughable, can benefit

from a re-thinking and a remodeling. The demeaning antics of a Black maid and chauffeur seen in a Saturday movie and the incident in which Marguerite deliberately breaks a dish belonging to Mrs. Cullinan, the white woman who insists on addressing her as Mary because "Marguerite" is too long--such examples as these of tastelessness, carelessness, and lack of concern for the dignity of others are targets of a subtle satire.

> Nothing is merely humorous in this book; behind the laughter is a vision of human frailty, a compassion for people's crippled backs and false teeth, their embarrassment, their attempts to cling to some semblance of dignity in the midst of the ridiculous, and their uncontrollable emotions. (Butterfield, 1974, p. 210)

Even when humor is not the prevailing tone, when the event or emotion being recalled is of such pathos that laughter would be completely out of place, there is rarely a sense of outright rage and anger. While there is much evidence of indignation, there is never a sign of resignation. It appears that by her actions, Marguerite sends a message that says, "This is the way things are at the moment, but this is not the way things will always be." When she decides at her grammar school graduation that it would be better to die than have no control over her life, when she later refuses to give up trying to obtain the job she wants even though she is told "they don't accept colored

people on the streetcars" (p. 225), and when she makes the conscious choices discussed earlier in this paper, she seems to be following an instinctive force that commands her to take the initiative to direct the course of her own life.

How does this interpretation of Marguerite's attitudes and actions relate to the title Miss Angelou chose for her book? A clue to the answer to this question may be found in the poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar which contains the same line as the title of the autobiography:

> I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
> When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,--
> When he beats his bars and he would be free;
> It is not a carol of joy or glee,
> But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
> But a plea, that upward to heaven he flings--
> I know why the caged bird sings! (Carlson, 1979, p. 250)

Miss Angelou can empathize with the bird that sings in spite of the bars that bruise his wings and bosom when he confronts them. The song persists as an ostensible manifestation of an instinctive impulse that will not be suppressed. She knows why the caged bird sings. Life has taught her.

Introduction to Stage III

The third and last stage of the model intends to direct readers to a better understanding of themselves as they

reflect on their own autobiographies. It comes after two previous readings--one aesthetic, which seeks an understanding of an autobiographical text in its literary tradition by examining component parts starting from the beginning of the text and working toward the end; the other interpretive, which aims for clarification of meaning through a retrospective look at the work as a whole by proceeding backward from end to beginning. This third step becomes student-centered as the reader, in search of self-enlightenment, relates personal experiences to meanings derived from the two earlier readings. Stage I, the first reading, applies Gunn's poetics in which "the reader experiences the otherness of the text which helps keep the appropriative activity of interpretation from becoming expropriative" (Gunn, 1982, p. 20). Stage II, the second reading, utilizes concepts of Gadamer's hermeneutics which includes the idea that "a person who seeks to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 333). Stage III, the third step, employs aspects of Pinar's currere which values

> the experience of the individual, respecting all those qualities which disqualify it for consideration in the behavioral sciences: its idiosyncratic history, its preconceptual foundation, its contextual dependency, its innate freedom expressed in choice and self-direction. (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. 45)

Currere combines two perspectives that are characteristic of autobiography: "one that is a distanced view--rational, reflective, analytic, and one that is close to its subject matter--immediate, filled with energy and intention" (Grumet, 1978, p. 191). Procedures for this section require students to assume both perspectives in their bid for self-understanding. The close view comes first as impressions recorded while reading become subjects of free associations and free writing. This writing incorporates stories, events, and relationships associated with targeted ideas and impressions. It should be very specific so that later scrutiny can produce revealing generalizations and probing questions. A subsequent essay will develop from the ideas and questions generated by the earlier writing. This is the distanced view that looks for emerging patterns, attitudes, and nuances. It must come several days after the first writing and should be as objective and nonjudgmental as possible. Further writings and analyses will repeat the close and distanced viewing of experience as the journal process of recording impressions continues.

To demonstrate this stage, I become the student who has kept a journal of impressions and notations of interesting passages from the autobiographical text. Through free association with the ideas within the recorded

material, I allow it to become the basis of personal scrutiny which in turn provides subject matter for self writing and analysis.

Application of Stage III

A sample assignment and one which I shall follow to demonstrate this segment of the model is as follows:

You are to write two autobiographical essays.

Essay #1: Choose from your journal entries the recorded ideas and impressions that remind you of something similar that happened to you. Allow your mind to work freely to make associations between the recorded ideas and your experiences. Write freely and vigorously as thoughts come. Be specific. Set this essay aside for several days.

Essay #2: After three or four days, re-read your first essay, drawing general statements from the specific incidents related and noting any questions raised within the writing. Use the generalizations and questions as the focus for another essay. Be as objective as you can as you try to understand reasons behind actions and

reactions. Also be alert to recognize uncovered realities and truths.

Below are passages from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings that I have chosen as bases for free associating and writing. The two essays that follow the passages are my fulfillment of the assignment given above. They incorporate some of the writing techniques outlined in Writing with Power by Peter Elbow (1981). The specific process used is one which Elbow calls direct writing, "a kind of let's-get-this-thing-over-with writing process" (p. 26).

> The process is very simple. Just divide your available time in half. The first half is for fast writing without worrying about organization, language, correctness, or precision. The second half is for revising. (p. 26)

An advantage of using this process is that it helps get ideas from the head onto the paper quickly and without too much trouble. Passages for free associating:

> During these years in Stamps, I met and fell in love with William Shakespeare. He was my first white love. Although I enjoyed and respected Kipling, Poe, Butler, Thackeray and Henley, I saved my young and loyal passion for Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson and W.E.B. Du Bois' "Litany at Atlanta." But it was Shakespeare who said, "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes." It was a state with which I felt myself most familiar. (p. 11)

> Every person I knew had a hellish horror of being "called out of his name." It was a dangerous practice to call a Negro anything that could be loosely construed as insulting because of the centuries of

> their having been called niggers, jigs, dinges, blackbirds, crows, boots and spooks. (p. 91)
>
> George Washington High School was the first real school I attended. My entire stay there might have been time lost if it hadn't been for the unique personality of a brilliant teacher. Miss Kirwin was that rare educator who was in love with information. I will always believe that her love for teaching came not so much from her liking for students but from her desire to make sure that some of the things she knew would find repositories so that they could be shared again. . . . I often wondered if she knew she was the only teacher I remembered. (pp. 182-183, 184)

Essay #1

I remember the big box of books sitting in the middle of the floor in the back bedroom of our house. One of our church members, Deacon Thomas, who worked for a wealthy white family, had been ordered to throw the books out; and when he remembered that I loved to read he brought them to me. There were all kinds of treasures among the discarded volumes--some were too technical and cold to catch my interest but many were to fill my days with adventure after adventure. Evidently they had been in a household where there were young people, for there was plenty in that box to keep a young boy or girl happy for hours on end. Through Mr. Thomas' kind gesture, I was introduced to <u>The Bobbsey Twins</u>, <u>The Hardy Boys</u>, and many other titles that escape me now.

My passion for books began long before the thoughtful gift. Books were a standard part of the decor at our house

when we were growing up, and as the seventh child in an ever increasing family, I was able to take advantage of some of the literature brought into the house by my older siblings. Sometimes they didn't take too kindly to my borrowing their novels, and I guessed it was because a lot of what they read was considered too grown-up for me. My oldest sister was attending college and her bookshelf was especially appealing. I would take a book without asking and usually she would say nothing. But when she found me reading Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath, she told me to put it back. It was too late. I had already become entangled in the story and could hardly wait to discover what would happen to Tom Joad and Rose of Sharon and Ma and Pa on their long dusty trek to California. When she realized that I was ignoring her, my sister reported to Mama that she had been allowed to read that particular book only after finishing high school and that I really shouldn't be reading it. The ironic thing is that the parts she pointed out as unsuitable for my tender years I had already read and their sullying influence had completely slipped by my attention. Perhaps I really was too young for those sections because their import was lost on me, but the other "suitable" parts were the parts I understood and the parts I wanted to absorb. In later years, when I re-read The Grapes of Wrath,

those taboo sections seemed so mild that I wondered what the fuss had been all about.

Our house sat just beside a hill, and between the house and the hill was a tall tree (I never recognized the type it was). The space between the house and the hill was just wide enough for me to clear an area for two or three chairs. The picture of that little alley remains in my memory. So often Mama would call me to do my chores (How I dreaded washing dishes!), and I'd reluctantly put aside my book and leave my private place with its cleanly swept red-dirt floor which resembled a patterned carpet when the sun shown on the tree to project the dark shadows of its foliage onto the ground. And its cool breeze gently rustling the leaves of the old tree with its rope swing which had spun me to dizziness on many occasions. Somehow Mama always knew where to find me.

They used to tell me that a seventh child is born for good luck. One of my luckiest breaks came in the form of my senior English teacher, Mrs. Doretha Black, who must have been born to teach English. She was just that good at it. When Mrs. Black discovered that I and two classmates were avid readers and could write reasonably well, she made sure that our lessons included extra work (and not for extra credit either!). We were assigned, along with the usual

classwork, to read and report on books that were not on the regular reading list. My favorites that year were Anna Karenina, and Madame Bovary probably because Anna and Emma seemed to me to be entrapped within an intolerable situation from which they could not morally or ethically free themselves. For some reason, I sympathized with characters who seemed victimized by their own emotions or circumstances beyond their control. Characters like Anna, Emma and Jane Eyre.

Mrs. Black also nurtured my deep love for poetry and increased my appreciation and understanding of that delicate art. Writing poems was a favorite pasttime. Today I wish I had kept a few of my earlier attempts at creating poesy. Simply to be able to see what and how I wrote back then. As I recall, nothing I wrote was profound--just silly, girl-type stuff and nonsense. I still try my hand at writing peotry and I am still careless about keeping copies of what I write. To me, they just aren't "deep" enough, not intellectual or academic enough to warrant publishing as some of my friends have suggested.

William Shakespeare was and still is of course a favorite, and when Marguerite admits a special love for his Sonnet 29, I can understand why. In fact, when my college professor assigned the class to write from memory

and explicate a sonnet of our choosing, #29 was my immediate, no-doubt-about-it choice. Still, the Romantic poets, especially William Wordsworth, could always arouse my response and my wonder at the way they could all say so beautifully and so completely exactly what I'd say if only I could!

I often wonder why words seem so precious to me, why the lyrics of a song seem more important than the melody. With this attitude concerning words and their power, it seems strange that I try not to give in to "accepting" a verbal insult. My rationale is that just because someone said it, doesn't make it so. Strange, too, that when the sentiment is complimentary, I tend to forget my "words-can't-touch-me" defense. The incident in which Mrs. Cullinan insists on addressing Marguerite as Mary reminds me of a couple of times when I was "called out of my name." The instance when the "other name" was a derogatory epithet didn't bother me half so much as when a classmate continually confused me with the only other black girl in the class. She repeatedly called me Joyce even after several reminders, and when I finally and forcefully displayed my disapproval of her disregard, she became more careful about what she called me. What was different about the two situations? I was able to ignore the insult by a

defiant student who profanely addressed my color and my ancestry because he was not ready to accept directives of any sort from someone of my hue, but I found it extremely offensive to be treated in such an off-handed manner that seemed to say, "You are not important enough for me to try to remember your name."

Generalizations and questions drawn from Essay #1

What does the writing convey to me that can be considered a discovery?

1. My childhood included aspects of the metaphorical Eden.
2. I tend to empathize with those literary characters who seem helplessly and hopelessly victimized by their passions and circumstances.
3. Mrs. Black, a former teacher, holds a precious place among my cherished memories.

What questions are raised for consideration and possible enlightenment?

1. Why do words, books, and literature seem so precious to me?
2. What is there about me that makes being called a derogatory name less offensive than having my real name ignored and being addressed by another name instead?

Essay #2

Until now I never realized that the little space outside one of our bedroom windows between the house and the hill was so important to my childhood. As I look back, I can't recall sharing that time or space with anyone else, although I'm sure that it was never so personal or private as I remember it. When the image of me as a child with a book in my hand comes into mind, I'm always in that spot and the feelings that complete that image are warm and loving. It was probably not beautiful as Edens go, but there were the tree, the cool shade, and several wild bushes--among which were wild berries and big sunflowers. Most of all though, it was a retreat from the busy activity of a house overrun with family. Not that family was not a happy environment. Mama made sure that conflicts were few and subdued. Daddy worked at a local furniture store and his coming home for lunch everyday meant the treat of riding to the corner in the red and green delivery truck he drove. We didn't seem to mind the walk back down the street in the hot sun.

If we were poor, we didn't know it, for there was always a solid roof over our heads, plenty to eat, and clothes to wear. And we had "luxuries" that many neighbors with fewer children didn't have--a radio, a piano, daily

newspapers, a telephone, books galore, and later on, a television set. Mama was usually the first in the neighborhood to have the modern household conveniences. School was understood as a natural phenomenon and received no resistance from any of us. So memories of my childhood suggest that it was a secure happy one.

Books, literature, and Mrs. Black all seem a part of the same scenario in my mind. Mrs. Black as my senior English teacher was an instrument to literary understandings and enlightenments that seemed only to need the recognition and encouragement she gave so skillfully and so wisely. Books have been the media for escape when a little relief from reality was needed, for appeasing a chronic thirst for learning, and for just plain enjoyment and pleasure. Literature, especially poetry, renders me a sense of euphoria and freedom, a certain indescribable feeling that is understood only to those who have experienced it. Why this is so can only be guessed at. Perhaps I enjoy vicariously those delights that I know are possible but which, for some reason, I am unable to enjoy actually.

Words are magic, and on the right tongue or from the right pen, they can mesmerize. They conjure up images, brew emotions, and charm the senses. But just as words are sent out, they must be received, and so perhaps as a defense

mechanism, I am more open to words that please, taking upon my own intellect and my unwillingness to be intimidated the personal responsibility of accepting or rejecting what is said to me. That's possibly why I handled the name-calling instances so differently.

A person's name is such an integral part of him or her. It is the one word that jumps out from among hundreds of other whispered sounds to grab the attention of its possessor. It stands out on the printed page as if beckoning its owner to recognize it. It is almost impossible for a person to be neutral where his name is concerned. At least that's how it is with me. At a recent family reunion, I met a distant cousin with the exact same name as mine, and to be honest, I felt a bit jealous that someone else had been answering to my name all these years. But my reaction to being called Joyce by someone who should have known better was something else altogether. I'll admit that the classmate who was so callous possibly had no adverse intentions. And I wonder how I would have reacted if she had used a name other than that of the one other Black female in the class. I try not to be overly sensitive where race is concerned, preferring to overlook impulsive, emotional slurs as ignorant outbursts of a limited mentality. This situation was different. This particular classmate

and I were members of a small study group of four, and it should have been easy to learn three names, even if it meant deliberately memorizing them. Our group met several times to plan our presentation. Each time I was Joyce and each time she was corrected. I tried hard to be civil, but finally the exhortation blurted itself out: "If you can't remember my name, please just don't call me anything!" From then on, I was Marie. Why the eventual, forceful reaction? The personal affront apparently hit a sore spot. I'm hoping that my retort is not symptomatic of a latent tendency to attribute automatically a racial cause to negative situations involving blacks and whites. I say latent because logic convinces me that such an attitude is absurd, and intelligence (real or assumed) usually keeps me from overtly jumping to rash conclusions when conflicts between races arise. It is important that I clarify my motives in this situation because I work each day with children of both races who are normally compatible but who may conceivably become estranged at times. So far, I have been impartial in dealing with them without having to exert deliberate efforts to be so. Such a pattern of behavior establishes my stance to a degree, but the fact that it seemed important to mention that the name offered to me belonged to another black person is significant. So now I

face another, more difficult question: Is there a conflict between what I'd like to believe because I feel I should and what I really believe because I feel it is true? This uncertainty suggests the necessity for further self-examination.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The main focus of this project has been the design and construction of a pedagogical model for teaching autobiography. The model presents a means toward greater understanding of self for students who study the recorded lives of others in conjunction with their own personal histories in the hope that the resulting self-knowledge will enhance their overall existence. Before the paradigm was devised, it seemed expedient to establish a need for a program which utilizes the personal experiences of the learner. Several sources were offered to suggest that learning becomes meaningful when it is relevant to the learner and to attest that a need for student-centered curricula does in fact exist. It then became necessary to demonstrate the feasibility of the study of autobiography as an instrument to self-knowledge. An investigation of the genre found it to be suitable in many ways, but especially so because of its fundamental prerequisite of self-scrutiny which offers a logical avenue to self-understanding. The task then was to discover a method of presentation that would combine the understanding of others and the investigation of self in a way that would be

theoretically sound and conceptually possible. The theories chosen as bases for the model--poetics, hermeneutics, and currere--are concepts expounded by Gunn (1982), Gadamer (1975), and Pinar (1975), respectively. Poetics and hermeneutics as methods both rely on reader expectation, and the narrative patterns advanced by Egan (1984) as traditional components of autobiography seemed ideal as a resource for preparing prospective readers to anticipate the text.

The next steps were to plan, construct, and explain the model, keeping before me several stipulations. The example had to be functional above all else. It had to comprise steps and procedures that were logical, easy to follow, and educationally acceptable. Explanations and examples had to be given in language that was not too technical for the teacher with no formal understandings of the theories involved. It had to be workable, and that meant demonstrating and proving its worth.

Demonstration of the model would serve two purposes: to show that it works and how it works. A prototype had to be selected. The several volumes of Maya Angelou's autobiography seemed attractive because of the neatness in which they fit into Egan's schemes. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings was chosen because, of the five volumes, I find

it to be the most intense, and also because it contains accounts of experiences that come closer to paralleling those of the students toward whom the model is geared.

The application of the model illustrates the success and ease with which the procedure can be implemented. The mythic patterns of Egan's theory define experiences that are in truth common to most people. They represent ideas and activities that are not alien; and so students, instead of having to comprehend new and complex concepts, have only to reconsider within a different context knowledge they already possess for the most part. Even though the method requires more than one reading, the time element can be controlled to some extent by the teacher who can, for example, remind students to begin the journal process which supplies data and information for the last step as soon as they begin the first reading. And the extent to which the processes are applied in Stages I and II may be adjusted to accommodate different time schedules.

Crucial to the success of the model is the comprehension of the metaphors which define human experience and formulate expectations for readers of autobiography. Therefore, the teacher and students should have access to printed material such as the books by Egan and Coe which were widely used in this study. The teacher should also be

proficient in explaining and demonstrating the process of formulating questions from assertions embedded in the text to assure that the hermeneutic experience is understood by and is successful and meaningful for students. It is essential that students learn how to make free associations between their personal experiences and meanings derived from the text, and they must be able to write freely about those experiences. Equally important is the students' ability to evaluate their writings objectively so that generalizations and questions revealed will point to truths and understandings that are authentic and valid. In applying the model, I found it rather difficult to be completely candid in responding to and reporting some of the findings within the essays I wrote. There were some discoveries revealed to me that I was unwilling to share with others. Since the objective is self-enlightenment and understanding, students should be made to know that they are not obligated to share discoveries that will prove too revealing or embarrassing. Such personal knowledge may be kept private, but it still can be useful in helping learners arrive at self-truth. The fact that my second essay ends with a call for further self-study supports the contention that understanding--of self or of a literary text--is never final or static.

The outcome of my application of the model was a revelation to me. I was happy to discover that it does indeed work. The model itself is largely derivative, based on ideas encountered in my reading. Gadamer's theory concerning the dialogical relationship between interpreter and text; Gunn's autobiographical response involving poetics and hermeneutics; and Pinar's currere requiring associations between personal experience and derived meaning--all seemed to entail processes that, besides being apparently compatible, have the common objective of self-understanding as a result of textual analyses. Also Jauss' "experiment" provided a concrete example even though he confines his analysis to an application of Gadamer's triadic unity of the hermeneutic process. The model should work with almost any autobiographical text since it requires the reader to note what is excluded from a traditional work while looking at what is included within it.

My object has been to present a working, easily facilitated methodology that will lead students to a critical understanding of a literary text using presuppositions and expectations as points of departure. Important to the procedure is an interaction between the reader and the text that allows meaning to unfold as the two separate horizons fuse. As partners in the dialogue,

students will become aware of their role in actualizing the meaning of a written work and will come to appreciate and enjoy the experience. The study of autobiography will expose them to the lives of people who are in many ways quite different from themselves, but who, they will discover, are surprisingly similar in some ways. The alienation, doubts about self-worth, and feelings of isolation that so often plague young people can be relieved when learners discover these commonalities. By allowing another's life story to stimulate personal memories that are in turn the subjects of self-writings, students can use autobiography as a means to self-examination and greater self-understanding.

EPILOGUE

A Bit of Serendipity

One thing that has impressed me while doing the research for this project is the frequency with which I have come across attitudes, ideas, and discoveries that coincide with my own, thus supporting the idea that there are indeed common patterns in various experiences. One example: Long after I had written the section of this paper entitled "Epiphany" in which I recount "my discovery of me," I read in Egan (1984) this quite similar account of Carl Jung's "discovery" of himself:

> Suddenly for a single moment I had the overwhelming impression of having just emerged from a dense cloud. I knew all at once: now I am myself! It was as if a wall of mist were at my back, and behind that wall there was not yet an "I." But at this moment I came upon myself. Previously I had existed too, but everything had merely happened to me. Now I happened to myself. Now I knew: I am myself now, now I exist. Previously I had been willed to do this and that; now I willed. (p. 140)

Another example: All through the writing of this paper, the following poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson has been just beneath the surface of my mind:

> Flower in the crannied wall,
> I pluck you out of the crannies;
> I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
> Little flower--but <u>if</u> I could understand
> What you are, root and all, and all in all,
> I should know what God and man is. (Woods, 1950, p. 1261)

Each time the verse attempted to rise up and be recognized, I would push it aside. Then I happened to find the following statement by John Dewey (1934) which, although more prosaic, dispenses a message complementary to Tennyson's poetic rendering and which seems to recommend and reflect the relevance of the poem:

> Flowers can be enjoyed without knowing about the interactions of soil, air, moisture and seeds of which they are the result. But they cannot be understood without taking just these interactions into account. (p. 12)

Tennyson is undoubtedly referring to the biological entities of the flower--the stem, the petals, the roots, etc.--an understanding of which he implies would be the key to an understanding of God and ultimately of man. Dewey says that we can begin to know the mystery of the flower only if we realize the interaction that takes place between the seed and the environment which nurtures and cultivates the flower. Both Tennyson and Dewey are suggesting a means by which we can begin to unravel the secrets of Nature and metaphorically, ourselves as natural creatures. Tennyson seems to advocate a look within; Dewey reminds us that we must also consider the world without. I would add: For a person to be whole and wholesome, it is necessary that he revive memories and relive experiences in an effort to identify significant themes in his biography, while

realizing that all experience is the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world. When the separate entities of a life have been made cohesive and coherent by patterns and structures imposed as a result of introspection and resolution, the life can then become as the blooming flower--"a thing of beauty" and a potential "joy forever." This I believe. This I affirm.

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