

Towards a narrative pedagogy: How stories humanize representations of poverty

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ABSTRACT

Towards a narrative pedagogy: How stories humanize representations of poverty

Adrian McKerracher

I examine and defend stories as learning opportunities and explore their impact on representations of poverty. First, I outline the territory of aesthetic education as demarcated by Maxine Greene and John Dewey. I explore the functions of two essential components of aesthetic experience, metaphor and imagination, arguing that stories have the capacity to link differences of circumstance and character by sharing common experience. Second, I direct the learning potential implicit in stories to education about poverty. I focus on the ways in which poverty is represented and how it is addressed by the international development efforts of wealthy countries. I explore the ubiquity of quantitative descriptions that probe solutions for poverty as if it were a problem of numbers. In this discussion, I contrast economic descriptions with narrative ones in an effort to understand how poverty can be re-envisioned to better represent the poor as people. Third, I combine the strengths of a narrative pedagogy with the need for re-representing poverty by viewing them through the lens of Paolo Freire's critical pedagogy. I examine the extent to which stories constitute opportunities for radical transformative education, opportunities which may contribute to a critical awareness of one's circumstances and one's agency to affect them. I conclude by arguing that stories should be a fundamental part of education about poverty because of their capacity to humanize representations of the poor through empathy. An original work of fiction is included and examined for the learning opportunities defended in the main argument.

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INTRODUCTION

When I told a friend that my thesis was going to argue that fiction constitutes a learning experience, she asked, “Is that something that anybody would disagree with?” After telling other people, I got similar replies – “Well of course we can learn from stories.” But why, then, have they been so absent from my formal education? If stories are so generally approved of as formative experiences, why are they not more integrated into the ways in which students are encouraged to discover the world? These were important questions when I began this project. Still, they constituted the circumstantial starting point; they are built on a pre-existing conviction that stories have educational value.

There are three main parts to this thesis: first, I examine and defend the foundations of this conviction that stories constitute learning opportunities. To do this, I outline the territory of aesthetic education as demarcated by Maxine Greene and John Dewey. Within that fertile land, I explore the functions of two essential components of aesthetic experience, metaphor and imagination, concluding that stories have the capacity to link differences of circumstance and character by sharing common experience.

Second, I direct the learning potential implicit in stories to education about poverty. Here I am interested in the ways in which poverty is represented and how it is addressed by the international development efforts of wealthy countries. I explore the ubiquity of quantitative descriptions that probe solutions for poverty as if it were a problem of numbers. In this discussion, I contrast economic descriptions with narrative ones, examining each for their shortcomings and merits in an effort to understand how poverty can be re-envisioned to better represent the poor as people.

In the final chapter, I combine the strengths of a narrative pedagogy with the need

for re-representing poverty by viewing them through the lens of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. Here I am concerned with exploring the extent to which stories constitute opportunities for radical transformative education, opportunities which may contribute to a critical awareness of one's circumstances and one's agency to affect them. Such an awareness, I argue, is essential to understanding alternative representations of poverty. I conclude the thesis by arguing that stories should be a fundamental part of education about poverty because of their capacity to humanize representations of the poor through empathy. I explore the validity of this claim by examining a short work of fiction that has been written to confront these challenges of representing poverty.

Readers should be advised that the tone of this thesis is deliberately intimate. For example, I use the first-person subject; that is, the voice of the author – my voice – is present through out the argument. My hope is that readers will understand the appropriateness of a personal and even playful address in a defense of humanizing representations of poverty. My goal has been to reflect that humanization in the tone of the argument itself.

In a world where single corporations have more money than entire countries, concern for the distribution of wealth is increasingly necessary. But changing the lives of those in poverty requires recognizing them as people, first, not as mathematical problems to be solved. In the pages of this thesis, the educational capacities of stories are urgently summoned to the cause of humanizing representations of poverty.

CHAPTER ONE

Stories and aesthetic education

Introduction

If I wanted to convince you that Uganda is a beautiful country, I might tell you plainly “It's really quite pretty there,” or I might tell you a story of the time I went north and how the red roads cut through the green brush and the sun was setting blue. If my particular tale was the first you had heard to address that subject, or if it was told with a breath of originality and flare, it might feature in your thoughts the next time you were called upon for opinions of Uganda. If you, being as worldly as you are, were accustomed to such a subject, the story might blend into others you have collected and contribute in gentler ways to your understanding of, and your feelings about, Uganda.

So that is the first thing I will say: specific stories affect one's understanding of a place in ways that sweeping generalizations have trouble matching. But stories do not only teach emotions – they build knowledge that is personal. The knowledge that is presented “by means of human emotions, intentions, hopes, fears, and so on, is not only more directly comprehensible but is also more meaningful and engaging than knowledge presented disembodied from its human source” (Egan, 1999, p. 51). In this section I will defend the worth of stories – I will show how they make meaning, and how they connect people to others. First, I will situate my appreciation for stories in its appropriate field of study, aesthetic education.

Aesthetic education

“To grasp the origin of art it is also necessary to grasp the origin of the communities of shared experience. Art forces us to think about how human beings are related to the world and to each other.” (Alexander, 1987, p. 189)

Aesthetics is the study of what is beautiful. This sounds too simple, but it is simple only when phrased so briefly, because beauty is deeply complex. In poems, for example, we may find ourselves in fields of daisies; in paintings it may be sunflowers. Either way, something happens that is more than the simple tickle of pretty sounds or pretty colours. Relationships are being made, strengthened, dismantled, rebuilt. Something is formed in the beautiful.

Aesthetics, then, “is the term used to single out a particular field in philosophy, one concerned about perception, sensation, imagination, and how they relate to knowing, understanding, and feeling about the world” (Greene, 2001, p. 5). At this level, aesthetics remains as it did with Plato and Aristotle, as a philosophical engagement reserved for intellectual elites. Such a sensitivity, however, was not a birthright. Instead, the awareness of the aesthetic – that relationship between beauty and knowledge about the world – was guided by a slender but supple branch of education, aesthetic education, and its nature is the main concern of this section. According to Maxine Greene (2001), the well-known contemporary philosopher of aesthetic education,

[Aesthetic education] is an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what is there to be noticed, and to lend works of art their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful. When this happens, new connections are made in experience: new patterns are formed, new vistas are opened. Persons *see* differently, resonate differently. (p. 6)

The aesthetic experience, then, is a relationship, a transaction between what Greene (2001) calls an “inner vision” and an “outer vision” (p. 32). It is not a static event;

we do not perceive beauty in a void. Even to describe something as “beautiful” says more about the perceiver than about the thing. In this way, aesthetic education, drawing upon the aesthetic experience, “has to do with process and not with product” (Greene, 2001, p. 68). If you want an example of a product-oriented interest in the aesthetic, turn to art appreciation. Aesthetic education, however, is inseparably linked to the ways in which meaning and knowledge are built as art is perceived and engaged. Because the educational, formative experience of art is born from the person, a work of art can never be exhausted or used up. As a pedagogical experience, it is a fully renewable resource.

Dewey and aesthetic education

According to John Dewey, grandfather of progressive education, “the opposite of 'aesthetic' is indeed 'anesthetic'” to which Maxine Greene added that “we might think of aesthetic education as education for wide-awakeness – for a more active, responsible, ardent mode of pursuing our human quests” (in Greene, 2001, p. 111). Fortunately, the caffeine to fend against the slumber of a life without aesthetics is ubiquitous – “Art is all around!” we say in the frolic of our daisy fields – and Dewey said it, too. While elites glared into the grinds at the bottom of their empty cups, Dewey sought, with his writing in *Art and Experience*, “to restore the continuity of aesthetic experience with normal processes of living” (in Zeltner, 1975, p. 15; and Greene, 2001, p. 107). That meant,

removing arts from their pedestals and equipping all kinds of people to engage with them, to lend them their lives. And it meant enlarging the domain of the arts so that all kinds of silenced voices could be heard, all kinds of once discarded imagery be attended to and, at the very least, explored. (Greene, 2001, p. 107)

If the arts could be so lowered from their lofty heights and brought down like a plate of food for normal people to eat, then the aesthetic experience could – and should,

as Dewey maintained – be accessible by all forms of learning. That is, all education had the potential for aesthetic experience.

Art is lovely! Art is grand! Everyone go join a band! With our pockets filled with stems and heads, we wonder if we can all go home now. Not quite. The aesthetic experience is not an attribute that can be grafted on to pedagogical practice with the assumption that beauty and knowledge have successfully been attached. The nature of the aesthetic experience entails no fixed identity – it is, like aesthetic education, a complex, dynamic relationship instead.

According to Dewey, the existence of life has three parts – the organism or individual; the environment in which the individual exists; and the interaction between the individual and its environment. Together they are referred to as a triadic relationship. The individual does not (and in fact, cannot) exist independently of its environment, nor can the environment exist separately from the individual – although the conditions of the environment might exist without the individual, they are only environmental conditions in relation to the life of the individual. In this way, both the individual and the environment require interaction to exist as themselves. Dewey elaborates:

[It is not the case] that organism and environment are ‘given’ as independent things and interaction is a third independent thing which finally intervenes. In fact, the distinction is a practical and temporal one, arising out of the state of tension in which the organism at a given time, in a given phase of life activity, is set over against the environment as it then and there exists. There is, of course, a natural world that exists independently of the organism, but this world is *environment* only as it enters directly and indirectly into life functions. (Dewey, in Zeltner, 1975, p.15)

Continuing in this vein of philosophical ecology, Dewey claims that life moves in gaps and recoveries from equilibrium (Zeltner, 1975, p.18). This relationship with an equilibrium in our environment gives us some important insight into the causes of

emotions, which arise as “the conscious sign of a break [from equilibrium], actual or impending” (Zeltner, 1975, p.16). Consider your most recent surge of emotion in this light. Could it not also be linked to an actual or probable change in your environment, positive or negative? Those circumstances that cause one to fall out of step with one's environment, to break with equilibrium, are what Dewey calls “disturbing or problematic situations” (Zeltner, 1975, p. 19). These problematic situations constitute “the paradigm of human affairs in Dewey's logic and psychology” because of nature's constant evolution. As the individual and the individual's environment inevitably change, the individual is constantly called upon to adjust to a new equilibrium, “that is, to reintegrate with the ongoing process of nature” (Zeltner, 1975, p. 19).

Let me put this in very real terms. You are on a moving sidewalk in the airport, going to catch your flight. You have to pee. You get off and find the toilet. When you emerge you realize that you are nearly late. You run in the direction of your flight. Eventually, you find another place on the moving sidewalk. You aren't sure yet whether you will make your flight. That's life.

The moving sidewalk is nature, which, according to Dewey (and the engineers who design moving sidewalks), is always moving. It passes different surroundings. You are the individual. Some change in your environment (in this case, in your bladder, which is part of your environment to the extent that it affects your behavior) requires you to react, perhaps even with emotion. You react; you emote. You realize that you might be late (another emotion, based on the break with equilibrium that you held until leaving the moving sidewalk), and finally you regain your place – that is, you recover equilibrium – still unsure of what is to come.

According to Dewey, this is how intelligence works. By using intelligence, people

“initiate action which is purposefully designed to solve the problem” (Zeltner, 1975, p.

19). And art, according to Dewey, is a deeply intelligent process that should not be considered as anything less.

Because perception of the relationship between what is done and what is undergone constitutes the work of intelligence, and because the artist is controlled in the process of his work by the grasp of the connection between what he has already done and what he is to do next, the idea that the artist does not think as intently and penetratingly as a scientific inquirer is absurd. (Dewey, in Zeltner, 1975, p. 27)

Dewey's artist, then, must respond consciously to his or her own work, absorbing the relationship between previous brush strokes or notes or words or movements and future ones, anticipating problems as they arise (breaks from equilibrium) and resolving them with intelligent readjustment to given circumstances and available goals (restoring equilibrium with one's environment).

This is to demonstrate the thinking behind one central idea: that the aesthetic has a valuable place in common experience because it strengthens the interaction so critical for Dewey's triadic relationship. Later in this chapter, I will return to the interactive opportunities provided by the aesthetic experience, particularly in the context of stories as pedagogy.

What are stories?

Stories parade beneath the umbrella of aesthetic experience. Stories can also be called narratives. 'Narrative' sounds more formal and proper while 'stories' sounds pedestrian and accessible. I prefer the term 'stories', so that's what I'll use. Stories are one of the many forms that the aesthetic experience can take, which include painting, music, dance, theatre, poetry, and more varied versions or collaborations between them. What

has been said above pertains to aesthetics as a general field of inquiry; what I'm going to say here is designed to narrow my focus and speak specifically about stories, which, along with their pedagogical potential, are my main concern with this thesis.

The academic interest in stories arose in response to positivism, which insisted on the laws of cumulative reason and logic to derive universalizable truths about the way things were. As people began to realize the difficulty (to put it mildly) of such a task, a small faction broke off to explore ways in which knowledge could be sought that was not universal but no less legitimate. In this way, researchers who support narrative as a viable form of information about the world are interested “not in prediction and control but understanding” (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007) locating them solidly in the same camp as much qualitative research. There are, of course, many other researchers and even larger social and economic groups that entirely reject this kind of qualitative investigation, along with its reluctant conclusions, dismissing them as ignorant of necessary laws based on science – that is, logic, testing, reason, fact, causal relations – in short, positivism. In stories, however, there is another kind of value, one that cannot be found in laboratories or deduced by formula, and that is the interest I am writing to defend.

If we accept for a moment that stories do hold some kind of meaning about the world, some kind of knowledge that eludes positivism, then knowledge of language becomes an indispensable prerequisite, knowledge of one's mother tongue, specifically. If one is to participate in one's own community, one must be able to communicate and understand what is communicated by others. That, in effect, may be what community is all about. Stories take multiple forms including anecdotes, fables, legends, history, and gossip. They all share some traits. And since this section is devoted to first clarifying what a story is, let me dispense with that now before the soup gets cold.

Technically, a story has three basic elements: “(a) a situation involving some predicament, conflict, or struggle; (b) an animate protagonist who engages in the situation for a purpose; and (c) a sequence with implied causality (i.e., a plot) during which the predicament is resolved in some fashion” (Carter, 1993, p. 6). When compared to positivistic fact mongering, stories can do two things that brute facts cannot – they can accommodate “ambiguity and dilemma as central figures or themes” and imply by their temporal sequence “both causality and significance” (Carter, 1993, p.6). Very bluntly, in terms of what is called narrative arc, or story arc, “there is [...] at the simplest level a rhythm in stories. They set up an expectation at the beginning, this is elaborated or complicated in the middle, and is satisfied in the end” (Egan, 1986, p. 24). But of course, it's what happens along the way that matters.

How do stories affect the perceiver?

So far, I have whittled down aesthetic education as a field of study to hold a little wooden bird in my hand called 'stories' or 'narrative'. Similar to the way that I pointed out how aesthetics were embedded in daily life by examining Dewey's triadic relationship, here I want to explore how stories work. What is actually going on in them that makes them effective? Later in this chapter, I'll examine the obvious question that follows – effective for what?

Stories earn their worth as morally educational experiences by two devices, metaphor and imagination. Both of them are linked to each other. Metaphor brings different parts of the world together through identification, while imagination conceives of the leap in association between the two parts. First I'll describe how metaphor works.

Metaphor: Bringing the world together

“We all have some idea of how metaphors open our views of the world. They do so in part by enabling us to understand something by likening it to something else.” (Greene, 2001, p. 101)

There are two kinds of association in speech – analogy and identity. Analogy produces simile; identity produces metaphor (Frye, 1963, p. 11). For example, Bryan Adams has a song called “Cuts like a knife”. This is simile, saying that one thing is like another thing. It's not terribly interesting to put things this way, but certainly effective. On the other hand, Ricky Martin has a song called “She bangs”. This is metaphor, and is much more exciting. It is exciting because Ricky Martin, or more likely the people who write his songs for him, are likening “she”, the feminine object of his desire (shall we say) to something that blows up, or goes 'bang'. Does she actually bang? Is that for us to say? While keeping our minds clear of the gutter, we are encouraged to draw likenesses between two disparate phenomena. That is, two different parts of the world have been brought together to enrich each other.

Making metaphor is a contradiction of logic. One thing cannot be another thing and still be kept as two separate things. Yet these devices, analogy and identity, are what literary critic Northrup Frye (1963) calls the “two crude, primitive archaic forms of thought” which poets use “in the most uninhibited way” (p. 11). The project of metaphor is not designed to show nature as a single unit unto itself, but to show “a world completely absorbed and possessed by the human mind” (Frye, 1963, p. 11). It is a merging of what's inside with what's outside; or, returning to Maxine Greene's words, of “inner vision” with an “outer vision”.

The sudden alignment of until-then separate parts is what writer and essayist Cynthia Ozick (1989) calls “the shock of metaphor” (p. 281). Ricky Martin's popular

song might be shocking for other reasons, too, but considering more genteel verse like Shakespeare's "Juliet is the sun" from *Romeo and Juliet* illuminates once again this coincidence and convergence of a person with a part of their natural world. If we return briefly to Dewey's triadic relationship, we can begin to see that metaphor provides opportunities for interaction between the individual and his or her environment.

Metaphor, however, does not simply take two fixed points and align them with no regard for temporality the way that stars might be dragged into alignment by gravity. Instead, metaphor relies as much on the past as on what is presently available for comparison. In "[transforming] the strange into the familiar" (Ozick, 1989, p. 280), the experience of metaphor calls into relevance all of one's experience of that particular phenomenon up until that most recent point of perception. For example, in order to gain any insight into who Juliet is or what Juliet means to Romeo by the phrase, "Juliet is the sun", one must have some experience of the sun and what it means. Some may recall the field of daisies, other may think of sunflowers. Another may remember only a red nose and a headache. The pedagogical success of a metaphor is the degree to which it can stretch the understanding of the thing it is brought out to illuminate without being so alienating as to snap the taffy of its identity. In this way, the negotiation of metaphor is carefully and sensitively wrought to achieve a new identity for both things – Juliet and the sun, in this case – without destroying either one. To resort to a trite metaphor, a bridge is made, and just like a bridge is neither one of the shores at either of its ends but something unto itself, so is metaphor. This delicate balance must be established in the context of one's previous experience of the illuminating comparison. In other words, just as metaphor aligns two separate identities in the creation of a new, merged identity (this "Juliet-as-the-sun", or the bridge architecture which depends on either shore but is not the

shores themselves), so does the experience of metaphor reach back to previous experience, recalling it and applying it to the present moment; and in that moment, reinventing the experience (Bateson, 1994). Perhaps in this way the alignment of stars is not such an inappropriate analogy after all – even though the stars may align for all visual purposes, one of those stars may in fact be billions of years old, even burnt out, from a previous solar generation, and with the relatively ponderous speed of light, is only reaching the present moment of perception through lengthy travel in the past. So too does experience come to the fore in the alignment of metaphoric identification between Juliet and all the suns we have ever known.

Imagination: Seeing possibilities

I have suggested one of the devices that stories rely on to insert themselves relevantly in the world – metaphor. Later I will be building on this relevance to show that stories are morally constructive, that they make people into more moral arbiters of human experience. There is still, however, another aspect of the aesthetic experience in general and of stories in particular that must be examined in order to understand the ways in which stories affect people. Imagination is the capacity to see metaphor and make the links between disparate parts – to see, for example, the bridge between two shores.

The first of many challenges with imagination is encouraging others to recognize it as a legitimate mental faculty and area of investigation. Educational research into the imagination relies heavily on narrative methods (stories) and is, by nature, largely qualitative. Although parts of the brain have been recognized to be more active during certain imaginative exercises, still not enough is known about how the imagination actually works, meaning that there remains a lot of room to explore. In this context of a

mental faculty that is hard to define, important pedagogues and philosophers continue to defend the importance of the imagination as an essential learning capacity (see Greene, Dewey, Egan).

Northrup Frye (1963), for example, doesn't seem to think that humans are as powerful as many other humans think they are. In fact, he refers to them as “second-rate animals” in terms of actual constructive capacity. It's true that we are rather soft, needing frequent maintenance, and can be bested by a mosquito. But what Frye recognizes as the main capacity that separates humans from animals is what he calls “a third level of mind, a level where consciousness and practical skill come together” (p. 5). The three levels of mind, according to Frye, are: (1) consciousness and awareness (charged with recognizing the difference between what's me and what isn't me); (2) social participation (responsible for involvement in practical and professional concerns); and (3) the imagination (Frye, 1963, p. 6). The role of the imagination, put simply, is to conceive of the opportunities implicit between “I don't like this” and “I could imagine things different” (Frye, 1963, p. 9). It is to conceive of “alternative realities” (Greene, 2001, p. 74). With this “third level of mind” we begin “to see where the imagination belongs in the scheme of human affairs [...] It's the power of constructing possible models of human experience” (Frye, 1963, p. 5).

The relationship between imagination and metaphor becomes increasingly apparent. Just as metaphor brings two separate parts together to enrich the identity of each, or brings part of the individual's environment alongside to illuminate parts of his or her character or sentiment, so does imagination work with the possibilities between what is real and what could be. The potential, in this case, is dependent on the reality – by perceiving the conditions in which I find myself and comparing them to how they could

be different, I am engaging my imagination in the pursuit of possibilities. Maxine Greene

(2001) intertwines these qualities more conversationally:

Yes, if you like, imagining has to do with metaphor-making, discovering unexpected resemblances, making connections between the inner and the outer. Some say it has to do with appreciating the known and the unknown simultaneously. (p.74)

From just this glimpse into the value of the imagination, we can extrapolate the need to increase or at least preserve the respect for the unknown in the school curriculum. And one can just as easily see how reluctantly a place for the “unknown” might be reserved at the assembly of positivist researchers or pedagogues. The requirements for the classroom in regards to the morally constructive capacities of stories and imagination will be explored in the final chapter of this thesis.

The capacity to “look at things as though they could be otherwise” (Greene, 2001, p. 83) is what literary philosopher John Gardner (1978) calls “the laboratory of the unexperienced, both the heroic and the unspeakable” (p. 13). Here, however, I must add a caveat, one that I hope will dress the imagination in more civilian clothes, for I'm afraid that it is in these discussions of imagination as dreaming that it gets its bad rap, or at least its ditsy glitter stiletto heels.

Imagination relies on experience as metaphors do. It is not strictly “a laboratory of the unexperienced” although it may be a place where things yet-undone can play themselves out to wild potential. Like metaphor, imagination works on a given reality to pursue alternatives. This is how change occurs, from inventions to economies, modified from what is available and combined with what could possibly come from it or replace it with more accuracy, efficiency, or insight. Even in Gardner's “laboratory of the unexperienced,” his two examples rely heavily on experience for their derivation. How

would I know what is heroic without experience? What are the limits of the speakable, except by those limits that my experience has defined? With words from Greene – the combination of the known and the unknown – or from Frye – the real and the imagined – or from Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) – experience and un-experienced – we begin to see how imagination plays a similar bridging role between our given environment and a potential one.

To understand the role of the imagination, consider (only hypothetically) what it would be like to be deprived of one. Northrup Frye goes down this road in his essay *The Educated Imagination* (1963) in which he defends the imagination and its cultivation through literature as essential to awareness of the self and society. In the scenario that he constructs, the hypothetical man becomes disillusioned with the status symbols that were previously so important to him, symbols by which he used to define his identity but to which he no longer feels attached. He realizes that his participation in the world is dependent on the conditions that are fed to him – he is told that a car, a house, a paying job are all good things, but he feels far from them in spite of the value that is projected upon them. The hypothetical man's problem, according to Frye, is that he can only imagine the reality that he lives in. He is a slave to one world.

I would add that, while it is obvious that the hypothetical man has failed to see other ways of living, he has more specifically failed to do so in a way that is personal. The value that he expects from the car, house, and paying job are projected upon him from without. Instead, in his disillusionment and eventual (one hopes) engagement of his imagination to pursue alternatives, he must think for himself, must imagine for himself, based on the capacity of his experience. This ability to recognize one's reality, to become disillusioned by it, and eventually to rebuild it through personal awareness is explored in

the third chapter of this thesis, “Stories as opportunities for social change”. There, the learning process, challenges, and opportunities of stories and imagination will be pursued in the context of critical pedagogy. In this light, the imagination, through stories, represents the power to change a given reality to an alternative one. Congruently,

We have much in common with early Greek and Hebrew thinkers who portrayed the imagination as both divine and diabolical in nature. The human mind can envision change. For those who desire change, this power is divine. For those who do not, it is diabolical. (Frein, 1997, p. 7)

How are stories morally formative?

Before discussing the social change opportunities that stories present, though, there is still more to say about how stories work. Up until this point I have described a few things – first, I situated stories in the context of aesthetic experience, identifying the three critical elements for life to exist – the individual, the environment, and interaction between the two. In that section I suggested, along with Dewey, that the aesthetic experience contributes to that interaction, and therefore is an important part of everyday life, or at least should be. Second, I narrowed my focus to stories and explained some of their technical attributes – a few notes on form and a little bit on character and plot. Third, I broke stories down further to their two devices that connect them to the world that they exist in, those devices being metaphor and the imagination.

This final section of the chapter, which pursues the reasons for which stories should be considered morally formative, and thus opportunities for aesthetic education, is divided into two parts. First, I will describe the ways in which stories are embedded in meaning-making practices, from scientific to religious. Second, I will explain how they create empathy between people. Later, this “empathetic imagining” as Martha Nussbaum calls it (1995, p.xvi), will be the foundation for critical pedagogy through stories.

How stories fit into the ways we make meaning

i) On tolerance

The first way that stories affect us is by encouraging tolerance. By presenting circumstances outside of, but accessible to, our own, they escort the reader or listener through other lives. Northrup Frye's ideas (cited in Egan, 1992) about imagination and tolerance can similarly be transported by the specific vehicle of stories.

One of the most obvious uses [of imagination] is its encouragement of tolerance. In the imagination our own beliefs are also only possibilities, but we can also see the possibilities in the beliefs of others... what produces the tolerance is the power of detachment in the imagination, where things are removed just out of reach of belief and action. (p. 56)

Tolerance, then, becomes a pedagogical outcome of exposure to and exploration of stories. If a reader in the West diligently follows the narrated accounts of someone in the East, then at the close the Westerner may come to know a little more about the ways of the Easterner, and thus find allowance in his or her mental charity for the differences to continue with permission.

Tolerance, however, is not enough. Tolerance, with its feet in cultural relativism, risks embracing infinite diversity without interacting with it. It compartmentalizes difference, puts it aside. Tolerance is categorical and dismissive.

Instead of simply existing in proximity to difference, one must engage in a relationship with the world around him or her – in Dewey's terms, the individual must interact with his or her environment. As interaction takes place between the two, the individual is affected, that is, he or she is jarred out of equilibrium, then uses intelligence to adjust and reinsert him/herself into the equilibrium of the (ever-changing) environment. The values of tolerance, in this light, are akin to changes in the environment which the

individual simply observes, making no other response than to accommodate them. If I go back to the moving sidewalk analogy, it's like having to pee and simply noticing, "Hmmm, I have to pee, I didn't have to pee before, isn't that interesting," and doing nothing about it. The biological consequence in this analogy is easy to anticipate. The pedagogical consequence is that the utility of stories is sold short, only taken part way along its potential to affect the perceiver. Certainly, recognizing the need to pee is a necessary first step in solving the problem, but it does not represent the address in itself. The tolerance that stories might elicit is only useful to the extent that it alerts readers and listeners to the presence of difference around them. What remains is to respond to that difference.

In this way, the exposure to difference that stories provide is useful, and even foundational, for a morally-formative experience. If any kind of moral creature is to escape from the zoo of pedagogical experience, it must be thoroughly acquainted with the nature of difference around them, especially in the lives of others, since morality is mainly concerned with how conscious beings treat each other. But what does this exposure look like?

The motive behind tolerance seems to be the inclusion of all difference. It is a value that cultural relativism serves on the neatly delineated sections of a T.V. tray with steaming potatoes in one part and Vodka Jello shooters in another. Anything goes. In its valiant effort to be infinitely inclusive, cultural relativism becomes passive, setting strict boundaries between groups and discouraging, above all, moral commentary on one by another.

I am not suggesting that stories should give rise to a moral tyrant who mixes ham into cookie dough or nuts into chewing gum; the alternative to tolerance is not a moral

hodge-podge in which all differences should get caught up in one another to become unrecognizable or incoherent. Instead, a kind of interaction is required that encourages what Kobena Mercer (in McLaren, 1995) espouses as solidarity – “solidarity does not mean that everyone thinks the same way, it begins when people have the confidence to disagree over issues because they ‘care’ about constructing a common ground” (p. 41). Here, unlike in a pedagogy of tolerance, we have the interaction that Dewey required between the individual and his or her environment – even, and often necessarily, through disagreement. (Keep in mind that other people constitute part of one's environment to the extent that they affect the individual in ways that he or she must recognize, respond to, and adjust to in order to restore equilibrium). This effort to maximize points of interaction is one that stories can contribute to generously – each story represents not only a different node of contact with one's environment, but when combined with other stories creates a complex web of interconnections between those nodes. Returning to an earlier analogy, the individual becomes the bridge between differences. It is on these bridges that differences come into contact with one another, interacting, readjusting, and searching again for equilibrium in their traffic.

What I have said above might have seemed like a hiccup in the respirations of my argument. The main point of the above is to show what stories contribute to the foundation of a morally-formative experience – they create opportunities for interaction between differences by establishing points of contact with one's environment. At very least they encourage tolerance. Below I'm going to talk about stories as tools that influence ideology, whether that's political or religious. This may seem like another hiccup, but if you hold your breath until the close of the chapter, you will find they've gone away.

ii) How stories influence ideology

Neil Postman (1995) uses “the word narrative as a synonym for god” (p. 5). What he means by this is made clearer by what he calls “meta-narratives”, the kind of grand, all-encompassing stories which set our lives in a particular context and establish through that context a design of what is meaningful. If this seems like a tall order for something as simple as a story, consider the Bible or the Koran, or any religious text or creation myth. The Bible, whether we agree with its validity or not, sets up binary value systems in the West (good/bad, heaven/hell, god/devil, even the meaning of dead or alive) that guide not only our moral categories but our metaphors as well. Although most people have moved on from believing that they are actually inhabited by angels or demons, these binary distinctions persist – the sky is heavenly, while pits are creepy. Light is good, dark is bad.

In other words, “stories create their own bonds, represent cohesion, shared understanding, and meanings” (Delgado, 1995, p. 64). They do not do this uniformly, however, or to uniform effect. Stories are read or heard in many ways. The meaning that stories convey is not absolutely fixed or indisputably concrete, which is what makes them so difficult to reconcile with positivism. Instead, their meaning is multiple. In contradiction to the implied message of meta-narratives that claim universalism, each of them is available for interpretation. In Dewey's words, “the realm of meanings is wider than that of true-and-false meanings; it is more urgent and more fertile.” Although there are some meanings that are also truths, truth does not have “monopolistic jurisdiction [on meaning]. Poetic meanings, moral meanings, a large part of the goods of life are matters of richness and freedom of meaning, rather than of truth” (Dewey, 1994, from *Experience and Nature*, p. 332, in Greene, 2001, p. 67).

Here we begin to see links between the authority of stories and the need for exposure to difference mentioned above. As Maxine Greene (2001) writes, “some of you may be feeling already how poor a life can be when it is confined to only one reality, only one kind of meaning” (p. 69). The value of multiple stories becomes clear with an example. When I was younger, I acted in plays. One of the exercises for finding one's character involved saying the same line in as many ways as possible, exploring intonation, accent, volume, and accompanying it with different gestures. The result was an increased appreciation for how diversely a single sentence could be interpreted and an awareness of what effect that had on the character. Of course throughout the exercise, the words of the line never changed; still, their meaning and significance was shaped by what the actor brought to its expression.

This kind of openness to interpretation abounds, even beyond the tools of aesthetic expression. As Richard Delgado (1995) explains,

The same object, as everyone knows, can be described in many ways. A rectangular red object on my living room floor may be a nuisance if I stub my toe on it in the dark, a doorstop if I use it for that purpose, further evidence of my lackadaisical housekeeping to my visiting mother, a toy to my young daughter, or simply a brick left over from my patio restoration project. There is no single true, or all-encompassing, description. The same holds true of events. Watching an individual perform strenuous repetitive movements, we might say that he or she is exercising, discharging nervous energy, seeing to his or her health under doctor's orders, or suffering a seizure or convulsion. Often we will not be able to ascertain the single best description or interpretation of what we have seen. We participate in creating what we see in the very act of describing it. (p. 65)

Stories, and especially those meta-stories that Postman describes, should be recognized for their various interpretations, too. But not only should each story be susceptible to interpretation (as is the nature of qualitative data) – there should also be more than one story available for such scrutiny. That is, once the actor has examined all possible ways in which their line could be delivered, there should be other lines with

which to continue the exercise so that they might find the continuity of their character in the way they explore the lines. In my experience of the plays I have acted in, there is often a single line or phrase that encompasses what that character means to the actor, but it takes the exploration of those lines to expose and attach to its personal meaning.

If there were, for example, only one way to say the given line, then the expression of the actors would be harshly limited, even oppressed. What is required then, are many interpretations, many lines – that is, many stories with many ways to interpret them. As Delgado (1995) points out, a single dominant story assumes neutrality. With only one story to give meaning to an experience, the experience disguises itself as fact, eluding the interpretive process that is essential to qualitative description. Delgado's response is what he calls “counter-storytelling” – contributing to the available stories with those marginalized voices that are erroneously considered irrelevant. What this entails is a more public participation in the act of making stories, and through those stories, making meaning. In this way, stories can fulfill their function as meaning makers and meaning breakers. For it is through their capacity to show many perspectives that stories both assert value, reshape, dismantle, and reconstruct it, a feature of stories that Delgado (1995) says is often overlooked:

Most who write about storytelling focus on its community building functions: stories build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and deeper, more vital ethics. But stories and counterstories can serve an equally important destructive function. They can show what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel. They can show us the way out of the trap of unjustified exclusion. They can help us understand when it is time to reallocate power. They are the other half – the destructive half – of the creative dialect. (p. 65)

In other words, “stories can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo” (Delgado, 1995, p. 65). A story depicting an alternative vision of reality can show contradictions that a positivist argument cannot. With that, I return to the thrust of this

section – that a moral pedagogy of stories must be built on a foundation where diverse interpretations are encouraged and many different stories are recognized. This calls for a reclamation of authorship, claiming the authority of stories from cultural or historical elites and writing anew the details of one's environment and the values in it. This reclamation will be pursued in the third chapter of the thesis under the exploration of critical pedagogy.

iii) On empathy

So far I have suggested that one lives by stories, and that one should not live by only one story because that limits the possibilities of how to live and what has meaning. The final point of this chapter's argument is perhaps the most important: it is how stories reach the heart.

Equipped with the ability to feel as others feel, even if only vaguely, people keep themselves from plunging into harm and destruction in the forms of selfishness, blindness, and ignorance. With empathy, with the glimpse of one's self in the heart of the other, there is the foundation for all moral activity, and the hope for community. Here I will explore that critical human capacity for empathy and its essential place in morality. My main interest is the ways in which stories are effective tools for achieving such bonds of solidarity among people.

First, let me return to Gardner's claim that the imagination is "the laboratory of the unexperienced." Above, I criticized its accuracy on the grounds that experience actually played an essential role in imaginative activity. I still believe this is true. Here, however, I want to rework what he might have meant and in what ways he is correct.

As Maxine Greene (2001) claims, art allows us to confront experience that we

otherwise wouldn't in our own lives. An easy example of this are testimonies from the Rwandan genocide in 1994. The atrocities of this tragic and horrific event have become, albeit cautiously, narrativized by survivors, researchers, and development workers seeking to better understand what happened and how. Consequently, people in developed countries are slowly coming to awareness (if they look for it) of the conditions of the genocide. Additionally, people in Rwanda and neighbouring countries are learning what happened to their own people and communities through those same stories, constructing a more coherent picture of their own history. By these accounts, told by survivors, witnesses, perpetrators, and victims, one learns of experiences far beyond one's own and comes to a more inclusive understanding of what diversity of experience is possible in a lifetime, horrific or joyous. In this way, stories create opportunities for people to experience from a safe distance (Bevan, 2006). None of us should want to experience in any first-hand, intimate way the atrocities of the genocide; yet through their narrativization we are able to approximate them, draw safely nearer, and comb them for learning opportunities, in a way that being there in the urgent present would not allow for reasons of safety, nor for the limited time available to reflect upon it.

A technique from fiction becomes relevant here – showing, not telling. Young writers are often guided away from the temptation to make claims like, “She was an angry person”, and instead conceive of a scene or gesture that suggest the character's anger vividly, through action. Similarly with the effectiveness of stories and their ability to contribute to our understanding of events or phenomena – those personal stories are worth infinitely more to the complete understanding of a time or place than directly stating the descriptive conclusion could ever be.

Here's an example of what I mean, from a different country: I could tell you that

civilians in Sierra Leone struggled to feed themselves when the rebels got close to

Freetown, the capital city, or I could tell you,

In a moment when there were no bullets shooting we snuck to get green mangoes from a tree. I got two, but the rebels saw when my friend shook the branch by accident and they fired into the leaves, *babababababa*, and that man dropped out of the tree, dead. (Humble Kiat, in conversation, from personal Sierra Leone journal, December, 2, 2004)

In spite of their differences, both of these statements are true; neither one is more true than the other. Yet one is normative and conclusive, and the other is narrative, a story. In the story, there is a person. And immediately once there is a person – indicated in this instance by an “I”, but in others by a name – there is the possibility for empathy for the character by the reader. Even if their conditions are starkly different, even unfamiliar, the shared personhood between reader/listener and character establishes at least a minimum for common ground. This kind of qualitative description should not be universalized, of course. Instead, it represents an opportunity for interpretation and adds to the stories that make up our understanding of, say, the civil war in Sierra Leone or the genocide in Rwanda. The resonance that is created by stories, either by emotion, problem, solution, or character, enables participation in the other's experience (Luwisch, 2001). Or, in literary and ethical philosopher Martha Nussbaum's words (1995), “in their very mode of address to their imagined [audience], [stories] convey the sense that there are links of possibility, at least on a very general level, between the character and the reader [or listener]” (p. 5).

Here is where I finally return to Gardner's claim that the imagination is a “laboratory for the unexperienced.” Keeping in mind what I have said above (along with a disclaimer that Gardner is probably trying to legitimize the imagination by using a

positivistic metaphor – the scientific laboratory – to evoke it), stories become the opportunity to explore different experiences, to experiment with them, safely. Or to use another metaphor: to borrow the life of another, try it on, see how it fits, and return it, but to remember how it felt. The safety in this regard is critical, since, as Gardner (1978) claims, “a simulation of real experience is morally educational” (p. 114). Surviving the Rwandan genocide or the civil war in Sierra Leone would likely have an overwhelming effect on one’s moral formation, too, but one that is not worth the risk nor the destruction of considering as a deliberate learning experience (except by the those rare journalists that contradict all available traffic to go where conditions are at their worst). Gardner’s “un-experienced” may be un-experienced to me, but it attaches to me through my own experience of others.

It is good to remember, too, that stories need not shock and disturb to achieve their effect. Instead, they present equal opportunities for exploration of the mundane, allowing people to scrutinize familiar territory for hidden details – there is, in some stories, the opportunity “to embrace the ordinary” (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 9). However, whether it is by the shock of civil war or the startling discovery of how similarly people experience aging, the way in which stories summon emotion has the capacity to “disconcert and puzzle” (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 6). With stories of violence as with those of love, stories,

inspire distrust of conventional pieties and exact a frequently painful confrontation with one’s own thoughts and intentions. One may be told many things about people in one’s own society and yet keep that knowledge at a distance. Literary works that promote identification and emotional reaction cut through those self-protected stratagems, requiring us to see and to respond to many things that may be difficult to confront – and they make this process palatable by giving us pleasure in the very act of confrontation. (p. 6)

Nussbaum’s work on ethical and empathetic formation is primarily through literary texts and the imagination that carries them forward. As with ‘stories’ and

'narratives', I draw close links between 'stories' and 'literature', the main distinction being that literature is interested in the fictitious and its relationship to the real, while stories and narratives may encompass literature but not be limited to it.

Stories contribute this “identification and emotional reaction” in a way that positivist summaries or sweeping generalizations cannot. By seeing, as poet Walt Whitman saw, “eternity in men and women” instead of seeing them “as dreams or dots”, a contrast is made “between an abstract pseudomathematical vision of human beings and a rich and concrete vision that does justice to human lives” (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 80). In Nussbaum's writing, stories in general and literary works in particular contribute to the “rich and concrete vision” in more substantial ways than the positivist – or, “pseudomathematical” – generalizations do.

This “justice to human lives” is the goal of what Nussbaum (1995) calls “empathetic imagining”, attained by the practice of “judicious spectators”. The spectator's role is anything but passive – by entering into the lives of the characters and their circumstances, the reader or listener tries out other lives – mixing chemicals in the laboratory of the unexperienced – without a predetermined assignment as to whom they will empathize with, nor why. With this exploratory process, the reader/listener comes to know what of their own identity exists in that of the characters he or she encounters. Through this process of exploration – of character, circumstance, and self – the reader/listener considers his or her own life in the context of the narrated ones, examining the role of circumstance and self, and to what degree each is responsible for identity. In Nussbaum's words (1995),

The reader enters each of these lives not knowing, so to speak, which one of them is hers [...]living each of those lives in turn and becoming aware that her actual place is in many respects an accident of fortune. She has empathetic emotions

appropriate to the living of the life and, more importantly, spectatorial emotions in which she evaluates the way fortune has made this life conducive or not conducive to flourishing. (p. 87)

My central interest along with Nussbaum's is the contrast between a “pseudomathematical vision” and “seeing infinity in men and women”, and the empathy that is required by the latter. Stories can encourage such empathy in a way that the mathematical cannot; stories can give life to the individuals who are only vaguely represented by the numbers that blur the real description of who they are and how they are similar to others. In other words, stories can explore how I am the other, too. The absence of the ability to see individuals in the group and the self in the individual “is evident in much evil. To understand and feel this adequately requires thinking that transcends our conventional sense of the “other”” (Egan, 1992, p. 54). Indeed, “group hatred and the oppression of groups is very often based on a failure to individualize” (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 87).

The ability to individualize, or to see one's self in others, is not a guarantee that people will live by the Golden Rule, doing unto others as they'd have done unto themselves, but it is undoubtedly a prerequisite. Without the recognition that the fears, hopes, loves, and losses of another might affect him or her in similar ways as one's self, there can be limited will to treat others fairly or to build a moral community.

The morally formative opportunities implicit in stories – the opportunities for empathetic imagining – do not prescribe a fixed moral ground. The pedagogy of morally formative stories that I am proposing here is not didactic – they do not insist on what is good and what is bad, nor do they tell people how to behave. The morally formative experience comes instead with the process of living, for however briefly, the lives of others, by knowing those lives and comparing their turns with the turns you would make

and seeing how it affects your beliefs (Bevan, 2006). Ultimately, the choice of what is good and what is bad remains with the reader/listener. Nussbaum, (1995) in her appreciation for Charles Dickens, cites the close of *Hard Times*, which concludes with a direct address – “Dear reader! it rests with you and me whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not” (p. 7).

This tag could be added implicitly to the end of all stories. Each entails an opportunity for the reader/listener to engage in experiences that are not their own and to find one's self among the characters and the circumstances. For the moments of immersion in stories, universalisms are played out in a contained, concrete reality – a laboratory, even – like testing an experience or ethical principle safely.

iv) Empathy and love

The limits of the empathy that connects one life to another stretches the boundaries of what qualitative research can address – into what could be called, even, love. (Ironically, emotions are often criticized because they are 'irrational'. Could one not then criticize rationality for being equally 'unemotional'? The infrequency of the latter illustrates the cultural bias against the legitimacy of emotion in decision making.)

It is hard to define love. In fact, it is usually futile. Instead, while I will promise to use it sparingly here, I will say that its definition is best understood as derived from its use. The word love means the way that we use the word love. All I will suggest otherwise to define it is that it is most often, if not most clear, as a relationship between people.

A philosopher and musician friend, Mathias Granum, believes that if you could somehow know everything about a person's life – even the life of a thief or a dictator –

you would love them. Perhaps fortunately, the impossibility of such knowledge renders the exercise obscenely difficult, so it remains in principle more than in practice. The point that Mathias Granum makes, however, is that a knowledge of all the experiences and influences affecting a person leading up to the moment of crime would lend the criminal sympathy; if that knowledge was so thorough as to be complete, to an extent that perhaps only a deity could ascertain, the sympathy, then empathy, would be so great as to be love.

Love has long been the goal of much artistic production, narrative and beyond. As Gardner (1978) states, “misused as [the word love] may be by pornographers and the makers of greeting-cards, it has, nonetheless, a firm hard-headed sense that names the single quality without which true art cannot exist” (p. 83). And just as love is deeply important to the motivation and realization of art, so is it the cherry on top of true empathy, an empathy which stories have the opportunity to inspire. The goal of such empathy through stories should not be reserved for an elite minority as Plato's *Republic* prescribes; instead, as the writer Leo Tolstoy claimed, “the task for art to accomplish is to make that feeling of brotherhood and love of one's neighbour, now attained only by the best members of society, the customary feeling and the instinct of all men” (cited in Garner, 1978, p. 27).

The talk of love and empathy is not reserved for the hocus-pocus of qualitative aesthetic experience. It arises equally in the critical pedagogy of Paolo Freire who also espoused a solidarity, community, and empathy that could engage people in recognizing, then redesigning, their own reality – a process that, I believe, can be greatly aided by stories and the bridges that they build.

Conclusion

Here is what has happened so far: I have introduced stories in the context of aesthetic experience. I have examined how that aesthetic experience can be broken down, and how it contributes to life – by providing opportunities for interaction between the individual and his or her environment. I have introduced and defined 'stories', and dismantled two of their most pertinent devices, metaphor and its relationship to the imagination, to show how stories connect people to their environment and to other people. I have further defended stories' meaning-making capacity by showing how they construct and deconstruct modes of thought, from so-called 'meta-narratives' to counter-storytelling. I have suggested that stories are required in order to increase the points of contact between one's self and others, and that tolerance in itself is not enough to bridge the gap between people. Finally, in an effort to illustrate how stories transcend mere tolerance to contribute inexplicably to the formation of a moral character, I have mapped their path to empathy, and even, love.

Returning briefly to metaphor, the pedagogical differences between the aligned parts are as important as the similarities. In the act of making metaphor, separate parts are brought together, say, as above, Juliet and the sun. The success of the metaphor comes with one's ability to conceive of the contributions each part makes to the other, both by positive definition and negative. We learn of Juliet by examining the ways in which her identity is represented by the sun, all the while knowing that she is not *actually* the sun. The ability to conceive of each part's contribution to the other is achieved by the capacities of the imagination, which can see Juliet, but also make the leap to the sun as her possible identity, too. One learns, then, to appreciate the complexity of Juliet's identity – her character becomes richer, and she is linked to the world around her. If,

however, Juliet were a bowl of noodle soup, we might experience a break-down of metaphor. How do I feel about noodle soup? What does that mean for Juliet? The alignment of the two separate parts in this case does not build new understanding of Juliet's complex identity. Instead, it only confuses it. When metaphor breaks down, no bridge has been built between the parts; the metaphor has failed to achieve its uniting effect. In such a way, the use of metaphor relies heavily on the conceptual capacity – the imagination – of the one who perceives it. To test a metaphor, one asks, can the possibility of a link between these parts be imagined? Metaphors, like their bridges, are built with a careful awareness of the relationships between one's environment and one's self, and of how far those relationships can be stretched to make new and increasingly nuanced meaning.

Metaphors, along with stories, cannot be universalized. All Juliets are not suns, nor is Humble Kiat's testimonial applicable to all Sierra Leoneans during the civil war. The process of engaging those stories, however, and allowing them a place in one's understanding of others and their circumstances, constitutes the morally formative learning experience that I am proposing. In such a way, stories do not “teach”, in the sense that they do not tell us what to do, nor should they. Instead, they present possibilities to explore. With these possibilities, one comes to identify one's self in others; in hard, pedagogical terms, empathy becomes the learning outcome.

The final conception leap I will propose is this: stories are metaphors in themselves. Just as metaphors encourage me to see the sun in Juliet, so do stories propose on a grander scale a version of reality that must be explored, examined, and inhabited. If a metaphor presents new ways of seeing a part of one's self or a part of one's environment, stories present new ways of seeing the world. Both rely on the same imaginative capacity

for recognizing possibility – the difference between what is and what could be. As

Nussbaum (1995) echoes regarding novels,

The novel calls on us to interpret metaphors. But we can now say more: the novel presents itself as a metaphor. See the world in this way, and not in that, it suggests. Look at things as if they were like this story, and not in other ways recommended by social science. (p. 43)

I am not proposing that stories and metaphor-making should become the sole guides for navigating behavior in the world. The importance of facts has not been dismissed, and the ease of their calculation should not go unnoticed. To subject all moral judgment to a narrative scrutiny is beyond the scope of legal and political activity.

Instead, by recognizing the valuable place that stories hold in the formation of a moral character, there is the opportunity to be more just, to see the self in others. Again returning to Nussbaum (1995),

Government cannot investigate the life story of every citizen in the way a novel does with its characters; it can, however, know that each citizen has a complex history of this sort, and it can remain aware that the norm in principle would be to acknowledge the separateness, freedom, and qualitative difference of each in the manner of the novel. (p. 44)

Eventually, with increasing empathy, one approaches the possibility of seeing some part of one's self in the actions of others. The height of this, perhaps, is expressed by poet Walt Whitman:

Whoever degrades another degrades me
and whatever is done or said returns at last to me (in Nussbaum, 1995, p. 119)

Or by Shelley:

A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. (In Frein, 1997, p. 39)

With the chance for such profound empathy, I turn the page as you do to the next chapter of this essay which identifies an area of investigation and education sorely in need

of human connections, the representation of poverty.

CHAPTER 2

Poverty and its discontents

Introduction

In this chapter, I attempt to define the setting for my argument. Up until this point, I have suggested a set of ideological positions that present aesthetic experience as pedagogical opportunities. I have argued that stories mean something – that they make meaning, and that they enrich understanding because they show people and phenomena from different sides, even from the inside. That, on its own, is pleasant, but does not suggest with any clarity what stories and their telling could be directed towards. In this chapter, I outline that territory.

I direct the morally-formative power of stories towards understanding and changing perceptions of poverty because the conditions under which much of the world suffers are real, urgent, and unnecessary. In order to set the stage for the cue that will bring a pedagogy of stories into the light, I will evoke the conditions of poverty in the world that must be confronted. Not only will this section show as well as it can the true details of poverty, it will suggest the ways in which that poverty is conceived. This setting will make way for the subsequent chapter which will suggest a way forward from the oppressive conditions described below.

Facts about poverty: Who and where are the poor

Here is how poverty is broken down in neat economic terms – there is relative poverty, moderate poverty, and extreme poverty (Sachs, 2005, p. 20). Relative poverty, as the title suggests, is comparative. It is based on a derivation of national average income. If

your income situates you below the line that is determined to represent the minimum for survival in that country, you are a member of the relatively poor.

Moderate poverty refers to those people who have access to their basic needs, but barely. At first glance this could seem to include reference to some of those who live out the legacy of oppression and neglect by the Canadian state on native reserves, where generations have been robbed of history and parenthood by imposed residential schools and robbed of land by laws ignored against their favor. However, moderate poverty, according to the World Bank (in Sachs, 2005, p. 20), refers to those people who exist between a consumption range of \$1 - \$2 US dollars per day, based on purchasing power parity, meaning that very few, if any, would qualify in Canada in spite of the state-sponsored deprivation.

The group that I am most interested in, however, is the one that is known by those in economic development circles as the “extremely poor.” These people exist on less than \$1 US per day. They cannot meet their basic needs for survival – that is, they are without water, food, medicine, safety. In many ways, the fact that they continue to live constitutes a miracle, a contradiction to prevailing concepts of logic, whether one believes in miracles or not. Today 1/6th of the world is “extremely poor” (I will stop using quotation marks after this; I do so here only to show that it is a category with real, although generally derived, boundaries) – in other words, there are 1.1 billion people living in extreme poverty (2001 estimate; Sachs, 2005, p. 20).

None of the three forms of poverty is favorable. I am not dismissing the real disappointment that one should feel for ways in which states neglect their people, either in rich countries or poor ones. Relative poverty should not be ignored, and moderate poverty should certainly not, either. Meanwhile though, the conditions of extreme poverty

are most urgent. Tens of thousands of people die every day from its realities.

Development economist Jeffery Sachs (2005) draws this distinction between moderate poverty and extreme poverty:

When people are poor, but not utterly destitute, they may be able to save [some money]. When they are utterly destitute, they need their entire income, or more just to survive. There is no margin of income above survival that can be invested for the future. (p. 56)

This luxury of saving is often overlooked by those who can afford it. In real terms, it means that an entire day's earnings can and likely do go towards feeding one's family. That is a ten hour work day, usually involving hard labour and often dangerous, in order to afford some plates of rice and beans. To draw the comparison closer to home and put it in terms that might be more emotional and comparable, imagine that food in Canada cost \$120 per family per day. Based on the amount that most young people are able to earn, this would use up all, if not more, than their wages. It is in these conditions – a day by day existence – that the extreme poor (1.1 billion people) find themselves. For those with regular employment, even if it is carrying bags of cement across a construction site for ten hours a day in the sun, there may be the possibility of saving a little for inevitable times of sickness or for school fees. For those with less reliable forms of employment – the day workers who live in slums around a city, for example, leaving each morning to compete for those same bags of cement – a day without work means a day without food. It is not hard to imagine how, in these conditions, a single disruption by politics or weather can be cause for widespread mortality.

The extremely poor have more economic descriptors to accompany them than the sub-\$1 per day demarcation. Sachs (2005), building on years of development work around him, outlines the following forms of capital which the extremely poor are lacking:

- 1. Human capital (referring to health, nutrition, skills)
- 2. Business capital (machinery, motorized transport)
- 3. Infrastructure capital (buildings, bridges, ports)
- 4. Natural capital (land, healthy soil, biodiversity)
- 5. Public institutional capital (commercial law, judicial system)
- 6. Knowledge capital (which Sachs refers to as “scientific and technological know-how that raises productivity in business output and the promotion of physical and natural capital.”) (Sachs, 2005, p. 245)

The conditions of poverty, including extreme poverty, are not new. In Sachs' cursory summary of economic development (in *The end of Poverty*, 2005), he traces the economic growth – and stagnation – of the world's accumulation of wealth. According to Sachs, the world before the industrial revolution, cited as around 1820, had more or less evenly distributed wealth. That is, everybody was poor. There were of course, royalty and merchants, standing in the graphs of wealth's national distribution like the spires of their own mansions, surrounded by the paupers and serfs at their feet, but the disparity between rich and poor countries was, according to Sachs, much less pronounced. (Those conditions in the serfdom would probably constitute “relative poverty”; what Sachs is saying is that a national average wealth would compare more closely to other national averages of the day). The world in the early 19th century saw rich countries that were four times richer than the poorest – at that time, the United Kingdom was the richest and African countries were the poorest. Today, that disparity has become much more obscene – in 1998, the difference was twenty times greater between the richest (the United States) and the poorest (the average national wealth of countries in Africa).

The global population has increased six-fold in the last 200 years (Sachs, 2005, p. 29). The economic growth of the world coincides with this growth in population, but the disparity has grown, too, and the uneven distribution of wealth is increasingly alarming. With economic dominance comes the erroneous but wide-spread assumption of religious,

racial, genetic, cultural, and institutional superiority, which lead to harsh colonial rule (Sachs, 2005, p. 39). In the 19th century, the resulting power inequality favored Europe, “leading to ‘racism and culturism’ which offered pseudoscientific justifications for the vast inequalities that had opened” (Sachs, 2005, p. 39). All of this has served to exacerbate the disparity of global wealth.

There are a variety of reasons why the poor stay poor, why it is difficult to break out of what is sometimes called the cycle of poverty. One of them is what Sachs refers to as the poverty trap. I have already talked about it above – it is the inability to save for future compromises in income. With a sustenance that is only daily, there can be little opportunity to prepare for change, or worse, for disaster, trapping people in a race for life-sustaining means that starts over again each morning. Another reason that some people and countries remain poor is their physical geography – as trade developed around ports and was serviced by proximal infrastructure (such as safe or efficient roads), landlocked countries were left out in obvious ways. Another reason is a fiscal trap, wherein governments of poor countries cannot provide for the needs of social spending and infrastructure. There could be failures in governance, changes in leadership that challenge long-term planning. There could be cultural barriers to mobility, such as limitations on the agency of women or minorities. A pertinent example is the Indian population in Uganda, who were forced out of their country by Idi Amin, only invited back after a change in government. Geopolitical reasons can also limit a country's ability to climb out of poverty – if neighbouring countries are unstable, unreliable, or unwilling to trade, opportunities for growth are compromised. Finally, a country may limit its growth if there is a lack of support for innovation, whereby there is little capacity to explore and disseminate new ideas (Sachs, 2005, p. 56-61).

The demographics of poor countries can also contribute to their continued poverty. Families often have many children in order to fend against high infant mortality rates and even the spread of disease or conflict through adulthood. Having more children increases the chances that someone will be around to take care of the parents when they are older – large families are, in many ways, insurance. However, as mortality rates decline, so do fertility rates. That is, as a child's chances for surviving past age five increase, parents have less demand for large families. The link between lowering mortality rates (in other words, ensuring that children do not die before they are five) and lowering fertility rates is made by education, both of parents and children. In this way, Sachs maintains that the assumed 'problem' perceived by those in developed countries of a population explosion if extreme poverty were eliminated is erroneous (and not only inhumanely cruel). As families learn about how to ensure a longer life for their children, they reduce their needs for larger families. Until this change takes place, however, parents, and especially mothers, become locked into their role of providing (often desperately) for their children in conditions of obscene deprivation.

An example of a setting where some of the worst conditions of poverty are not only visible but concentrated is the urban slum. Slums have arisen out of the process of urbanization which began its boom with the industrial revolution around 200 years ago. Since then, as people continue to leave rural homes in search of jobs in the city, slums have cropped up and spread like seeds – or smoke – in the wind, filling in the undesirable land in cities, the watersheds and the sides of mountains.

Slums, like urbanization, have not happened over night, although their urban design can seem to change that fast. Just one hundred years ago, only 15% of the world's population lived in cities at all; now half the world does (Satterthwaite, 2005, p. 6;

Sheuya, 2008, p. 1). The current total urban population is therefore three billion – “the same size as the world's total population in 1960” (Satterthwaite, 2005, p. 6). It is estimated that by the year 2020, 80% of the world's population will be urban (Moser, 2005, p. 21).

A good description of urban poverty includes the following points, provided by Satterthwaite (cited in Sheuya, 2008):

- 1. Poor quality and often insecure, hazardous and overcrowded housing
- 2. Inadequate provision for infrastructure and services
- 3. Inadequate protection of poorer groups' rights through the operation of the law
- 4. Poor groups' voicelessness and powerlessness
- 5. Inadequate income
- 6. Inadequate, unstable, or risky asset base
- 7. Limited or no safety net. (p. 3)

This is a clinical description of what poverty looks like in cities, but still one that “provides more entry points and multiple strategies to effectively address urban poverty” (Sheuya, 2008, p. 3). In a later section of the thesis, this concern for entry points will be paralleled with the need for creating points of contact between different identities, as it was discussed in the previous section on aesthetic education. In this light, stories will once again be presented as opportunities to draw closer to the experience of others.

The worst of urbanization reveals itself in the slums. One third of the world's urban population lives in slums, and 200 million of those are in Africa (Sheuya, 2008, p. 1). A definition of these urban spaces includes even more impoverished conditions than the generalities outlined regarding urban poverty. Slums can be characterized by the following:

- 1. A lack of basic services
- 2. Substandard housing or illegal and inadequate building structures
- 3. Overcrowding and high density
- 4. Unhealthful living conditions and hazardous locations
- 5. Insecure tenure
- 6. Irregular or informal settlements
- 7. Poverty and social exclusion
- 8. Minimum settlement size (Sheuya, 2008, p. 3)

Here is an aside, but a relevant one (as asides are assured to be): the book which I used as a source of much of my information on poverty in this era is, as I have mentioned, Jeffery Sachs' *The End of Poverty* (2005). The edition I used was from the library at Concordia University in Montreal. For all that I learned from the text, I enjoyed just as much the comments that happened to have been scribbled in the margins of the text I had borrowed, for they entailed an antagonistic and skeptical dialogue between the author and his anonymous critic. And the penciled critic beside the inked expert expressed similar skepticism to my own. In this particular case, beside the list of reasons why the poor remain poor, the previous borrower of the book had written, "strikes me as morally and ethically vacant, like helping the poor is a math problem to be solved" (in Sachs, 2005, p. 64, but only the edition at Concordia Library). I could not have voiced my concern more succinctly. How well do these conditions describe the poor? I was often left with the impression that, not only was this a problem to be 'solved', that it was a problem where people were not fully represented. This concern for the dehumanization of the poor through the economic descriptors that are used to represent them will be taken up later in this chapter, and more fully in the following one.

With that breath of skepticism to line your lungs, I invite you to examine the representations of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Africa is always the exception to development. Even amid Sachs' insistence in the global growth of absolute

wealth, he checks himself when it comes to Africa. According to Sachs (2005), “Living standards are much higher in almost all places than they were at the start of the process [of industrial growth, beginning around 1820] the major exception being the disease-ravaged parts of Africa” (p. 49). Here is where one finds most of the world's extreme poor. And contrary to the optimism for the global economy, conditions in Africa seem to be worsening. Indeed, it is the only continent that is poorer overall in the 21st century than it was in the 1960s when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank arrived with their plans for structural adjustment (Sachs, 2005, p. 189).

So here are some figures in the quantifiable poverty of sub-Saharan Africa: twelve million people have died of AIDS and 11,000 new cases are diagnosed every day (Ayittey, 2005, p. 15). There are now about ten million children who have been orphaned by AIDS (Sachs, 2005, p. 201). Up to 3 million people in the world die each year from malaria – an entirely preventable sickness – of whom 90% are in Africa (Sachs, 2005, p. 196). All of the twenty-eight lowest countries on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) can be found in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ayittey, 2005, p. 3). A fifth of Africans live in countries that have been “severely disrupted by conflict” (Ayittey, 2005, p. 4). And finally, as if to kick at hope while it's down, “Africa today is a continent where the number of people living in absolute poverty has reached close to half the population, and this figure continues to rise” (Kabbaj, 2003, p. 1).

What is being done? The international response to these conditions, to this “problem of poverty”, remains negligible. The current target for international aid commitment is 0.7% of rich countries' gross national product (GNP), which, even as a target, is akin to telling the poor “You count for nothing” (Sachs, 2005, p. 288). That means that for every ten dollars that a rich country makes, it – and by “it” I mean *we* –

commit seven cents to alleviating conditions of poverty around the world. Still more shameful is the fact that this goal remains unmet by most rich countries – the United States, with one of the poorest contributions to international aid in the world, commits just 0.15% of its GNP, which is then topped up to 0.18% by non-profit groups (Sachs, 2005, p. 303). To put this in perspective, that's one thirtieth of what the USA spends on the military – 15 billion dollars compared to 450 billion dollars annually (Sachs, 2005, p. 329). Finally, the international development efforts set to address poverty often focus more on visibility than long-term effectiveness (Easterly, 2002, p. 44). There are all too many projects whose tenure is too short to become a healthy part of a community.

It is surprising how far one can go into a discussion of poverty without settling on a definition of what it actually means. This omission is common in the literature I explored, where poverty was engaged instantly as a problem that the book was dedicated to solving. Above, I have suggested some of the conditions that have come to connote poverty for many of the people and groups who work to alleviate it. The current climate of development work – which often means working with the poor in conditions of poverty – has begun to recognize the limitations of defining poverty in purely economic terms. Income bracketing may be enough to locate the poor, but it is not enough to understand the complexity of their lives. According to Shaaban Sheuya (2008), defining poverty based only on income fails to “consider the role of assets; take into account intra-household differences; distinguish between different-sized households; account for non-monetary income sources; and allow for large variation in living costs within and between nations” (p. 3). But even this list remains located in a consideration of poverty that is largely empirical.

What becomes clear as a more rigorous definition of poverty is pursued is that it

“is almost never defined by itself, but through other concepts, such as growth, well-being, exclusion or equity” (UN, 2000, p. 57). To this more inclusive end, the United Nations (UN) can be recognized as adding considerable progress. The derivation of the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), while admittedly serving only comparative functions, seeks to indicate a 'quality of life' based on conditions and values beyond pure economics. It identifies “two essential features of the concept of poverty: 1) its comparative nature – nationally and internationally and within specific situations of poverty; and 2) its complex and multi-dimensional nature” (UN, 2000, p. 57).

This “complex and multi-dimensional nature” is worth pursuing, not only because it may lead to more effective ways of alleviating conditions of poverty, but because it is essential to acknowledge the lives of real people who live in these conditions – their complexity and multi-dimensionality, as people, is indisputable. That is why the UN recognizes (at least in the progressiveness of its literature) different approaches to poverty, including “well-being and poverty,” “income or consumption perspective,” “basic needs perspective,” “and “social exclusion” (UN, 2000, p. 60-2). This final condition of social exclusion is often left out of other definitions of poverty, especially those that emphasize poverty as economic.

Up until now, I have been describing poverty in mostly empirical terms – what it looks like as it is understood today. I picked urbanization and slums out of a global portrait of poverty, and then located the epitome of poverty's manifestations in Africa, giving some textural setting to the discussion with details about disease and conflict. Finally, mimicking the delivery of much of the literature I read on poverty, I delayed the effort to define what poverty actually was until the end of the section. Nearly all of the data presented in the section up until now has been quantitative. It has relied on surveys,

statistics, and empirically verifiable terms.

In the second part of this chapter, I will explore the other half – if the first part was called “facts about poverty”, let this one be appropriately parallel.

Feelings about poverty: Representing the poor

Poverty as it is understood today has not only arisen out of economic conditions. It has also arisen out of social ones, and been created by discourse. First, as I have suggested, there is the persistent refrain that poverty is a sickness or a disease or even more generally a problem that must be cured or solved. Poverty is defined by the numbers affected, how far it has spread, and the need for finding causes and cures, just as diseases are defined. This is metaphor in action. By linking poverty with illness, the options for addressing it are limited at the same time that they are illuminated. If this is sickness, we must find a cure, and people set about diagnosing poverty and trying to get the global body back to health.

But what does that health look like? And who decided what it was? Much of the work of defining poverty today is done in order to alleviate it. Studying poverty is, either explicitly or implicitly, a study of development. And this discourse of development is relatively new. According to Wolfgang Sachs (1992a), it was first in 1949, just after the second World War as countries realigned themselves with newly-defined world powers, that US president Harry Truman “defined the largest part of the world as ‘underdeveloped areas’”. By labeling the majority of the world this way, emulations of the US model for economy and society were globalized and countries steered themselves towards images of American success. Compare, also, the opening lines of the UN Charter – “We, the peoples of the United Nations...” – with those of the US Constitution – “We, the people of

the United States...”. The content of such a short phrase is benign enough, but the parallels in form suggest a much more proximal alignment, one that is especially significant given the global status of the United Nations as the closest body available for international regulation. Faced with this concept of being 'underdeveloped', poor countries internalized their role, subscribed to the guidelines for development that were stuck onto them, and slotted themselves into the grooves of development that had been worn by the dominant powers of the day. These grooves were both cultural and economic, but the economic models were pushed with the most structural support, often through the requirements of international lending groups such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Sachs, W. 1992a). Consequently, “Today, the scene [of international development] appears more like collective hallucination. Traditions, hierarchies, mental habits – the whole texture of societies – have been dissolved in the planner's mechanistic models” (Sachs, W. 1992a).

These mechanistic models and the grooves that they wear impose a linear progression, one which places countries – and therefore people – on a uni-directional path with few opportunities for original expression. Such definitions of development and poverty look at the world for what it lacks, not what it has (Sachs, W, 1992a). In this way, “‘poverty’ was used to define whole peoples, not according to what they are and want to be, but according to what they lack and are expected to become”, leading to a dehumanization that describes people by ‘animalistic’ qualities and conditions (Sachs, W. 1992b).

The authority of this linear progression (from not having, to having what the rich have) “allows any intervention to be sanctified in the name of a higher, evolutionary goal” (Sachs, W. 1992a). To recall the vocabulary of the previous chapter, this linear path

acts as a solitary meta-narrative, one which prescribes values and guides decisions, without much room for alternative voices to add to the complexity of individual identities.

This linear progression away from poverty and towards development can also be depicted as a spectrum, with the poor at one end and the rich at the other. But the problem with both representations is their binary limitation, which hacks at the details of human lives until they fit into their category.

Binary divisions, such as healthy/ill, normal/abnormal or, more pertinently, rich/poor, are like steamrollers of the mind; they level a multiform world, completely flattening anything which does not fit. The stereotyped talk of 'poverty' has disfigured the different, indeed contrasting, forms of poverty beyond recognition. (Sachs, W. 1992b)

The categories of poverty and wealth lead to gross depictions of either. When it comes to representing the poor, it seems that identities are seriously limited. Diana George, (2001) in her essay *Changing the face of poverty*, cites 18th century depictions of poverty as moral decay. In her analysis of poverty depictions in contemporary North America, she suggests that the poor are either represented as dangerous thugs or helpless victims (George, 2001, p. 214). Campaigns for philanthropic support to Africa seem to rely heavily on the helpless victim model, the lost eyes of the hungry child looking up at the camera or the mother before the tatters of a windblown refugee camp. The problem is not that these representations are false, just that they are limited – they propose few alternative identities for those living in conditions of poverty. The height of such limiting representation is expressed in images of the famine in Ethiopia in 1984, which spread “masturbatory images of hunger – a pornography of starvation” (George, 2001, p. 225). Additionally, the poor themselves are shown few images of themselves, all of which are of destitution, an identity that they are wont to adopt in the paucity of alternatives, just as poor countries have internalized the labels of ‘undeveloped’ bestowed upon them.

Conclusion

What emerges out of the discussion of development and the definitions of poverty is the impression that poverty is not me. As rich countries are the contributors to the development discourse, setting the terms, resources, and even goals of lives in other countries, the debate as to who is poor and what constitutes poverty is stalled by its obsession with binaries and its constant return to metaphors of illnesses with implied cures. According to Jeffery Sachs (2005), modern development economics needs an overhaul (p. 74). It should not be so categorical and its prescriptions should not be so broadly blanketed over different communities, geographies, and even economies. Instead he proposes a metaphoric way of addressing poverty which is an extension of the sickness model, but at least applied to the treatment and not only the diagnosis. In it, he defends the need for assessment of individual cases – of countries, or perhaps communities – as though they were bodies, including regular contact with the ‘patient’ and responses that are appropriate to their means. These two qualities of appropriateness and long-term commitment, in spite of their obvious importance, are surprisingly absent in development practice.

Still, a further step is required. While Sachs' progressive approach to economic development in the form of his impassioned and insistent plan for reducing – even eliminating – extreme poverty within a few decades is an important effort, even his clinical approach to poverty neglects a human element. Poverty remains, like my anonymous accomplice in the margins penciled, ‘vacant’ of moral contact with people represented *as people*. Granted, the challenges of alleviating poverty are of such a scale that they cannot be addressed on an entirely individual basis. However, what could afford

the change in the global recognition and address of poverty is a change in popular and political perceptions of poverty, especially in those places that are responsible for defining it through discourse – rich countries such as Canada. A more complex representation of poverty is required, one which does not see men and women “as dots” (to return to Walt Whitman's words), but as fully-formed human beings. One way of drawing closer to this, according to Diana George (2001), is to “call attention to how the [poor] depict themselves” (p. 227). By including this image of self in the global representation of poverty, the poor have the opportunity to choose their own face. Although the conditions of some may constitute real destitution, few people would likely see themselves as being *only* destitute. Jeffery Sachs (2005) incorporates this increased awareness of the ‘developing world’ into his call for economic change, too – “If we explain patiently and honestly to the taxpayers in the rich world that more money is needed and can be well used, it is much more likely to become available” (p. 268). It would appear, then, that increasing both the quantity and quality of representations of the poor would contribute positively in economic and moral terms – economic, because of the increased pressure on those who move money around the world, according to Sachs; and moral because of the ties that such representations create between people, whether they are at either ends of a spectrum, a linear progression, or more appropriately, sharing a planet. As a matter of scale it is worth recalling that 3000 people died in New York city in the attacks of September 11th, 2001, while 10,000 people die every day in Africa from entirely preventable diseases (Sachs, 2005, p. 215). This should serve as some reminder of the urgency of a shift in perspective on what constitutes a true emergency.

I hope that this section has prepared the necessary groundwork for me to build my argument for stories as contributing essentially to understandings of poverty, and my

belief that such a valuation of stories is at the heart of changing conditions of inequality.

This chapter has been integral to the setting of my appreciation and defense of stories as opportunities for social change. I have explored poverty as it is commonly treated around the world, in urban settings, and in Africa in particular; then I have stepped back to examine some of the origins, both historically and discursively, of the way poverty is known in so-called developed countries. In the following chapter, I will bring the value of aesthetic education to the discussion of poverty to explore how stories can recognize that the poor are actually people.

CHAPTER 3

Discussion: Stories as opportunities for social change

Introduction

The poor, as the numbers in the previous chapter suggest, are having a rough go at life these days. But conditions around the world, for rich or poor, are leaving much to be desired. According to Candace Stout in her essay *Art of empathy: Teaching students to care* (1999), “our world is characterized by environmental exploitation, economic elitism, irresponsible consumption, ego- and ethno-centrism, nationalism, and human violence” (p. 23). These problems are obviously not ones that can be shoveled off onto the poor as though they will cart them away to suffer alone. Because these conditions have important global effects, rich and poor people and their countries are responsible for recognizing them and addressing them.

In this chapter I draw parallels between the critical pedagogy proposed in Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and my own views on the effectiveness and appropriateness of stories as opportunities for social change. Part of my goal is to show the usefulness of critical pedagogy in transcending our understanding of poverty to achieve an awareness that humanizes those who are labeled poor by economic terms.

First I will set the context for why change is required. I've started that setting with the comments on poverty and its representation. Here I'll say more about the global puzzle that I see as describing the times in which I live, today's paradoxes of excess and scarcity. Second, I'll reintroduce the aesthetic as a possible way of supporting the change that is required to address those paradoxes. Third, I'll bring back the discussion of quantitative representations, which will combine ideas from the first chapter (on aesthetic

education) and the second (on poverty), showing how it is that an excessive reliance on facts and numbers limits understanding by providing an incomplete picture. If it seems like I'm setting up old bones and calling it a new body, that's partly true. This chapter is where I bring together the two parts of the argument that I've tried to keep separate up until now while adding critical pedagogy as the interpretive lens. The centre-pieces of this chapter, then, (call them the vertebrae), are the ways in which Freire's critical pedagogy can frame the call for stories as opportunities for social change. Specific concepts of Freire pedagogy – conscientization, humanization, narrative teaching, and agency – will be paralleled with the ways in which stories can change representations of and relationships with poverty.

Something must be done because things are not going well

If it's unsettling to say that we live in a time of contradictions, let it at least be said that we live in a time of paradoxes. Here are some of them in impressionistic terms, drawn from my own experience: there is more information available through means of communication and technology than ever before, and yet people lament a declining sense of purpose. "What's it all for?" they ask. "What is to be done with all this information?" Similarly, while the ability to control nature increases with chemical fertilization and genetic modification, environmental sustainability has never been so gravely at risk. Or, consider in economic terms that the wealth of the world has never been so great, that there have never been so many wealthy people in the history of human civilization, and yet there have never been so many poor people either. And even with the alleged abundance of wealth, there seems to be increasing worry, trepidation, and concern for the future. Here's another paradox: military spending around the world is astronomical

(sometimes literally) and yet security – or the suspicion of its absence – is an increasing concern. Finally, consider the multiple means of communication and media that are available for disseminating ideas and important news, and then consider the paucity of content that is actually presented by those means.

What arises from these paradoxes are a few important impressions: the most urgent one is that there seems to be a general loss of meaning in the things that people do. The available means, whether they are technological or intellectual, do not address the needs of people. This seems to be occurring on a personal level, with questions about what is school really for, for example, and on a national level, with the dissonance between spending money on weapons instead of actually fostering an environment in which people feel safe.

The second impression – and it relates more closely to the discussion at hand – is the general trajectory of each of the concerns considered, from security to wealth distribution to information monopoly to the dangerous power to control nature. Each of these seem to be on an exponentially upward-sloping incline – that is, if one were to represent these trends graphically, one would arrive at a line that bowed gently at the base before rushing skyward at a terrific rate. In order to bring this comparison closer to home, consider the same graph that is often made of story plot lines. Although not usually exponential in shape, they do tend to increase with heightened conflict before dropping with resolution close to the end. The figures below represent these two curves.

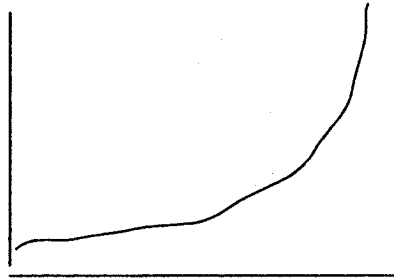


Figure 1: Growth of concern for wealth distribution, security, risks of controlling nature, etc. (exponential)

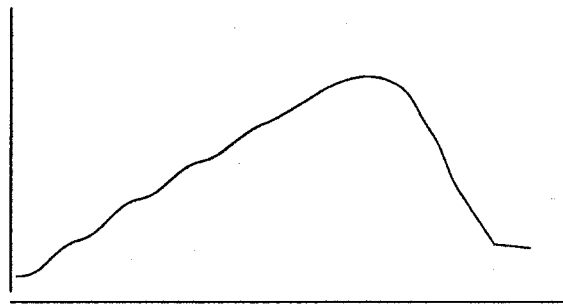


Figure 2: Story plot line (cumulative)

While these two representations share some traits and differ in others, one of the significant differences is the way each graph ends. The story resolves. The growth of concern for our times, however, shows no signs of resolution. This of course is an impression, gleaned from feelings, talk, tone, attitudes, and ideas. Here I'm using the comparison between the representations more symbolically, to suggest that the paradoxes of these times are actually narrative crises. A story that went exponentially into crisis would be an unpleasant one. This is one way of illustrating the dire straits in which we find ourselves, economically and morally.

Stories as social change

All of this is to say that these are urgent times because of poverty and many other concerns, and urgent times call for urgent measures. In this context arises the need for social change in order to protect life and the values of justice and freedom. There are, of course, many ways to go about instigating such change, from blowing up buildings to building schools. My interests are closer to the latter. But what kind of schools? That question will be taken up more conclusively in the final chapter of this essay, but here I want to return to what I believe makes an important contribution to the possibilities for social change – stories. Certainly, there are other pedagogical tools that could achieve similar ends. But they are one of the means available to everyone – who cannot tell a story? – that has been under-recognized in schools in general, and in the ways by which we build our relationship with poverty in particular. They do not make change in themselves – telling a story does not change the reality of the people about which the story has been composed, if it is a true story, and it changes even less if it is fiction. But what it changes, or at least has the chance of changing, is the person who then makes change. As Maxine Greene said (2001), citing Herbert Marcuse, “the arts do not change the world, but they can change the living beings who might change the world” (p. 129). In this there is the trace of evidence that stories are connected to moral formation, and in that, they have the potential to affect the ways in which we understand and respond to others in conditions of poverty.

Before going too far into the social change opportunities implicit in stories, it would be important to return to what is not their adversary, but counterbalance – the quantitative descriptions that were the emphasis of the previous chapter, so that stories' effectiveness can be more fairly critiqued.

Facts: Their utility and their limits

The way in which poverty has been evoked in the previous chapter fits into a utilitarian economic perspective. Utilitarian economic perspectives value commensurability (that is, they are sensitive to measurements of quantity but not quality); aggregation (that information can be grouped to reveal trends); maximizing (that it is interested in increasing allotment); and exogenous preferences (that preferences can be predicted, determined, and expected) (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 14). These utilitarian rational-choice models – by which trends can be predicted based on quantifiable, measurable preferences – are used in determining public policy, either to explain or predict or to make normative descriptions that isolate what is irrational and therefore deviant (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 15).

Including economic utilitarian perspectives in these important decision-making processes in society is not a mistake – they provide information that qualitative methods would struggle to deliver – but to rely on them solely is to neglect other important factors of the human experience. In Martha Nussbaum's analysis (1995) of Dickens' novel, *Hard Times*, which she uses to explore the relationship between literature and utilitarian economics, she uncovers the tendency to favor the quantitative at the expense of the qualitative – in other words, according to Nussbaum's analysis, facts dominate over feelings. She writes that “the economist's habit of reducing everything to calculation, combined with the need for an extremely simple theory of human action, produces a tendency to see calculation everywhere, rather than commitment and sympathy” (p. 25). One of her more aggressive attacks goes like this,

The economic mind is blind: blind to the qualitative richness of the perceptible world; to the separateness of its people, to their inner depths of their hopes and loves and fears; blind to what it is like to live a human life and to try to endow it with a human meaning. Blind, above all, to the fact that human life is something mysterious and extremely complicated, something that demands to be approached with faculties of the mind and resources of language that are suited to the expression of that complexity. (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 27)

John Dewey (in Greene, 2001), is slightly more generous to those who espouse and practice the quantitative arts, believing that the excessive reliance on quantitative methods for representing and responding to the world is a product of a lack of imagination (to recall an earlier theme) “in generating leading ideas” (p. 126). In Dewey's words,

Because we are afraid of speculative ideas we do [...] an immense amount of dead, specialized work in the region of 'facts'. We forget that such facts are only data; that is, are only fragmentary, uncompleted meanings, and unless they are rounded into complete ideas – a work which can only be done [...] by a free imagination of intellectual possibilities – they are helpless as are all maimed things and as repellent as are needlessly thwarted ones. (Dewey, 1931, p. 11, from *Philosophy and Civilization*, quoted in Greene, 2001, p. 126)

Both thinkers take issue with the dominance that the quantitative has over the qualitative, the fact over the feeling, the economic over the empathetic. Even Nussbaum admits, in spite of her attack, that economic science is not to be done away with, only to be made more just. Her interest is in adding layers to it, not refuting it, to “seek a more complicated and adequate set of foundations” (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 11). In the following section it will be important to keep in mind that much of the reliance on quantitative work, especially when it comes to representing poverty, is an effort to deal with an enormous challenge in what many believe is the only way possible – economically. In this way, it should not be decided that I am rejecting the validity of utilitarian economic perspectives specifically, nor quantitative values generally; instead, like Nussbaum, I am compelled to add my belief that stories can humanize the relationship between people,

whether that manifests in a more just legal system (as Nussbaum advocates) or in a more responsible field of international development and education about poverty (as I do).

Up until now I have been talking about the limits of the utilitarian economic perspective that is often used to describe poverty and prescribe solutions. While the quantitative methods of representing poverty are helpful for their efficiency, they are an incomplete means for understanding poverty and being moved to change it responsibly. In the following section of this chapter, I will explore the ways in which stories are useful means for bringing about social change. To do this, I will present them in a critical pedagogical framework of consciousness-building.

Introducing critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy, largely identified with Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, is centrally concerned with emancipation. Ideologically, its influences and origins are in critical theory (in particular, the Marxist view of a material history which is defined by the struggle between classes); humanism (the concept of self-actualizing, or pursuing one's potential); post-modernism (at least its interest in the deconstruction of boundaries based on race, class, or gender); liberation (the transcendence of current conditions of oppression); and radical pedagogical perspectives (the understanding that institutions are "consciously or unconsciously used for the reproduction of the socio-economic order of capitalist societies") (Guilherme, 2002, p. 9). Adding to this understanding of the reproductive model of education, Aronowitz and Giroux (in Guilherme, 2002) identify three dimensions by which paradigmatic values are transferred to learners – economic, cultural, and hegemonic-state.

As witness to the ideological reproduction that Aronowitz and Giroux describe,

Freire's approach emerged from the context of the education he saw around him, wherein education was an instrument to keep the masses 'submerged' (Freire, 1970, p. 30). In his work, he proposed a new version of self, maintaining that men and women are not objects but subjects who actualize their own world. In this dialectic relationship between people and their reality, the world is not a static and fixed entity to be understood through slogans and limited representations, but a dynamic relationship of mutual construction – people affecting reality and reality in turn affecting people – to be worked through in solidarity with others.

It can be limiting to think of Freire's pedagogy as having a 'goal' – it is better to understand that there are many goals that interact to form a theme of freedom. To sketch this interaction with dangerous superficiality, Freire's concept of *conscientizacao*, or conscientization, tackles dehumanization through problem-posing education as a way to recognize and utilize one's agency. These concepts will be taken up below. The function of each will be to illuminate similar characteristics in the role of stories in changing the relationship with poverty.

i) Conscientização

Much of the energy of Freire's critical pedagogy focuses on *conscientização*, or conscientization, which he defines as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and [taking] action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 35). The effects of this conscience-raising, according to Freire, are nothing short of revolutionary – *conscientização* will tear apart the world as you know it and build it back up with new understanding.

The need for *conscientização* sits atop Freire's foundational conviction that

education is inherently political. In his view, education is for one of two purposes: either for integration, in any combination of the three dimensions that Aronowitz and Giroux identify above; or for self-actualization, empowerment, and liberation (Freire, 1970, p. 34). According to Freire, “it is impossible to deny, except intentionally or by innocence, the political aspect of education;” and later, “educators must ask themselves for whom and on whose behalf they are working” (in Mayo, 1999, p. 60).

conscientização cannot be engaged through slogans of reform or by a massive prescriptive appeal. Instead, by a process of problem-posing education (discussed below), *conscientização* arises through dialectic communication – one discovers for one's self the contradictions that surround him or her, and, as one's awareness increases, begins to see links between the societal structures that host such contradiction and one's own participation in them.

It is not necessary to believe that the world of today generally, nor the representation of poverty specifically, is a sham of contradiction in order for stories to play an important role in Freire's *conscientização*. Consider, first, Freire's insistence that conscientization will tear apart the world as it is known and build it back up with new understanding. This is a reference to the painful process of uncovering contradictions in what one previously thought was infallible; in other words, to the destabilizing effect of realizing that one was wrong about the way things are. When it comes to the representation and subsequent relationship with poverty, I am not suggesting that the current tools available are useless, but sometimes they are misleading. While utilitarian economic depictions of poverty have done a lot to bring poverty into the sidelight, (if not, on rare occasions, the spotlight), its limited ability to accommodate qualitative experience renders an incomplete image of the people who live in poverty. Adding stories to the

current understanding of poverty would probably constitute only a small tear in “the world as we know it”, but an important one. What's more, the inclusion of stories would likely contribute to that pain that Freire suggests when previous understandings of our societies are broken down, seen through, and require subsequent reconstruction from the rubble. In the case of poverty and the way it is represented in economic terms, the contradiction is more subtly evident than the mechanisms of oppression that Freire was citing. Instead, with the way the relationship with poverty is built, one comes to realize that the picture is not necessarily contradictory, but incomplete, lacking, even superficial. Completing the image of poverty, which would entail including the stories of real lives to give it qualitative, humanizing richness, could indeed be a painful process of first empathizing with the person in his or her poverty, and second, seeing one's own complicity in sustaining a world where the distribution of wealth is so grossly uneven.

As Freire maintains, this process of coming-to-awareness cannot be sloganized and still preserve any of its integrity or effectiveness – instead, it must be engaged in personally. To this project, stories make important contributions. Their subjectivity and the privacy of their encounter mean that one's individual experiences add unique content to the story itself. In other words, as stories bring other lives to the people that read them or hear them, so do those people bring their own lives to the stories. As an example, consider a phrase like, “along the tracks that lead to church.” The literal content of this image is clear enough – there are tracks, a church, and some movement between them. What is personal and private about stories is that each person's tracks and church differ – each of them is composed of individual, personal and private previous experiences of the same object or phenomenon. No two people read or hear that sentence in the exact same way, and thus each reader or listener projects a part of themselves into the sentence (on a

small scale) and the story (on a bigger one).

This is what Donald Smith (1999) calls “the mirror angle” of literature, but it can be applied to other forms of fiction and even non-fiction stories, too. Because “we each bring unique perspectives, experiences, and reactions to the act [of reading or listening] [...] [stories] can reintroduce us to ourselves” (p. 19). What's more, it's this reintroduction that links stories to the world – without it, they are no more than words. The reader or listener “brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contributions” (Duchamp, in Stout, 1999, p. 33). By contributing one's experience to the story, one makes it richer. Congruently, there is no story that can exceed the greatness of the reader or listener's imagination.

This profoundly intimate and personal relationship identifies the important way in which stories contribute to the *conscientizacao* that Freire so adamantly defended. Just as conscientization cannot be sloganized, so can the meaning of stories cannot be universalized. Because the experience of stories calls up one's personal experience, it is active in the deepest part of the individual – while the story may be popular, its experience is unique to each of its spectators, who contribute to it their own history of the world that it evokes. To fail at contributing one's self to stories, or any imaginative act, is to be numbed by the superficial – even false – experience of the story. It becomes a slogan, words with habit but no personal meaning. Freire's conscientization and the problem-posing education that evokes it, rely on this personal experience of the world, one in which the formation of meaning comes from each person's own experience, experience which is called forth at the moment of engagement with the work (aesthetic in my case, or literacy in Freire's) and integrated with the new experience. An impersonal

engagement with the aesthetic would risk knowledge that is conventional and removed from lived experience. According to Keiran Egan (1992), “transcending the conventional is necessary to constructing one's sense of an area of knowledge; accepting conventional representations is to fail to make knowledge one's own, it is to keep it inert rather than incorporate it into one's life” (p. 48). In Freire's critical pedagogy, such an engagement could not lead to *conscientização* because it was not linked to the individual.

The final alignment I will make between the pedagogical opportunities of stories and the Freirian concept of conscientization is the possible reluctance that people may feel to confront them. According to Freire (1970), people may be disinclined to see their objective reality if it contradicts their class understanding. There is the threat of a world torn apart. In other words, they may prefer to remain contentedly ignorant of the contradictions in which they live because to confront them could destabilize their understanding of place and responsibility. This, too, is the challenge of including stories in the representation of poverty – where poverty is defined and recognized by economic descriptors, it is hard to find place for the narratives that could exist outside of the paradigm that is defined in quantitative terms. For example, a narrative of poverty which is funny, which has comedy, is hard to locate in the utilitarian economic vision. Consequently, those who work at defining, understanding, and challenging poverty may be reluctant to embrace the complexity that stories inevitably add. For those who prefer to insulate themselves with a purely quantitative understanding of poverty without seeing the human relationship between themselves and others, facts about poverty are much easier to dismiss than stories. Somehow, wealthy countries cope with the available knowledge that more than 10,000 people die every day from preventable diseases. Perhaps telling the story of one of those people would be more awkward to ignore.

Stories, then, have an important role to play in stimulating what Freire called *conscientização*. By creating personal relationships between the content of the story and the experience of one's life, stories have the potential to explore contradictions about the distribution of wealth and the people who profit from it and suffer by it. Just as dominant classes may be reluctant to become conscious of these disparities, so might others be reluctant to know the real people that live in conditions of poverty and find that they are not unlike themselves in many ways. The next part of the section looks at Freire's concept of humanization, which is an important theme in his work, bolstering his defense of the need for freedom.

ii) Humanization

Humanization is closely linked to conscientization in Freire's critical pedagogy. As conscientization brings people to awareness of the world in which they live, humanization is one of the effects of becoming aware. The understanding of humanization in Freire's work, however, is gleaned most readily from his use of the opposite, dehumanization, which he identifies as stealing humanity or having it stolen (Freire, 1970). As one might imagine, this is a complex process, one in which both oppressor and oppressed participate. In simple terms, to be oppressed is obviously dehumanizing, but in this oppression the oppressor is also implicated, also dehumanized, because their role forces them to limit the opportunities of others. The dehumanized person (an oxymoron) is one whose freedom to self-actualize – to express his or her agency in the construction of history – is constrained. For example, to label someone as stupid and to deny them opportunities based on that label is a dehumanizing act. His or her attributes have been determined from without and their treatment has been prescribed

based on an appraisal that cannot possibly encompass all of his or her true identity.

Perhaps the greatest strength of stories is their capacity to humanize – both the characters that they chronicle, and the reader or listener who encounters those characters. In the representation of poverty, stories present opportunities for entering into the lives of others and bringing one's own life along, too. This humanization is achieved in two parallel ways: one is by accompanying the character through their relationships and challenges and reflecting on how divergent or convergent they are from one's own; and the other is by the smaller pieces of language – the words, the images, and the sentiments – that one brings from one's own life to the story, humanizing one's self by combining the experiences that are presented in the story with personal lived experience. In representing poverty, such humanization is essential. By rendering those who live in poverty as humans – as people with similar capacities for dignity and shame, humor and loss, to recognize their equally complex nature – the abjectness of their condition is lessened. I fear that when people think of the poor, the very poor, the “extremely poor” who live, perhaps in slums in Africa, they think of them in broad categories. They think of them in conditions, as living in conditions as though those conditions defined their lives. I fear that the ease with which the lives of people in slums are dismissed is symptomatic of a belief that the poor live only by reflex, instinct, that they are animals. The poor are not animals. They live in conditions to the same extent that wealthy people live in conditions – while each environment prescribes opportunities and limitations, some certainly more than others, the necessary link between them is their humanity. The people who live in slums are people to the exact same degree than people who live in apartments are. And yet, at the hands of quantitative representations, people become the conditions in which they live.

To this end, the project of humanization and the contributions of story are essential. Through stories of people who happen to live in conditions of poverty, honest stories – they may be fictitious or entirely true, but they must be faithful to the complex people that they represent or portray – have the opportunity to make poverty sufficiently rich with humanity that its other-ness is so greatly reduced as to even vanish. In Freirian critical pedagogy, what should remain is an understanding of solidarity that transcends apparent divisions of class, one that sees not dots but people.

iii) Teaching as narrating

The contrast between teaching as narrating and what Freire calls the banking method of education is the most obvious and direct evidence of symbiosis between critical pedagogy and stories. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire claims that all liberating teaching is narrating, but he laments that education today suffers from a “narrative sickness” (Freire, 1970). In other words, the current practice of “filling” learners with information is meaningless, no more than a learning of sounds, and turns students into containers, not people. According to Freire, when education becomes the same as depositing, “[it] is the banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filling, and storing the deposits” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). In the banking model, the teacher is the opposite of the student – the contrast between knower and learner is obscenely overt. In more poetic terms, Freire states that the learner is “in the world, not with the world” (p. 75) – he or she receives information and carries it, but does not interact with it nor add themselves to it.

Freire's response to the banking method is his advocacy for problem-posing education, which, as the name suggests, problematizes observable phenomena of one's

reality, soliciting interpretations and probing sources of the circumstances that personally affect the learner. Through the problem-posing model for education, the dichotomy between teacher and student fades. The authority of the teacher is demythologized (Freire, 1970, p. 80).

Stories defend the same values as problem-posing education. Freire's diagnosis of "narrative sickness" aligns with the quantitative obsession evident in representations of poverty. What's more, the title of the 'banking' model in this context becomes all too ironic – the facts and information that are used to describe poverty are then 'deposited' into those who make important policy decisions affecting the poor (often behind names like The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund).

Stories, as has been suggested, do an excellent job of problematizing. Their *nature* is to problematize, especially in literary fiction. By presenting alternatives to given circumstances, by exploring the effects of action and emotion, and by daring to describe people and events with courage amid the many and legitimate descriptions that propagate around them in other works, stories present rich and infinite opportunities to identify, probe, and challenge the problems of one's time and place. Also, because stories invite and require the participation of the reader or listener by summoning his or her lived experience, stories ground themselves in the lives of their perceiver, just as Freire's problem-posing education does.

By the same token that brings lived experience into comparison with narrated experience, stories reduce the gap between teacher and student, knower and learner. Since there is no claim to the absolute meaning, moral or otherwise, of a story, its authority cannot – and should not – go unquestioned. As the reader/listener consults his or her own experience for the validity, similarities, or differences between lived experience and

narrated experience, he or she draws closer to the story (by trying on new experiences) while the story simultaneously draws closer to them (as they live alternative lives and contemplate them). In other words, the authority of the story is demythologized, brought into the life of the reader/listener, and recognized for what it is – an opportunity to explore one's self through the lives of others.

iv) Agency

Northrup Frye's ideas (1963) about agency are considerably more limiting than Freire's (1970). The distinction should help to illustrate how stories could be used in the classroom and the importance of agency in humanizing the representation of poverty. In an effort to describe the function of educating the imagination, Frye cautions that, "in these days we're in a hare-and-tortoise race between mob rule and education: to avoid collapsing into mob rule we have to try to educate a minority that'll stand out against it" (Frye, 1963, p. 55). Frye's idea is to train a minority – an elite, from what it sounds like – to protect society against the wills of the uneducated masses. What he seems to be advocating is an agency for the benevolent few, who will then act as guides and guardians against "mob rule". In my view, the opportunity that Frye seems to miss is the one for individual agency, not just reserved for a minority, but for all. To carve divisions between the mob and the individual is to forget that the mob is made up of individuals, each of whom has the capacity to affect their own decisions and actions.

This popular agency – one in which each person is responsible and active in social action – is a pillar of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. Indeed, to deny a person their agency and relegate their action to that of the mob is to deprive them of their right to affect history, to shape it by what Freire called praxis – the dynamic interplay of action

and reflection. While Northrup Frye calls for educating a minority to defend against the illusions of society, Paulo Freire calls for the agency of each person to claim their capacity and right to interact with the world around them and recognize that it has been formed by those interactions. While Frye's pedagogical design for an educated minority certainly presents opportunities for stories to affect social consciousness by sharing experience among people, it is Freire's will for universal agency that blazes the broadest trail into a future of social change and empowerment.

In Freire's critical pedagogy, then, agency is essential for the exercise of freedom. It is the logical and necessary expression of the awareness that is engaged through conscientization; it is the capacity with which to humanize others and one's self; and one comes to recognize and then utilize it through the process of problem-posing education. Without agency, conscientization is incomplete, humanization is being obstructed, and problem-posing education still has work to do. Agency, in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), arises out of the realization that history is made by human action and that individual people can and must contribute to that history. This fundamental belief in the formation of human history is expressed most clearly in Freire's own words,

there is no historical reality which is not human. There is no history without humankind, and no history for human beings; there is only history of humanity, made by people. And (as Marx pointed out) in turn making them. (Freire, 1970, p. 130)

Into this moment in Freire's march for massive popular agency, stories arrive with a torch held high. With their capacity to explore alternative realities, stories contribute richly to the pursuit of change and growth of societies. In order for change to occur, the difference between a given reality and a possible reality must be perceivable. Before light bulbs were invented, Thomas Edison conceived of the possibility for electric light; before

the Cuban Revolution in 1959, people dreamed of equal opportunity and nationalism; before landing on the moon, people craned their necks to wonder about how it could be done. Before poverty can be changed, it must be re-thought and re-visioned – change must be imagined before it can be enacted. The proof of collaboration between agency and imagination is that societies change. The world changes, has changed, and does each day. To be saddled with only imagination and the ability to conceive of alternatives without agency would be lame. To have only agency and no imagination would be blind. The two, then, work together.

Stories, with their manifest expression and exploration of alternative realities, alternative characters, sentiments, places, and events, supply essential opportunities to interrogate one's reality and invite one to interact with it, affect it, and shape it. In defense of stories as opportunities for social change I will cite Martha Nussbaum again – a little bit at length, but thoroughly worthwhile. Here she outlines with clean deft strokes the transition from exploration to agency in stories:

It is brought home to readers that the story is in certain ways their own story, showing possibilities for human life and choice that are in certain respects their own to seize, though their concrete circumstances may differ greatly. Thus their attempts to interpret and evaluate are encouraged to be both affectionate and critical: for the text portrays them as social agents responsible for making a world that is either like or unlike the world within its pages, agents who must in life stand in some emotional and practical relation to the problems of the working classes and to the conduct of managers and leaders. In imagining things that do not really exist, the novel, by its own account, is not being “idle”: for it is helping its readers to acknowledge their own world and to choose more reflectively in it. (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 31)

With stories as opportunities for social change, the way in which poverty is understood need no longer be limited to the dots of economic descriptors. Instead, stories can restore humanity to the representation of those living in conditions of poverty and increase the awareness of the ways in which people contribute to the uneven distribution

of wealth. By humanizing those representations, the poor themselves are humanized because their opportunities are no longer limited by the categories of existence that are applied to them. As those in poverty are humanized by stories, the need, will, and ability to change the global conditions become urgent and apparent to all those who affect history by their agency.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I've tried to make the previous two chapters relevant by integrating them into the discussion of how stories encourage opportunities for social change. First I set the global stage with the broken chairs, over-turned garbage cans, and scattered papers of the current paradoxes in which the world exists today. While the previous chapter (on poverty) emphasized this catastrophe in economic terms, this one emphasized it with a more interpretive and even sentimental tone. The purpose of this was to show, both from quantitative and qualitative perspectives, that social change has no shortage of relevant projects to tackle in defense of the oppressed, marginalized, or poor. What is to be done? was the implicit question in this chapter, And how? Here, the possibilities for stories as social change were briefly explored before turning to Paolo Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). I suggested ways in which stories and their qualities which had been discussed in previous chapters could contribute to the central values, concepts, and effects of Freire's critical pedagogy. I explored how stories could present opportunities for conscientization, humanization, problem-posing education, and agency. This chapter concludes with my belief that the strength that stories have for bringing the reader/listener into the world while bringing the world to the reader/listener make them important additions to a critical pedagogy approach to social change. The following

chapter is a work of short fiction that attempts to achieve the humanization of representations of poverty that have been explored thus far. In the final chapter, the success of this short story will be evaluated based on the goals of a narrative pedagogy.

CHAPTER FOUR

The laughter of my brother Julius

The Aunty told me that if they'd found me in the church that day it would have been a sign from God but I was playing netball. She'd guided them to me in the afternoon along the tracks that lead to church, on the long down side of Zone B. The whiteman and his interpreter stood below the single tree while she went to fetch me among the ushers with their stiff bleached sashes that hang across their shoulders.

Hallelujah! Amen!

But she could not find me there. She told me after, when my shoulder was hard from the beating. They would come once more, and so we must impress them.

Netball is played with songs and cheers, like church. I have a special move, my turning feint, in which I tuck the ball down, wipe it below me, pulled in, and in the twisting come up high above the other girl. The opponent believes I will go forward but I go down and back, then over her head. It earns me much attention and when I perform it I can feel a rising swell of bigness come into me – the song and the cheer – usually from my chest and out to my back, because I stand differently after I have scored.

I play religiously with Winnie and less with other girls. Winnie's from a village close to my village, here since seven years. She came to stay with her brother before her brother died – Winnie with eyes that rise up at the sides. She smiles without moving her mouth.

Winnie has no turning feint, but it doesn't seem to bother her. Together we coach the smaller girls who are not quick or whose flapping hands cannot settle on the ball. If I were in school and Winnie were in school we would be Old Girls.

On that day I had executed the turning feint – and I had thrown because for that wide moment I could see all of the sky and the net above the other girls; their hands were tiny wings below the ball that arced into the astonished ring without bouncing or bumping – when the Aunty came to admonish me for not being at church. She did not care that it was church as much as she cared that the whiteman had walked across all of Zone B to find me. It would have been a sign, to be in church just then. Now it was perhaps a different sign that I wasn't there, but not a good one. He would come again, at twelve o'clock on Wednesday, to talk about my schooling.

God? I asked.

No, the whiteman!

This she told me once we had descended through Zone B to the river and people could not hear us, nor could they hear the hardening of my shoulder.

At that time I stayed with the Aunty at the low side of Zone B, when there were fewer houses. To find her place you would have come down from the tarmac road at the Mokono Industries Factory. Then the factory was only small talk that happened while people stood among the red clay piles that had been scoured by some digging, but after time the talking settled like the clay. When it rained the talk flowed down and made a mess between the lower houses, where fighting over who would have the jobs spilled into doorways. But in the sun the talking dried, hardened, and people trusted it to walk on. They said they'd build it soon. A house that was assembled there was razed by men with gloves who dragged the zinc panels up to the road, where they were quickly plundered. Still the land stayed fallow and no one came to plant the jobs.

By then you would have crossed the tracks. They go along Zone B, like a back goes along this part of your body, and farther. The Aunty told me that when she arrived

the trains came through two times per day, going once to Lake Victoria and once to Tanzania, but now you see they come through only once a week, creaking from the lake one week and back another week. She said the smaller children have always run beside them, then and now, clanging at the wheels with sticks, since children never change. After the tracks and the red clay piles and the paths that cut across them, you would have passed Margaret's Hair Salon which is the blue house on the left below the hill. Margaret was always there, but now her sister runs it. The bridge that spans the ditch has always been the same piece of wood – like the paths, it is not much trouble in the sun but when it rains the bridge gets into the rising sewage and these sandals are not enough. It is better to come on a sunny day, when the bridges are easier.

On the low side the houses get closer together, so close you can touch both sides across the street, but back then they were not so close. There was Jeffery's father. He always sat on a wooden bench tying his shoes again and again in front of the house and only looked up when a white came through. The whites did come through sometimes – less then, more now – nodding with their hands in their pockets, but they only come once so Jeffrey's father only saw them once before they were gone forever. Then there was a toilet. We did not use that toilet because it had been posted with a cost of one hundred shillings and who has one hundred shillings for that activity? There were more bridges over more ditches between more houses and a pile of sand where two babies sat and held up their fists – now one has been lost and the other is in the village, while the sand mortared the house where they no longer stay – and around behind that house is where you'd have found the Aunty.

She had twenty stalks of maize but they did not produce. They stood in the hot packed earth beside the house and the house was sticks and mud. The house had risen

from the ground like a person getting up under a net while the stalks of maize had been slammed in around it, like spears. When it was not raining the place was very fine with the quiet green stalks moving in the sun and the brown river moving, too, but the stalks moved in the same air that moved the smell of the river over and in the sun it could offend. I did not hear the story of how the Aunty procured such space.

The coins were pressing hot and sweatily into my hand when I went to buy the bananas early in the morning. The green heads spilled from the back of the truck at the far side of Zone B where the tarmac turns to mud. Those men up high on the truck shifted green heads along to the back of the truck and slid them down on beds of green banana leaves. That is the market – around the sides there are sacks of many beans, black ones, brown ones, white ones, and cassava and pineapple and popo among the busy morning people scuffling with their setting and their selling. You can feel the beginning of the day in that place like the sun is coming into the market first, then going to the other sides. Mango, potato, even chickens. People call their sellings without shouting.

I craned below the back of the truck. The bananas made a shushing sound when dragged across the leaves. I did not get the eye of a man in grey shirt up there but he saw me standing and slid one of the heads towards me. I passed him up the coins. He closed his hand and said they were too few without counting them.

They are not too few, I said quietly because he was a man.

They are too few, he said, opening his hand to look into his palm.

That is the true price for this head, I told him.

Who is this girl? he said rhetorically.

I was already pulling the head of bananas closer to the end of the truck. He did not stop me.

You owe me one hundred, he said.

I don't.

Sister, he pleaded.

These men! They sell and sell and plead like they are not selling.

My hand was on the stem when the grey-shirt man slid it back with his shoe and said again, still pleading, Sister, holding down his open palm.

I don't have, I told him, only then squinting up to meet him. The new-day sun was orange on one side of his head and neck and shoulders.

The price is now one hundred more. Don't you know we are in a fuel crisis? he told me.

I don't know about any fuel crisis. All I know is that you are here with these heads of banana and I am giving you the good price. If you are not wanting my money then give it and I will go.

To my vexation the man returned my coins.

I'm sorry, sister, he said, It is a crisis. I glared up to him, taking it, and saw his face was open with the orange light upon it.

I burned with inside-heat that came up my throat and left from the tops of my ears. What was this fuel crisis? It was my obligation to procure those bananas as the Aunty had charged me to. He was going to come to see me. Now the coins were even hotter in my gripped up hand but they felt smaller as though the man had made them so. Behind me shushed the heads along beds of green banana leaves.

Come this way, sister. Winnie helped me get them, smiling, light, floating over everything.

She took my hand across the market to the quieter side.

This one sells your price, she told me, nodding to the boy who stood beside his cart.

They are cut too soon, I said to Winnie. Touching one, they were hard. You see they are so small. They should have remained on the tree for one more week.

Give them one day, two days. They will improve, said the boy, holding forward one banana as if offering it for testing. I only looked at it, small and hard and green.

They will steam just fine, said Winnie. I have cooked with them.

It's for a guest, I told her, getting vexed. But my vexation was not with her and so it only heated me and had no place to go. The boy was waiting, gently anxious, wanting the sale but knowing that a movement, if he moved too fast, would flap the sale away. He blinked. That's all. I bought them.

Across Zone B Winnie helped me carry the head – I at the heavy stem end and she at the end with the narrowing fruit. We walked beside each other with the fruit between us, then when we reached the red piled clay for Mokono Industries we went end-to-end down the path by Margaret's Hair Salon. At Jeffery's father we put down the head and asked to borrow his plate. He did not look at me while tying up his shoe. You can take it, he said. People were always borrowing Jeffery's father's plate because he had two, one with flowers and one with birds. I took the one with birds.

The Aunty, naturally, was vexed with the bananas. So green! So small! Eh! What will he think? Winnie left before that beating.

The next day I went to the pump on the up-side of Zone B where the water has washed the cement block clean of red dust. The water runs off the block into the earth around it and it has worn a place. Then it runs into the stream that goes beside the tracks, perhaps all the way from Victoria Lake to Tanzania, and when it rains the stream fills up

and floods the tracks.

At the pump was Jeffery, this small boy with brown half-trousers torn off below the knees.

Give me one hundred shillings! he told me with his hand on his hip while his yellow jerry can was filling.

Eh! This boy. Why should I give him shillings when I have no such shillings.

Because there are whites assisting you, this Jeffery said.

He has not assisted me!

You're a selfish girl, said Jeffery, so I pushed at him. My bigger size and the weight of my offense gave it a hearty push and he fell into the cement block where the pump was fixed. We clobbered into his jerry can which behind his heel tipped over, juggling on the block.

The Aunty was not home. My brother Julius and another boy were laying on the blackened mattress that was drying on the dirt, their bellies up in the air like big round stones. They are not my brothers but they are my brothers, you understand.

Come wash.

They pushed themselves off the mattress and got up from their hands and knees, brushing themselves before coming to the water. I poured some of it into a plastic bucket, the kind that Mokono Industries leaves outside the factory if the buckets break, and held it up while they washed from the hole at the bottom. Julius blinked with his lazy eye looking away, seeing something distant.

Where is the Aunty? I asked.

My brothers shrugged.

I put the jerry can by the door and waited for her. The boys lay with their belly-

stones upturned in the sun on the drying mattress until it was dusk. I swept around the house with some small broom sticks, then sat against the wall with my head leaned back. Above, the sky went pink like the sky was water and red ink had been dropped into it, then stirred, so it came in diluted streaks from where I imagined Victoria Lake to be, down where the tracks vanished. In school I had used ink and when I got it on my hands and washed them, the ink spread in the water. It was black ink not red ink but I could imagine how it would happen.

The trees across the river went dark, drawn fatly on top of the pink wash, and little bits of the watery wash were visible between the branches. The river wasn't brown any more, it was black, but the surface was the same as the sky. Only the inky black trees divided the river and the sky while the homes in Zone B glowed pink with cool shadows, and it was in that light that the Aunty came back, and after fidgeting with a useless silver key, opened the door with her shoulder and a grunt.

I lit one coal and when it was hot I found another one in the dirt. I packed them together in the clay stove and then both of them were hot. I scraped through the dark dirt around the stove and found some smaller bits of coal, which I added, removing the ones that were actually wet pieces of wood. I struggled with the pot. The water is heavy at that time of day. I did not remember the last time I had cooked, Friday or Saturday, because the days blend into my life like red in the sky, diluted when I look at them and washing over everything until it's dark and the glow of days is gone.

The water heated while I peeled cassava and thought about my turning feint, performing it in my mind, tucking the ball closer to my body each time before swinging up to be clear of all the other girls and alone in my height to face the net. I thought about guarding with my right elbow and each time I played it through I was sure to keep that

elbow strong. While I peeled the cassava I kept my right elbow up, too, and then I brought the cassava down quick and close to my body, retracting it, leaning my right shoulder forward, until I could bring the cassava up into the late dusk air where the sky was now dark, the day gone.

At night we lay on the floor with the empty pot between us, listening to the Aunty's radio that came on and off quietly by itself. The food sank into our arms and legs like weight.

The banana head ripened over night, two nights, leaning against the wall inside the house. It would have ripened better outside but in the evenings it was necessary to keep it secret from the boys who smoked that smoke outside. Three of them came down by the brown-black river and a girl was with them. You know those boys, you have seen them. They have those girls. They smoke that smoke that makes them fight so much, fighting each other. While they fight by the dark river we smell their smoke coming through the holes in the house, and odors of their violence drift around to affect my dreams. If they'd known about the bananas – if they could smell it above their smoke – they might have taken it with their fighting. That is why I don't mind so much these nights at United Biscuit Factory, now that I am working there. I dream better in the mornings, in the day, like ripening.

Those boys stayed some three, four hours, kicking sand and shouting, then dying down their voices to mumble, talk so low with round sounds in their language, rise up again like their voices were the kicks themselves. Then they went. And the banana smell came back through the quiet after the loud smoke had gone. And I slept.

Later I awoke when from the other side of the room, in the dark, a sound like water bubbled from sleeping Julius. It sounded like water but it was lighter. At first I

thought it was those boys with their fighting smoke, returned, but it was not. In the blindness he gurgled; his lungs and his throat and his lips were immaculately suspended in my mind when I heard the sound, *Huh*. It started small, a low breath in his little lungs, *Huh*. I thought about the back of his throat as the water sound bumped into it, coming up, squeezed up from his little lungs, *Huh*. It escaped between his lips, catching maybe on the back of his teeth, *Huh*, dropping from the side of his mouth into the still room too small for echoes. The house was dry and the sound was wet, soaking into the walls and the floor, gone, but by then another one had begun in the bottom of Julius' little lungs, *Huh*, and another one, *Huh*, bumped against his throat, caught against his teeth, spilled into the room, one after the other, closer together until the sounds streamed out, and I knew that even though he was sleeping, my brother Julius was laughing. I could see his broad good smile and his closed eyes when I imagined them, and beneath his lids the lazy eye seeing far away. The next day, when the light came blue then orange through the holes in the wall, he would not remember what he had dreamed.

I went to Winnie's to borrow her smart skirt made from silver with black buttons. We sat at the edge of the market, pinging stones on the tracks while we talked about netball and who was good – we were good – but when we stopped and both looked separate ways, me to the lake and her to Tanzania, she said that I was the best. When she said it I felt a rush of cool clean air carry me upward, like standing on a hill where there is wind, like laughing, and maybe from there I glimpsed for an instant what Julius saw.

Otherwise, Tuesday was a waiting day.

Then it was Wednesday, the day he'd said he'd come. The bananas were a better green but still so small. I brought them into the orange sunlight and sat against the house with a bowl beside my feet. I peeled the chalky fruit with the glitter of a knife; slip, slip,

through the peel; the green strips came off between the blade and my thumb. I pulled the blade towards me like my mother'd taught me to, in the village. I'd been tiny then, I don't even remember. Now the knife slipped through with green strip peels falling between my feet and I put the slipped white finished ones in the bowl that sat beside.

The bananas should be peeled and wrapped, boiling in the boiling pot one hour before – slip, slip, I was thinking – then while it steamed the oil and onion – slip – the onion and the oil should go into that pot and get cooked up together. At that time the wrapped bananas should be out and the water should be out so the pot is hot hot hot for the oily onion hiss. You tend the charcoal for that one, because it takes some time. It must be very hot.

That is what I was doing when the Aunty came to ask me where was he.

Where is he? I said back. How do I know?

If he had found you in church then God would have made things different.

He will come, Aunty.

She was looking into me like she was looking for something she couldn't find.

Maybe it was so far into me that I couldn't find it either.

He will help, I assured her.

He came to find you at church, that is something, and now we may have lost him, said the Aunty before returning to the house.

Four hours went past twelve o'clock. I had brought the wrapped bananas out and they were steaming on Jeffrey's father's plate, covering the painting of birds. I poured the onion and the oil into a plastic container, then put the bananas back in the pot. I put Jeffrey's father's plate on top of it, upside down, to keep the steam inside.

I sat beside the pot and leaned against the wall of the house, thinking of netball

and school, my world inside a world. It was at school that I had played on the girls team, played every Sunday after church. Now I play on Sundays, too, even in the morning. Although I'd performed my first turning feint here in Zone B, it was at school that I'd perfected it. The boys' football teacher, the round Mister Phillip, had even made his comment. That girl will play very good netball if she continues with her studies.

I continue to play good netball, I thought, looking at the empty sky.

Although I didn't know it then, I would go in search of Winnie after the whiteman had come and gone. I would go along the tracks towards the market site. In the afternoon it would be quiet with only some few shirts hanging among the empty hangars on poles. I would be carrying the folded silver skirt over my arm and looking where I walked to ease the burning in my eyes.

When I had not found her, I would walk beyond the church to where the netball net is planted in the dry cracked earth. On the post there is a country flag but not this country. The net was taken long ago but still it's called a net. I would sit on a stone below the net and look along the tracks to where cranes hunted through the mountain of garbage with their heavy dark beaks. And when the sun would go down, I would come back to the river.

But in that moment when I heard the children naming him, chirping it, the word they'd heard but rarely been able to apply, and their sound was as new and clean to them as the one they were naming, I was only happy. I stood quick and brushed down the silver skirt, then bent to blow the charcoal for it must be hot again. When the dizziness had passed, I lifted the plate with my hands, not caring about its burn, and poured some fast water into the pot, just a little, to return the steam to life. Then I went around the house to where he had arrived – that moon-made shining not-sullied small man standing on this

dark ground beside the stocks of maize that never have and never would produce.

Beside his dark friend he shone even more, like a new piece of paper, and his eyes were blue like plastic in the sun. A white towel was draped over his shoulder, marked with sweat and dust. I heard exalting music.

You are Susan? he said.

Yes, sir, I replied, walking bashfully that way. You are welcome.

Listen, I'm leaving much sooner than expected. Your sponsorship request has been handed off to an intern who's just arrived. My interpreter – he pointed at the man who stood beside him – will bring them up to speed. It's too bad we cannot stay.

You cannot stay? I asked.

Flight's in two hours. Sometimes these things happen. Maybe I've got something here. He rifled in his pocket and brought out a crumpled note, two crumpled notes, and a coin. He put the notes in my hand but dropped the coin because he was not paying attention. What's there, eleven hundred? HmMMMM. Thought I had more.

As he dug in his pockets, the towel slipped from his shoulders. The interpreter caught it. The whiteman fumbled more, unaware. The interpreter and I looked at his hands.

Got to save some for transport, the whiteman was saying.

Then, after turning to the interpreter, he nodded, said, Right, and was gone like a day that had never happened.

I removed the pot from the charcoal and brought it inside to rest on the floor of the house, where the Aunty was sleeping. I knocked one of the batteries out of the radio and the music stopped.

Did he come? she asked when she had awoken.

He came.

Will you go to school?

Not yet, I told her. Then I went to return the silver skirt to Winnie.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

My argument has now been laid before you. There have been two parts to it – one academic and the other narrative. I have included them in tandem to illustrate the different ways in which each contribute essentially to the representation and subsequent address of poverty. In this final section, I will explain my intentions behind the format I have chosen, evaluate its success, and outline considerations for teaching about poverty through narrative representation.

On form (theory and practice)

The two ways of exploring poverty, academic and narrative, are presented to show how different and yet valuable their achievements are. The academic argument (Chapters 1, 2, & 3) serves the positivistic, reason-based form that has been popularized by science and spread into the social sciences. It builds up its argument based on accumulated premises – stories link people to other people; those links can encourage empathy; empathy can humanize the way the poor are represented; therefore representations of poverty can be humanized by empathetic storytelling. Because of the legitimacy that such rational argumentation has established during its historic reign, such a format is more firmly planted in assumed validity than narrative “argumentation” in the same context. The essay form is a familiar means for identifying, exploring, and defending ideas or feelings about a particular phenomenon – in other words, people know how to read it, not just its linguistic units, but its relationship to the subject.

The narrative argument (Chapter 4) isn't an argument at all. If it is, it is only

because I have failed in some way (a prospect I will discuss below). Instead, as a companion to the reason-based form, the story explores the theme of poverty in organic, personal ways. The voice moves around, settles on subjects like netball, hints at god, returns to friendship. It moves in a different way than an academic representation of poverty can. Of course there are rules and expectations in stories just as there are in the essay form, but they are not the same rules and expectations. These differences allow for different experiences to get through in each of the forms, academic (rational, argumentative, objective) and narrative (emotional, exploratory, subjective). These categories are not exclusive, nor even strict. There are excellent narrative essays, like Virginia Woolf's *A Room of one's own* (1991), just as there are superb essay-narratives, like many of Jorge Luis Borges' (1982) short stories. These dynamic hybrids offer perhaps the best of each form to the other, leaving its limitations behind. In the address of poverty, perhaps a synthesis of narrative and academic argumentation would serve best to illustrate my concern. In this effort here, I have drawn the two forms as closely together as I could in hopes that the audience will combine them in the reading. My only additional effort towards merging academic and narrative has been to express my formal argument in a playful voice (mainly in the first chapter), one that recognizes more personal identity of authorship than one usually finds in academic journals, just as I have tried to earn the formalists' respect with the measured cadence of my narrative prose.

But before turning completely to a discussion of tone, I want to add these short comments on form in the context of my argument. Just as I maintain throughout the body of the essay, the strengths of both argumentation and narrative are involved in representing poverty. As Candace Stout (1999) suggests, both data and stories are required for fair representation – thinking and feeling are necessary (p. 24). Neither one

could substitute for the other. Stories are presented here to temper the ways in which poverty is represented – since that representation has most often been in the form of utilitarian economics, I am defending the essential contributions of narrative for their unique capacity to see people not as dots, but as people. Perhaps if I found myself in a world where subjective narrative dominated representations of poverty, I would rally in defense of economics, arguing for efficiency, commensurability, aggregation, and utility in a world where the needs of poor are so urgent as to leave no time for subjective contemplation. Until that paradigm has tipped to balance feelings with facts, I will maintain my encouragement for stories in the recognition and address of poverty. Here my goal has been to illustrate the need for both – without information, I don't know where to direct my feeling; without feeling, information becomes no more than a constellation of dots.

The combination of argument and story also represents an example of Freire's concept of praxis, the dynamic merger of theory and practice. It was my hope to illustrate with my own work the suggestion that I put forward in the theoretical part of the thesis – that poverty be represented and learned about through fact and fiction. While recommending certain stories by title at the end of the thesis might have satisfied the same overall requirements, it would not constitute an example (nor a metaphor) of Freire's praxis because the two forms, academic and narrative, would be alienated from each other. In presenting the two opportunities to learn about poverty in the same project, I am trying to edge them closer together, to synthesize them if not in form then at least in proximity. My hope is that in reading them, each one affects the other, adding layers, in a struggle towards seeing the world in new ways. To use Freire's language, I have tried to present an alternate way of reading the word and the world. To have simply presented my

ideas through theory would have been to preach without practice.

Freire's ideas are not only useful in explaining the form of my thesis. They also help to defend the tone of its argument. For the theory section of the thesis, I chose a voice that is more conversational, playful, and therefore less conventional than usual academic expression. I wanted my ideas to be accessible to a wider audience than the expert reader. And I wanted to appeal to the social creature that most people are behind the layers of formality that their professions often require of them. These values for communication are reflected by Freire in his *Pedagogy of Hope* (2004):

Language's aesthetic moment, it has always seemed to me, ought to be pursued by all of us, including rigorous scholars. There is not the least incompatibility between rigor in the quest for understanding and knowledge of the world, and beauty of form in the expression of what is found in the world. [...] It would be an absurdity for there to be, or seem to have to be, some necessary association between ugliness and scientific rigor. (p. 59)

Heartened by Freire's defense of real communication, I have tried to express my ideas, both through argument and narrative, in a way that allows a place for the author's identity. Just as my argument is for the humanization of poverty's representation, I have tried to humanize academic expression with a personal voice. Simultaneously, the speech cadence of the fictional story has been influenced by true speech patterns that I experienced while doing research in a slum in Kampala, Uganda. Some of the character's comments, in fact, have been borrowed directly from people I met there. In this way, both sections, argument and story, fact and fiction, are humanized by the presence of their authors, either knowingly or unknowingly.

Critique

I was not all successful in my goal, however. I'm afraid that the story I wrote does not entirely reflect what I argue for in the theory section. The argument is for a fiction that transcends the conditions of poverty and emphasizes instead the human experiences of the poor. In my opinion, this has been only partially achieved. While the story hints at the more complex humanity of some of its characters, it still dwells too much on the conditions of poverty. Its vision is even cliché – the dignity of the poor, the callousness of the rich – which only serves to perpetuate the stereotypes that keep poor people oppressed by limited representation. Perhaps I am as guilty as those I criticize – I have replicated the pervasive and even shallow images of the poor. If the possibilities for re-imagining the poor are only as great as what I am able to represent in my story, then the prospects for the humanization of others look grim. With this in mind, I insist that my story *cannot* have been successful, because I want to believe that the representation of poverty can be humanized to a further extent than I have shown myself capable of with this work. A way forward is glimpsed through the works of Leo Tolstoy, like *Anna Karenina*, for example, or Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice* – enduring literary classics, no doubt, but why? I believe it is because they emphasize the relationships among their characters, not their time, place, or even much their circumstance. Of course there are clues to remind readers of the era, but overall they are stories of human lives with all their feeling; they are stories of people. My story, meanwhile (falling infinitely short of any real comparison) does not distance itself from perspectives about the way the poor are treated. It is ironic, cynical, even political. A truly humanizing story would have been more bold to explore the narrator's internal responses to the circumstances in which she finds herself. By such a leap, the reader might establish real bonds of empathy – and not just sympathy – between

him/herself and the character who, in spite of different circumstances, allows for the exploration of different selves. With this thesis I have taken personal note that my project as a writer of fiction remains the unabashed excavation of self.

One idea from *Chapter 3: Stories as opportunities for social change* of this thesis suggests a different interpretation whereby my story does contribute to the argument I set out to defend. If, as I argued, one of the strengths of stories is their capacity to problematize, then my effort has not been in vain. The ironic and political tones of this story contribute to the *conscientização* that Freire described – learning to see the contradictions in one's surroundings. Perhaps by exploring the implication of the foreigner in unknowingly appealing to the hope of people in poverty, the story might cause the reader to consider his or her own role in lived or future experiences. In this way, the reader is the one who is humanized – made more complex, layered, diverse, capable of understanding difference – by exploring a depiction of him or herself that they had not conceived of until then.

Or perhaps it is just a story. What is remarkable about narrative is that people continue to enjoy them with or without awareness or care for the pedagogical experience that they represent. This realization is at the heart of stories – that they should appeal; that they make difference exciting; that they bring the world together in a way that is, quite simply, fun. Good stories entertain as well as affect their readers or audience. This leads finally to the implications for stories in the classroom and how a narrative pedagogy can be used to affect the way that poverty is not only represented, but changed.

Implications and recommendations for education

Stories should be an integral part of learning about poverty. Their many merits, from sharing difference to being pleasurable, make them valuable additions to curriculum for any subject. When Keiran Egan (1999) talks about the difference between information and knowledge, he evokes information as coded symbols. In order to transform that information into knowledge, it must be “resuscitated”, given human life (p. 51).

According to Egan, this “giving life” to mere information is the goal of education. He and I both agree that this transformation is excellently achieved through the use of stories in the classroom.

In Egan's view (1999; 1992; 1986), stories should be used in just about every learning environment to enrich the informational content. Recognizing the variable interpretation of stories does not compromise their validity as pedagogical opportunities, either. Instead, integrating them into form, content, and experience of the curriculum can contribute to an understanding of knowledge that is more flexible and less restricted by prevailing trends in perception. In Egan's (1992) view,

By presenting [knowledge] as our best understanding at the moment, or as relatively insecure, or as one possibility, we can encourage students' sense that the world their growing knowledge is enabling them to construct is not Truth or Reality, but one of a number of ways of making sense of the world and experience. Such an attitude towards knowledge encourages open-mindedness and tolerance towards other views. Such an attitude does not commit us to relativism or the belief that all knowledge is socially constructed; rather it simply recommends appropriate epistemological modesty in the classroom. (Egan, 1992, p. 57)

This “appropriate epistemological modesty in the classroom” would go a long way towards re-envisioning poverty and one's relationship to it. As alternative perspectives arise through the exploration of stories, people would be encouraged to reflect upon their own place, reaction, and initiative in affecting conditions of poverty. As empathetic bonds

are strengthened by the experience of the characters, people might conceive a birth a solidarity with those who suffer unjustly and unnecessarily. The presence of stories in the classroom, as pedagogical opportunities to explore and embrace difference, become important building blocks for a transformative learning experience.

The teacher should thus become an empathetic facilitator, one who “tries to look through the students' eyes, to struggle with them as subjects in search of their own projects, their own ways of making sense of the world” (Greene, 1988a, p.120; in Stout, 1999, p. 24). This positioning of the teacher as a facilitator who joins with learners and their experience to guide them through the discovery of the world aligns gracefully with Freire's criteria for the revolutionary leader – that he or she must be *with* the people, working together as subjects, not *for* the people, commanding them as objects. The facilitator of poverty education who is sensitive to the pedagogical opportunities implicit in stories strives to include them in his or her guidance through questions about what is poverty, and how can suffering be reduced. It is my belief that only with such an important revision to the way in which people learn about poverty – which is most often through the limited economic depictions that I explored in *Chapter 2: Poverty and its discontents* – can the entire field of so-called 'international development' be reorientated to steer a truer course that is more representative of all its stakeholders. Ultimately, then, my goal with this thesis has been to clear the groundwork for a new way of addressing poverty, based on first re-envisioning it.

Conclusion

Is this a project that schools are capable of taking on? Who is responsible for changing the global portrait of poverty? As Candace Stout (1999) recognizes,

These societal problems are increasingly becoming the problems of our schools. At the heart of the myriad concerns occupying the minds of educationists is the question of moral and ethical education and whether our schools can and should act as agents for social reconstruction. (p. 23).

In Freire's view, the answer to the last part of this question is obvious: yes, schools should definitely act as agents for social reconstruction. Because of their potential to awaken conscious agents, formal schooling has an important role to play in addressing moral and ethical formation. But schools are not the only site for such awakening, and stories make an important contribution to this expansion of educational experience. While schools are one place where the representation of poverty can be explored, I would defend a more universal inclusion of stories-as-representation in business and international development. Of course narrative representations do exist in these fields, but usually as supplements to quantitative ones instead of legitimate opportunities for reflection and action.

Stories, in learning about poverty, offer a bridge that connects the classroom to the outside world. When brought into the classroom, stories can link their reader/listener to experiences beyond, but related to, his or her own. When stories are engaged outside of the classroom (in business culture or international development), they can create communities of shared experience, even though their reading may be private – in linking experience through content and linking content through discussion, seeds of Freire's *conscientização* are planted. This capacity for bridging is shared by bell hooks' (2006) praises for the field of cultural studies, which in the early part of her career,

was a location that enabled students to enter passionately a pedagogical process firmly rooted in education for critical consciousness, a place where they felt recognized and included, where they could unite knowledge learned in classrooms with outside life. (p. 3)

Learning about poverty through stories contributes to a similar experience of education. Stories, like the field of cultural studies, depend on this link between the classroom and outside life. The story, through its character, setting, and circumstance, attaches to the lived experience of the reader/listener. Even though these elements may differ from the details of his or her own life, he or she can recognize him or herself in the details that are common and feel included. Ultimately, stories, like the broader field of cultural studies, contribute to this critical consciousness that is so dear to bell hooks and Paulo Freire. The end towards which learning about poverty through stories must lead is the alleviation of others' suffering (oppression, in Freire's words). The conscious citizen's agency is liberated so that "the poor would have their needs met, would have access to resources, would have justice and beauty in their lives." (hooks, 2006, p. 168). However, in order to change the way that poverty and wealth are distributed around the world, one must first change the way in which poverty – and wealth – are represented. It is my hope that the ideas of this thesis and the form that they have taken have contributed in at least a small way to this essential prerequisite for social and economic change.

The value of stories in learning about poverty becomes clearer in Stout's (1999) defense of 'connected knowing':

When students understand the interdependence between self and other, when they develop the ability and volition to reason empathetically within diverse points of view, they will begin to see the truth in the assertion that knowledge comes only through community, and they will begin the process of connected knowing. (p. 33)

This single sentence evokes many of the concepts I have elaborated upon above,

bringing them into close relation to one another. The creation of a community of knowledge seems essential to changing the way in which poverty is 'treated' in the world. It should not be the 'other'. The coincidence that for many people poverty is on the other side of the world only serves as a convenient but blinding metaphor to justify its dismissal. With community that is empathetic to the plight of its members, one that sees past conditions to recognize the shared humanity of its diverse people, knowledge of the world becomes interconnected, and awareness of one's own important role in representing that knowledge becomes clear. In such a community, the self in others would become illuminated and its oppression, impermissible.

In my effort to defend the essential contributions that stories make in representing poverty, I began by illustrating the mechanics of metaphor and the activities of imagination. The purpose of that chapter was to clarify stories as more than a pleasant tickle, more than simple entertainment. It was important to understand the bridging function that stories, through metaphor and imagination, achieve before relying on them in my subsequent argument – they connect experiences, objects, events, and people. In the second Chapter, "Poverty and its discontents," I explored the way in which poverty is typically represented – in utilitarian economic terms – and compared and contrasted the merits and shortcomings of quantitative and qualitative representations. The purpose of that chapter was to clear the space where learning about poverty through stories could be applied. I wanted to show the very real need for a narrative education about poverty. The third chapter, "Stories as opportunities for social change," presented ways in which this narrative education was revolutionary, leading to a critical awareness described by Paulo Freire. In that chapter, I brought up important concepts of Freire's critical pedagogy to show how each of them was present in the way stories' affected representations of

poverty. The congruence between Freire's ideas and a narrative pedagogy about poverty suggest that stories can make important contributions to new ways of understanding the lives of others. Included with as a chapter of my thesis has been a short work of fiction that is based on the lived experience of people in slums in Kampala, Uganda. The purpose of this story and its placement in the thesis was to illustrate in action what I proposed in theory. Both in the writing and the reading, it has been my effort to affect the representation of poverty, particularly in the context of international development, in a way that respects the poor as people. In this final chapter, I have suggested that stories of all kinds should be an essential part of learning about poverty, and that they are foundational in changing the way poverty is represented. The goal of this project has not been to dismiss the important work performed by quantitative representations of poverty, but to add to it. To lose one's self in a single life would be to ignore the world; but to reduce a life to numbers is to lose its meaning. The way forward can be lit by the synthesis of reason and emotion, fact and fiction, essay and story in the recognition and address of education about poverty.

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