

# Defending Reading Practices: A life-long learning process



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## Introduction

What does it mean to be literate in the 21st century? The view taken in this article is that being fully literate means operationalising different reading practices that range from word recognition to textual analysis. This paper discusses literacy in terms of modern social and pedagogical demands for expanded notions of textual analysis generated from contemporary literary theory. It offers readers a methodology for understanding, changing and defending reading practices associated with the texts they read for academic or recreational purposes. Suggestions are explored for producing a 'defence' or justification of two different readings of the film *Ghost*: one from a personal reader-centred approach, the other from a sociocultural or world-context approach. The implication for teachers and readers is that they come to (re)view literacy as a personally and socially-inscribed practice that extends to textual analysis.

An early contribution to Australian literacy education, in the late nineteenth century, was a 'basics plus classics' model (see Luke and Freebody 1997:186). This model was theoretically coherent in that it supported not only teaching of reading (the basics) but also literary criticism through a joint focus on decoding and encoding words on the page. Beginning readers learned to decipher words by recognising alphabet sounds and letters. Once mastered, the words on the page took on a renewed literary criticism interest as examples of how language could be crafted to produce 'great books' to guide readers to lead wholesome lives, rather in the manner advocated by F R Leavis (1963). This literacy model worked well in a social and pedagogical environment that accepted the authority of the text and the power of the teacher to impart that authority.

By the mid-twentieth century, educators became increasingly aware of the need to engage students in an expanding range of literacy practices. The 'basic plus classics' model began to be reshaped by modern social and pedagogical demands. The psychology of the individual had become a social and educational concern and therefore learning to read involved more than

decoding and encoding. The authority of the text was no longer absolute. Textual authority was replaced with readers' prior knowledge about language. Therefore, in learning the basics, a new reader might bring some extra-textual knowledge of words and signs from outside the text to bear and thus become a 'text participant' (Freebody and Luke 1990) in the meaning-making process. This change in learning to read coincided with a parallel reassessment of how to analyse literature. An accomplished literary reader would now be expected to bring personal experience to bear on what the story meant to them. Progressing further into the late twentieth century, reading practices shifted once more, again representing and responding to social and pedagogical changes. This time the changes involved (post-modern) readers in critique of the ideological assumptions, values and beliefs systems underpinning language. In terms of learning to read, learning the basics and literary criticism became even more enmeshed, in so far as both pedagogies directed readers to 'read between the lines' to determine how best to understand a text's positioning. When reading everyday texts and literature, decoding the words on the page became a necessary first step in questioning whose interests such a text might serve. For example, a reader could seek out the manner in which particular uses of literary devices might inscribe a particular characters immersion in discourses of social class, race, gender and age.

What does it mean to be literate in the twenty-first century? It is generally accepted that knowing the 'basics' is no longer sufficient, even in the very early years of schooling, if one is to participate fully and equitably in the present world context. Over ten years ago, Freebody and Luke (1990) outlined a literacy model that included the familiar literacy role of encoder/decoder but simultaneously integrated it into the wider sociocultural roles of text user, text participant and text analyst. This model has become popular in school curricula and in adult literacy programs as it offers clear directions for pedagogy. The latter roles acknowledge the need for literacy educators and learners to consider literacy, not only as a functional and personal practice, but also as individually and socially/culturally inscribed. In contemporary society, for readers of literature, it is no longer sufficient to be able to read texts in the classics model and produce what could be termed a single authoritative, static meaning, through a concentration on the text (Wimsatt 1954) and the author (Leavis 1963), or perhaps both. In current times, a mature reader might dexterously assemble a range of reading practices so as to read with, across and against the invited reading of any text. For a fuller explanation of how these terms and processes work, see Johnson (2001, 1999).

Recent Australian syllabus documents designed for the teaching and learning of subject English demand an increased performance in a range of literacy and literary practices, as well as requiring explicit awareness of how these practices are produced and enacted. For example, young adult secondary students working from the English Extension (Literature) Syllabus (2000) in Queensland must develop increasingly wider reflections and greater reflexivity. Accordingly, students must produce not only a variety of readings or interpretations of text/s but they must also develop reflexive methods of justifying their analyses or reading/s of those texts in the form of a spoken or written 'defence'. Being reflexive in this context means being able to understand and explain precisely what strategies were used to make meaning of a text. A starting point is to pinpoint the key focus in the meaning-making process. Was the main emphasis in interpretation on the author, the text itself, the reader or the world context? This trend to greater explication of reading (and writing) practices appears to have become more common in university courses as well. Such a move in literary pedagogy offers readers the freedom to shift and change their literate identities and continue to develop them as adults reading for recreation, in bookclubs perhaps.

This article addresses this complex and often perplexing process of producing understandings of texts and of acting reflexively by providing explicit and detailed explanations about how those understandings were produced. The following section provides a brief demonstration of how readers might enter into the process of defending readings they make of a text. However, it should be noted that the discussion explores only the explication of those reading practices associated with the readers' individual and social inscription. It does not treat the production and defence of traditional author and text-centred readings. Therefore, it discusses those reading practices that are generated from contemporary literary theories such as those known generally as reader-centred and world-context approaches. The next section gives a brief overview of these two contemporary approaches to reading that acknowledge the part the reader has to play in the production of meaning (see Queensland Bureau of Secondary School Studies 2000). It shows how a reader, using either of those approaches, might begin to make different meanings of a text when they work from a position that purports that literacy is variously a personally and socially inscribed practice. This overview is followed, in the latter sections of the paper, by examples of two readings of a 'literary' text (a film) and explanations or defences of how those particular readings were produced, from the different theoretical approaches to be outlined in the sections that follow.

### Theoretical considerations in producing a 'defence' of a reading

This section offers a brief theoretical framework that might provide an initial orientation for readers who wish to become more reflexively explicit about the personally and socially inscribed reading practices they have called upon to produce a reading. A reading is an interpretation of a text, using specific reading practices or protocols that are linked to particular literary theories. Moon (2001:128) defines reading practices as 'the rules and procedures which readers use in making sense of a text'. What I propose is that readers consider the suggestions outlined here in order to build a reading and a defence, not necessarily always formally written, of the meaning they make of the texts they read. In developing a defence it is important not only to know *what* is read but also to *know* how it has been done as well. In practical terms,

a defence is an analytical exposition that requires [readers] to 'step outside' the reading produced and critically reflect on the reading practices involved in making explicit their knowledge and understanding of how reading practices are used to produce different readings. (Queensland Bureau of Secondary School Studies 2000:55)

A defence gives readers (and indeed writers) the opportunity to learn more about themselves as readers and writers. In understanding different reading practices, and being explicit about just how these practices work in terms of the multi-faceted reader-text-author-world-context relationships, a reader is in a formidable position to control the production and reception of meanings. Having engaged with the notion of how different reading practices operate, it is probable that newly found patterns of reflexivity could inform future reading and writing practices. For example, readers might begin by looking back on readings they make of texts so as to explicate what reading practices they have used to produce those readings. Subsequently they might reverse the process and consciously use their newly acquired knowledge of reading practices to begin to produce a further reading or re-writing of the same (or another) text.

In order to write (or think about) a defence, a reader could examine a reading initially using the following general questions. How does the reading fit into the general range of traditional and contemporary literary theoretical approaches available? What specific reading practices, generated from a particular literary theoretical approaches, has the reader used to produce that particular reading? At this stage, a defence would expect to make general theory-practice connections between literary theory and related reading practices. Since

there is not space here to outline all the traditional theoretical approaches and the accompanying reading practices, I refer the reader of this paper to the English Extension Syllabus (Literature) (Queensland Bureau of Secondary School Studies 2000) and subsequently, to the updated version of this document due for general implementation in Queensland secondary schools in 2004. In broad terms, all literary theoretical approaches (traditional and contemporary) focus on author, text, reader and world-context relationships with the reader. The next section outlines a practical adaptation of a range of methods that are useful for reading from a reader-centred approach.

#### **A Personal Reader-Centred Approach**

An initial possibility for textual analysis using a contemporary approach is a Personal Reader-Centred Approach. This is a personally inscribed reading practice that is produced through a recognition of a reader's personal transactional engagement with the text (Bleich 1978, Rosenblatt 1968). This approach opposes the notion that meaning is to be found in the text or in authorial intention. The new understanding here is that readers produce personal readings. They read along with what they see as the invited reading of the text, matching those experiences of characters and events with their own. However, the experience readers bring to the text comes also in the form of the knowledge they have accumulated of how texts worked in the past, thus creating 'horizons of expectations' (Jauss 1982). Therefore readers may compare their knowledge of how a text was read in its context of production with how they are receiving it now in a different context. This reading practice acknowledges that meaning is not stable. From this approach literary analysis need not be tied exclusively to canonical printed texts, such as poetry and novels. Non-print texts such as films, hypertext and perhaps some computer games became objects of literary criticism.

The following points are derived from the pedagogically oriented work of Beach (1993) on theoretical perspectives (supporting a reader-centred approach) and on the research based reader-centred reading stages and process strategies model devised by Thomson (1987). However, it is readily acknowledged that this work is generated from a number of other literary theorists who are interested in the role of the reader in the reading process. These points, outlined in no hierarchical or theoretically relevant order, are designed to assist readers to produce and recognise a personally inscribed reading constructed from a reader-centred approach. They are organised under the five theoretical perspectives of Beach: textual, experiential, psychological, social and critical

- (i) A textual perspective relies on the knowledge a reader has accumulated of how texts work:
- Has my experience of reading other texts helped me to predict an ending?
  - How has my knowledge of symbols, images and narrative structure helped me to understand the characters, settings and events?
  - Who is the implied author of this text, ie, who is the persona/s writing this text? (see Iser 1974)
  - Who is the implied or ideal reader for the text?
  - How does the implied author connect with the implied reader?
  - How might readers have read this text at the time of publication?
  - Have I read the text intertextually? That is, what other texts, of any genre, helped to produce meaning? (see Kristeva 1986)
  - Has my knowledge of different literary strategies helped me to keep reading?
  - Has the use of particular points of view encouraged me to take up some characters' perspectives more than others?
- (ii) An experiential perspective relies on a reader's engagement with the characters, experiences and to some extent the world view of the text:
- Do you identify, at least at times, with the main character?
  - Can you visualise images in the novel based on your life experiences and reading?
  - Are you the implied reader for this novel? Why do you become (or not) the invited or ideal reader; why do you agree/disagree with the invited reading?
  - How do you as a reader fill the gaps left in the text (through your life experiences, cultural assumptions and ideologies, and knowledge of genres and textual features)?
  - Can you relate personal experiences to the novel? Do you know similar people? Have you experienced similar events?
- (iii) A psychological perspective relies on the reader's relationship to the novel in terms of cognitive development and personality. (see also Bleich 1978, Holland 1975):
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- Is your reading similar to or different from other readers'?
  - Would you enjoy reading this novel in ten years time? Why/why not?
  - Do the characters' personalities relate to yours?
  - How does your present mood impact on your reading of the novel?
  - How does your knowledge of people and events help you to predict outcomes of events and the way the text will end?
- (iv) A social perspective relies on the reader's reason for reading a text:
- Do you see this as a text that you would enjoy reading for formal assessment?
  - Would you read differently if you were reading this with a view to discussing it with a friend?
- (v) A cultural perspective relies on the reader's connection with the views, values and ideologies expressed in the text:
- How do the ideologies you are invited to accept in the text (mis)match with your own? Why is this so?

Using the personal reader-centred approach, readers may read more than the text's assumed message. For instance, they could disagree slightly with some aspect of the ideology they see as supporting the text. In this case they produce an *alternative* reading rather in the manner suggested by Ricoeur (1991). Here readers have a double motivation in so far as they take up simultaneously a willingness to suspect and a willingness to listen to an invited reading. An alternative reading would recognise that a reading *does not resist* the text outright. To do so would mean reading with resistant or oppositional reading practices, which mount deeper challenges to the ideological and discursive positioning of the reader by the text. A key point about a reader-centred approach to reading is the notion that different readers produce different readings of the same text. The same reader also could 're-negotiate' prior meanings of a text on re-reading it. However, it is also important to note that although readers might produce what seems to be a reading that comes from a personal perspective, groups or communities of readers also produce readings that are similar because they emanate from related experiences (Fish 1980). Finally, this approach provides a bridge to the socially inscribed reading practices that exist within a sociocultural or world-centred approach through a concern with textual ideologies and discourses. At this point readers only begin

to question textual ideology through (mis)matching personal ideologies with those of the text (Thomson 1987).

#### A Sociocultural or World-Centred Approach

A further, sociocultural possibility for textual analysis is a reading approach that also involves the reader's interaction with the text, albeit in a more overtly socially and culturally inscribed manner. This time the reader-text interaction is not personally engendered as in a reader-centred approach. Located in what has come to be known as a cultural studies theoretical and pedagogical means of textual analysis (Poynton and Lee 2000), this way of reading texts considers that texts attempt to position readers to accept textual assumptions in the form of discourses and ideologies. In response, readers bring their discursive identities to bear on what they perceive as textually-mediated positioning (Gee 1996, Kress 1985). Characters are not treated so much as real people, but rather as representing particular discursive positions or ways of being in the world. This approach takes up a more developed sociological focus than does a reader-centred approach, while still retaining a keen eye on how language is used to inscribe meaning socially. A reading constituted through this theoretical orientation might discuss how discourses are socially constructed and how they shift and change over time. Some discourses are more dominant than others in particular times and places – for example, patriarchy and racism. Readers using a world-context approach must examine the language of the text in order to support the discursive position they suspect underpins the text.

A starting point for a defence of a reading using this approach is to ask whether or not the reading addresses global questions such as:

- In whose interest is a text written?
- What other ways are there to write or talk about this topic?  
(Kress 1985)
- What are the silences that help to construct this text?
- How does the language of the text strive to convince the reader that meaning is universal?

The last of these dot points acts as a means of contemporising a traditional text-centred approach (Richards 1955) where the words on the page were seen to determine a fixed meaning.

Readings do not always fit into a single, discrete theoretical approach, and knowledge of the general approaches to textual analysis facilitates



recognition of shifts in reading practices. Having identified and/or explained the broad theoretical orientation/s of a reading, a well-argued defence needs to become more specific about the particular reading practices that have helped to produce the reading. The discussion of how to go about using the basic tenets of contemporary literary theory, outlined in the preceding section, supports not only the production of readings but also helps in the development of a defence. The next section moves from the theoretical explanation of personally and socially inscribed reading approaches to a discussion of practical examples of a reading and a defence from the personal and social theoretical approaches described above. Specifically, the remainder of the article demonstrates two readings of a film text and their respective defences, one from a personal reader-centred approach and the other from a sociocultural or world-context approach.

### **A Personal Reader-Centred Response**

A recent novel titled *Thinks ...* by the literary theorist David Lodge (2001) includes a series of diary entries by the protagonists. The female protagonist, Helen Reed, whose philandering husband, Martin, has died recently, has moved from London in the short term and taken an appointment as writer-in-residence at the fictional Gloucester University. She makes one entry in her diary after she has watched the popular film *Ghost* for the second time. For the purpose of this discussion, Helen's diary entry is called a reader-centred reading (of many possibilities) of that film. She begins:

1. SATURDAY 22ND FEB. Last night the film *Ghost* was on television after the
2. News, and I decided to watch it, although I had seen it before, with Martin – or
3. rather I watched it because I had seen it before with Martin. It was a surprise hit
4. when it first came out and everybody was talking about it. We enjoyed it, I
5. recalled, even as we rather despised its slick exploitation of the supernatural. I
6. remembered only the bare bones of the plot: a young man is murdered in the
7. street walking home with his girl, and tries to protect her from the conspirators
8. who killed him, though as a ghost he is invisible and can only communicate with

9. her through a medium. The few details of the movie that had lodged in my
10. memory were the special effects when characters died: for instance, the hero gets
11. up from the ground apparently unscathed and only realizes that he's dead when
12. he sees his distraught girlfriend cradling his own lifeless body in her arms; and
13. when the baddies die they are immediately set upon by dark gibbering shapes that
14. drag them screaming off to hell (surprisingly satisfying, that). And I remembered
15. that Whoopi Goldberg had been very funny in the role of the fraudulent medium
16. who is disconcerted to find herself genuinely in touch with the spirit world. These
17. things were just as effective the second time round. What I wasn't prepared for
18. was the way the love story would overwhelm me. Demi Moore, whom I've
19. always considered a rather wooden actress, seemed incredibly moving as the
20. bereaved heroine. When her eyes filled with tears, mine brimmed over. In fact I
21. spent most of the movie weeping, laughing at Whoopi Goldberg through my tears.
22. I knew in my head that the film was cheap, sentimental, manipulative rubbish, but
23. it didn't make any difference. I was helpless to resist, I didn't want to resist, I just
24. wanted to be swamped by the extraordinary flood of emotion it released. When
25. the ghostly hero reminds the sceptical heroine, through the Whoopi Goldberg
26. character, of intimate and homely details of their life together that nobody else
27. could possibly know, and it dawns on Demi Moore that her dead lover really is

28. communicating with her, my skin prickled with goosepimples.  
When the hero
29. (I've already forgotten his name, and that of the actor who played  
him) acquires
30. the powers of a poltergeist and uses them to terrify the thug  
terrifying Demi
31. Moore, I crowed and clapped my hands in glee. And when, in a  
sublimely silly
32. scene towards the end, Whoopi Goldberg allows him to inhabit  
her body so that
33. he can dance cheek to cheek with Demi Moore to the smoochy  
tune they made
34. love to at the beginning ... well, I almost swooned with vicarious  
pleasure and
35. longing.

In a sense my following demonstration of a written defence is somewhat artificial, because in order to demonstrate the process I am assuming the literary identity of the diarist/protagonist, Helen, and presuming to understand and explicate her reading practices. In a less artificial context I would expect that readers defend their own (re)readings of text. Having made that disclaimer, I now assume Helen's identity and attempt a defence from the thesis that the reader has used a range of reading practices that are generated principally from the personal reader-response approach to reading. As outlined above, Beach (1993) argues for the five theoretical perspectives of a reader-centred approach: 'experiential, textual, psychological, social and cultural'. These have been generated from a range of literary theorists to form what is offered as a pedagogical model for teachers. Beach maintains that all five perspectives are interrelated, so that a mature personal or reader-centred response to a text would not rely on a single perspective exclusively. However, in practice, it is entirely probable that at any one instance in the production of a reading of a text one or two perspectives might predominate. In what follows I draw on a range of reader-centred perspectives in compiling a defence of Helen's personal reader-centred reading of *Ghost*.

#### A Defence of a Personal Reader-Centred Response

Overall, I can see looking back I have deployed a reader-centred approach to understanding the film 'Ghost' and have produced my

reading through a personal transaction with the text (Rosenblatt 1968).

My initial engagement with 'Ghost' is from a social perspective (Beach 1993). I state in line 3 that I 'watched it because I had seen it before with Martin [my late husband]'. With the comment 'We enjoyed it ...,' perhaps I was trying to recapture some of the warm feelings I shared with him on that occasion. I understand (from my reading of contemporary literary theories) that texts are capable of being read in different ways and so if I had watched the film for another purpose last night, my reading could well have been very different. How could I have responded if I'd watched with a view to discussing the writing or production techniques with my creative writing class tomorrow? For that matter how has my present state of mind rather influenced this reading? My social purpose in watching the film for a second time seems to link up with the psychological perspective outlined by Beach (1993). From a psychological perspective I can see now that my rather depressed and lonely mood last night allowed me to wallow in what I wanted to see as 'the good life' I thought I shared with Martin. I wonder how I'd read this film in ten years time?

Another thing that strikes me about my reading is that my use of the diary genre to record my response, with its prerequisite use of the first person point of view, has actually encouraged me to link aspects of my life to that of the characters and events in the film. I have also called upon my knowledge about the way texts work to help me to become emotionally involved with the characters. More particularly, I focus on the romance plot and, from my experience with film narrative, I recognise how special effects produced through animation draw me into the plot further, for example, 'lodged in my memory were the special effects when characters died: for instance, the hero gets up from the ground apparently unscathed and only realises he is dead when he sees his distraught girlfriend ...'. With my later statement 'What I was not prepared for was the way the love story would overwhelm me', I acknowledge, again in line with reader-centred literary theorists, that even the same reader can have a different response to a text during a subsequent reading, depending on what is happening in their lives at the time. From here on to the end of the diary entry my response is predominantly experiential as I intermittently identify and analogise with characters and events that unfold (Thomson 1987).

When reading from a reader-centred approach, I know that it is dangerously inviting to engage with the text exclusively from a personal experiential perspective, one that (re)produces a real or even a vicarious life experience. I notice now how I am seduced into this reading practice by identifying with Demi Moore, the bereaved heroine. I write, 'When her eyes filled with tears mine brimmed over. In fact I spent most of the movie weeping ...' (lines 20-21).

From an intertextual stance, I have read other novels where characters have used a similar reading practice. The young adult novel *It all began with Jane Eyre: Or the secret life of Franny Dillman* by Greenwald (1980) captures the experiential reading process well, if not more dramatically than might be the case for most adult readers:

*My mother thinks it all began with Jane Eyre, Franny Dillman wrote in her journal. She paused to remember those days – only weeks when she had been reading Jane Eyre. She's read the book by flashlight at the back of her closet ...*

*In the closet, Jane Eyre's woes were Franny's torments; Jane's passions, her passions; Jane's suffering, her very own despair. Her eyes moved from left to right, her jaw from north to south as she rhythmically chomped and reread, with fast-beating pulse and for the twentieth time, Mr Rochester's first avowal of love for Jane Eyre. Ahhhh ...*

*How she hated the idea of Authors and Authoresses. She could hardly bring herself to look at their photographs on the backs of books. She didn't like the thought of them meddling in what she believed to be Real Life ...*

*Franny read in the closet by flashlight because reading in the closet made everything more intense. Everything but the light. Being at Thornfield Hall with Jane Eyre or at Netherfield with Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* was better than anything that happened in her Daily Life.*

However, unlike Franny Dillman, I have called again on my knowledge of how texts work, and played this off against my tendency to experience the lifestyle represented in the text, vicariously. Earlier, I have recognised that the actors are just that, and not real people: 'Demi Moore, whom I've always considered a rather wooden actress ...' (see lines 18-19). This reading practice has allowed me to keep a somewhat safe distance between living too deeply the life of the film.

The playing off of one reading practice against another has facilitated my beginning to read across the natural or invited reading of the text and therefore beginning to construct an alternative reading. I waver between becoming the implied reader (Iser 1978) and rejecting it when I challenge that position to begin the process of reading across the text. Very early in my diary entry I note 'we enjoyed it [the film at the first watching], even as we rather despised its slick exploitation of the supernatural' (lines 4-5). In response to the second viewing, later, I add that 'I knew in my head that the film was cheap, sentimental, manipulative rubbish, ...' (line 22) and in a further not so accepting response I add 'in a sublimely silly scene towards the end' (lines 31-32). Although I have not quietly accepted what I take to be the invited reading (that romantic love is totally fulfilling), I have only hinted at how my views, values and ideologies might disagree with those I recognise as expressed in the text. I appear to be beginning to see that the film as a textual medium is constructing a somewhat 'false' view of male-female relationships. I see how traces of dissatisfaction shown in my alternative reading (expressed in lines 5, 22, 31-32) could lead, at another viewing, perhaps in a different mood and circumstances, to a reading that outright resisted the way the world is represented in the film.

The end of this defence begins to cross the 'ideology' bridge that links a personal reader-centred approach with a sociocultural or world-centred approach. The next reading (sociocultural), and its accompanying suggestions for a defence, demonstrates how language is indeed a socially inscribed practice because it represents and shapes the power people have to relate to others in their worlds.

### **A Sociocultural or World-Centred Reading**

If I were to re-read (produce a resistant reading of) the film *Ghost* from a sociocultural or world-centred approach, I might begin with the following inquiry. How would I need to shift my theoretical approach to reading the film? Would I need to read using different reading practices? Initially, for instance, I could move away from a personal engagement with the life of the characters and the events presented in the text and pose the challenge: 'Do females always need to be rescued and protected within a marriage relationship?'. Such a question, generated from feminist literary theory, seeks to specify whose interests are served by the invited reading. Further, I might revise my first reading by refocusing on the way the language of the text positions me discursively (within dominant discourses deployed by the powerful groups in society) and the

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manner in which I might resist that positioning, rather in the manner posed by cultural studies and poststructural literary theorists (see Eagleton, T 1996). For example, I might produce the following brief world-centred reading:

1. I am watching this film for a third time, this time with the happy prospect of
2. discussing aspects of my response with the members of my writing class whom I
3. assume will have made rather different sense of the film. Earlier (in my reader-
4. centred reading) I described the film as a 'slick exploitation of the supernatural
5. (line 5)', 'cheap, sentimental, manipulative rubbish' (line 22) and as having a
6. 'sublimely silly scene towards the end' (lines 31-32). This time around I am
7. tending to concentrate much much less on my emotional involvement with the
8. subject matter (romantic love). I see more now (resistantly) how the film is
9. structured to promote a discourse of ideal love. My earlier traces of
10. dissatisfaction have become more extreme. 'Do females always need to be
11. rescued and protected within a marriage relationship?'
12. This time I am also drawn to a discourse that links the supernatural to
13. conventional notions of good conquering evil. Replaying the section to which I had
14. responded earlier with 'when the baddies die they are immediately set upon by
15. dark gibbering shapes that drag them screaming off to hell (surprisingly
16. satisfying, that)' (lines 13-14) I am drawn to my evaluative comment
17. (surprisingly satisfying, that). What cultural and moral assumptions was I making
18. there? Do evil deeds always get their just rewards? The special effects in the form

19. of animation used in the film would have the viewer readily accept such a view.
20. This time I am not so satisfied. From here I look more deeply into the film's slight
21. suggestion that the supernatural is 'fraudulent' (line 15). I do this by looking
22. beyond Whoopi Goldberg's character as a universally humourously entertaining
23. spiritual medium and consider the particular world-view that this character is
24. projecting. Is her (Black American) ethnicity another quiet textual assumption
25. linked to fraudulent spirituality? In a sense this re-thinking of the film has allowed
26. me to renegotiate the ways that texts can work to promote hegemonic views.
27. Responding exclusively to a text at the personal or emotional level is not the only
28. kind of satisfaction available to me as a reader or viewer ('surprisingly satisfying,
29. that').

#### **Towards a defence of a Socio-cultural or World-centred Reading**

Briefly, the general questions that prompted this reading are also useful in generating a defence of how such a reading moves from personally inscribed reading practices to those that are socioculturally inscribed. A related consideration is just how this reading attends closely to the view that literacy is a socially inscribed practice (Freebody and Luke 1990). More specifically, a defence would need to describe how concepts borrowed from feminist literary theory (see lines 6-11) (de Beauvoir 1973, Eagleton, M 1996) and post-colonial literary theory (see lines 20-26) (Eagleton, Jameson and Said 1990, Said 1978, Spivak 1990) have guided such a reading, for example, with the questions of the female's place in a patriarchal society and the notion of the marginalised ethnic groups.

Overall, a world-context reading approach acknowledges that contemporary literacy criticism can be a means of contributing to a socially more just society.



### Concluding comments

In outlining a methodology for producing and defending two contemporary readings of a film, this article has demonstrated some possibilities for expanding readers' literary identities, inside and outside formal educational settings. The reading practices discussed here have demonstrated what it means to become immersed in personally and socially inscribed literacy practices. It is viable now that all readers are able to look beyond traditional notions of the author's intention and the words on the page (the traditional pursuits of literary criticism). They can begin to ask questions about how what they read represents and shapes what they (can) do and who they are in their daily lives. It is important to remember that the readings and the defences produced in this paper are the products of my interactions with the film text and therefore it is possible for many different readings and defences of the same text to be produced in the future, by myself and others.

Towards the end of the article I have demonstrated how the process of producing a defence could lead into further reading and a defence of that reading. Subsequently, a more complex defence is produced by asking the questions, what would a different reading look like if produced from a different theoretical orientation or approach? What theoretical approaches have not been used in the production of the reading? In the long term at least, it is to be hoped that some of the strategies outlined here might become something that readers do routinely in their heads while reading for recreational as well as for academic purposes. In examining a reading of a popular film produced by an (albeit fictional) adult reader for recreational purposes, the assumption is made that literary analysis need not be tied exclusively to canonical printed texts, such as poetry and novels, examined inside the formal structures of classroom activity. Overall, reading this way is transportable from classroom activities and formal assessment tasks to everyday leisure activities such as attending the theatre or discussing a film with friends over a coffee.

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