Teaching Loving: On Embracing Affect in the First-Year Writing Classroom

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I. Introduction: Attached Classrooms

There is an illumination that I love: a page of a late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century manuscript, on which the artist, self-portrayed, dangles as if from monkey bars from the round O of a decorative letter Q. Her angled body makes up the Q's tail. Her name, "Claricia," halos her small head. The work is aptly called "Leaf from Claricia Psalter: Claricia Swinging on Initial Q" (Image 1). The colors—red, blue, green, and tan parchment—are somehow both vibrant and muted. Claricia's gaze is pensive, her grip on the Q light. Her dress clings to her body in the motion of her swing; she has even added knobby kneecaps that show through the fabric. The first time I saw her, Claricia moved me. Behind the childlike, euphoric, subversive swing from the letter Q rested the poignant paradox of her self-portrait: that Claricia was probably an apprentice, a student in some abbey or other training for a lifetime of rote illumination without recognition. Still, she stubbornly attached herself to that wide letter Q, and she labeled her name in a kind of signature. For these reasons—aesthetic, conceptual, personal—I quickly became attached to Claricia, too.

My fondness for Claricia—my attachment to her—was the kind of affective alchemy that Rita Felski describes in *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (2020). Artworks—visual art like the leaf by Claricia, but also literary works, music, and film—are central to Felski's project. Their very natures, she argues, are in the work of attachment: "they create, or cocreate, enduring ties" with us. Like Claricia attached her self-portrait to that Q's hooped O, Claricia's work attached both cognitively and emotionally to me. In this dual sense, Felski posits that a multivalency defines the term "attachment," as it indicates both "to be affected or moved" and also "to be linked or tied" (1). In my experience with Claricia, I was both *affected* and *linked*. I was affected by the experience of perceiving her self-portrait—its joy and beauty moved me. As a result, I printed

out a photo of the leaf, and I taped it into a scrapbook. I committed her image to my memory. I linked myself to her. In this confluence of the two denotations—"to be affected or moved" and "to be linked or tied"—my affection made the linking happen. I loved her; I remembered her. We attached.

My attachment to Claricia was not isolated. In fact, I was making attachments all the time, primed as I was for them by an affective atmosphere that made attachment—both loving and cognitive—possible. As it happened, the first time I saw Claricia mid-swing was in the dimly lighted classroom of Gale Murray, a formidable, much-beloved, and much-feared Colorado College Art History professor. Every day from nine to noon, she lectured from her pulpit in the dark classroom, reading from pages of crisp, elegant notes, the slides shifting beside her. There were other moving artworks, of course: bright and brutal renditions of Judith and Holofernes, carefully woven and embroidered tapestries, tender and honest impressions of daily life. There were exams written on the thin-leafed pages of blue books, returned with diminutive notes in red ink.

The course was called "Women in Art" and I had been advised to take it by a close friend, Zoe, an Art History student who had not yet taken the course herself—such was her faith in Professor Murray. Zoe often asked me over lunch or on walks to recount what we had learned that day in "Women in Art," and I did. In fact, as I took my hurried notes in class, they were with Zoe in mind. And so for about one month, maybe a little longer, I found myself netted in a kind of love: esteemed professor, arresting artworks, dear friend.[1]

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[1] Colorado College is on a "Block" schedule in which students take one course at a time, each course lasting for about one month. Because of this, courses meet daily, and often involve travel or project-based learning, providing a sense of experiential learning and immersion unachievable during a traditional semester schedule. Another paper might explore the relationship between immersive learning and the meaningful production of attachments in terms of curricular schedule and pedagogy.

I remember it all well. I remember, too, the pervasive feeling of well-being that marked that time. As I have indicated, my experience in this art history course—like my relationship to one Medieval manuscript leaf—was defined by not just one attachment, but by a meaningful web of them. Attachments, as Felski argues, are codified in these kinds of webs, drawing on Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to illustrate this concept. ANT "points to the distinctiveness of phenomena as they interact in a mutually composed world" (Felski 22). Phenomena create kinds of webs as they operate; these webs are the world composing itself. Moreover, Felski posits that ANT serves as "a way of proceeding and paying attention" to attachment (23). Indeed, in terms of ANT, Felski argues that attachment bonds are codified in this way: one attachment meaningfully attaches to another. Together, the attachments inform and expand upon each other, and in so doing they produce the world as one knows and relates to it. As such, ANT is a way forward for understanding attachment epistemologically. In this thesis, I would also like to position ANT and Felski's broader model as a way of proceeding and attending to the attachments that are codified in the classroom: a pedagogy of attachment.

As I have indicated, "Women in Art" proved to be a multilaterally attached learning environment for me. I felt motivated to learn by personal and cognitive connections to artworks like Claricia's Psalter. As Felski has indicated, artworks are in the business of attachment: "they create, or cocreate, enduring ties" with us (1). I was open to attachment, but the artworks, as artworks do, made way for attachment. As I have already mentioned, during this time, I did things like print out pictures of the *Claricia Psalter*. I made them a part of my physical and intellectual worlds. I was motivated to learn, too, by the positive attachments I had for people: for my friend, Zoe, and my teacher, Professor Murray. I reported everything I had learned to my friend, reliving each class, so to speak, with her. I studied hard for exams in order to impress my

professor with my mastery of the material. I was codifying memories, both consciously and unconsciously. I was, in other words, learning. Importantly, the affect ingrained in interpersonal relationships, including my esteem for my professor and my love for my friend, created an atmosphere that made affective and emotional attachment possible. I was primed by the learning environment to develop love-bonds with the scholarly work I was performing. I achieved the latter definition of attachment—connection—*via* the former definition—affect. Because of my bonds, I was linked to the information, or rather, the information was stuck to me.

When considered through this lens, learning any kind of content or skill is, at bottom, codifying an attachment to it. In this sense, the classroom operates as a kind of attachment laboratory for its students. That education is the work of attachment is true too—perhaps even more so—from the perspective of the classroom instructor. In *Hooked,* Felski points to the "institutional" and "cognitive" attachments ingrained in the labor of *building* a class. For Felski, these attachments materialize by way of "the novel that crops up every year on my syllabus," or "the essay that gave me new intellectual vocabulary" (5). Through this lens, teaching is an integrative practice of attachment, in which the teacher's task is to reconcile and consolidate a web of disparate connections. Indeed, when I look at the syllabus I curated for "Writing About Love," my section of first-year writing at the University of Virginia, I see a map of my own cognitive and institutional attachments: essays that proved meaningful to my own self-actualization as writer, short stories that taught me how to read more closely, assignments culled straight from my own meaningful educational experiences.

Teaching is an integrative practice of attachment, but it is also, more precisely, one of love. The word "love" is of course banal, and perhaps a bit suspicious to the postmodern ear. And yet, for me, "love" represents both a specific brand of positive attachment—a *kind* of

linking—and an ongoing practice of *active* attachment. Love not only describes the quality of a given attachment, but also provides a verb with which we maintain and attend to the attachment. Perhaps as a result of this dualism, love is also the particular term that many pedagogues before me have used to consider the importance of affect, atmosphere, and attachment in the classroom. Beginning with Paulo Freire's 1968 work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* pedagogical thinkers have increasingly considered the importance of theorizing the role of love in teaching. I have noticed a common sentiment in pedagogical writing about love, which Tim Loreman aptly sums up in his 2011 volume, *Love as Pedagogy*: "love," he writes, "is a product of, and a necessary element to, successful and meaningful teaching and learning" (1). Love—as it represents a certain kind of attachment—is required of successful education, and of this education love is also an outcome.

As such, I see the movement in the humanities towards postcritical methods that embrace attachment and affect as working in tandem with pedagogical discussions about love. These pedagogical and methodological conversations most often run parallel to each other, like train tracks. Yet I posit that when made to intersect, theories of affect and love-based pedagogies provide an exciting and lucrative example of methodological and pedagogical symbiosis. In this sense, the emergent work of Rita Felski and others on attachment, love, and affect provides a compelling pedagogical opportunity, fusing a theoretical curiosity about the ways in which scholars think about and relate to their work with the pedagogy with which we *teach* students to think about and relate to their work.

As I have already suggested, in addition to providing compelling material for a new leaf in humanities scholarship, attachments espouse and codify educational experiences. From my pedagogical perspective, attachment comes down to two questions: "what sticks to students?"

and "for how long?" The first-year writing classroom seems, to me, especially favorable to these kinds of questions for two reasons. The first is that students—at least at the University of Virginia—often come to the first-year writing requirement out of major, meaning that they are not enrolled in the English or Rhetoric program. What's more, they are often on pre-professional tracks like pre-medicine and pre-commerce, or even professional tracks like architecture or nursing. These students often lack meaningful intrinsic attachments to the kind of work they are expected to perform in their writing requirement (more than a few times I have heard in my office hours some variation of "I'm not sure when I will need to write again as a nurse/chemist/architect/etc., but I'm interested in love and I'm willing to try"). Moreover, if students are not required to—or do not—enroll in other, more advanced humanities classes down the road, they fail to build upon the cognitive attachments they have made in their first-year writing class. The original attachments are liable to become weaker, less *entwined.*

The second reason is that the first-year writing classroom at the University of Virginia prioritizes the teaching of writing as a process of inquiry, and the language embedded in the attachment framework provides a litany of analogies for thinking about writing in this way. Writing, like loving, like attaching, like being in the mutually composed world, is ongoing: a process, a practice. Paulo Freire argues in *Pedagogy of the Heart* (1997) for an education that emphasizes the "exercise of knowledge" rather than the knowledge itself: "the important thing is to educate the curiosity through which knowledge is constituted as it grows and refutes itself through the very exercise of knowing." He describes this process-based educational style as "an education of question;" it is one that "can trigger, motivate, and reinforce curiosity" (31). As Freire articulates, learning the "exercise of knowledge"—for our purposes, the practice of scholarship, the practice of writing—is the most meaningful outcome. Making way for the

integration of *practice* becomes the goal of the writing classroom, linking attachments to processes of inquiry.

Indeed, to return to "Women in Art," I will admit that my memory of the content is spotty. I can no longer tell you the dates during which Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun worked for the French court. I am not quite sure about the names of the paintings I see when I encounter them now, even though I know we talked about them in that class. I never took another art history course in college, and so my knowledge of the content ended there. But despite my shoddy memory for content, I codified attachments in "Women in Art" that persist. I attached to the methods I was exposed to. I adopted a framework—a way of relating to art, to writing, to the world. I realize now that the important thing was not really that I had, at one time, known all of those facts—all of that content. The important thing was that, in the four-week course, I learned how to learn a little bit better. My formidable cape-wearing professor had provided an "education of question" (Freire 31). She taught me how to inquire like a scholar of art. I left the course with a slightly broader understanding of the world in time, with a vocabulary for analyzing art, and with three or four more essays under my belt. In short, I had adopted a kind of practice of scholarship.

Attachments help me keep this scholarly practice in play. I look at the *Claricia Psalter*, and other artworks I love that I still think about, relate to, and call upon in my life and in my work. I call Zoe, who is now a scholar of Art History, and we have a meaningful conversation about the project she is working on. I bring a group of my own students to the University of Virginia's campus gallery for a field trip, and I have a vocabulary for talking with them about artwork. I write a paper, considering a literary work through the lens of gender theory, and in so

doing I perform the same kind of analysis I learned in Professor Murray's class. Attachments ground my practice-based educational experiences, allowing them to endure.

What sticks to students and for how long? In response to these questions, I will pose another: what would happen if we centered affective relationships—attachments—*as* the content of the first-year writing course? I began this introduction with a reflection on what stuck to me as a student, considering my relationship to the *Claricia Psalter* in terms of Felski's theory of attachment alongside love-based pedagogy. Throughout the essay that follows, I will do the same, from now on drawing from my experiences as a first-year writing instructor.[2] I will pull together strands from postcritical theory and contemporary pedagogical thought, weaving them together onto the loom of my own teaching method: my love pedagogy. When intertwined, these disparate threads, like a braid, become stronger: an integrated scholarship, pedagogy, and classroom. I hypothesize that by engaging attachment, affect, and love through assignments, methods, atmosphere, and processes in the practice-based first-year writing classroom, we might create the kind of glue that will stick to our students for a little while longer.

II. Love as Method

All relations, whether they are entwined with different affective and emotional modes, are first attachments in the sense that they are connections: meetings. For the purposes of this paper, I am positioning "attachment" as a kind of parent term for "love," following Felski's thread that "something can be learned…from attending to the varieties of aesthetic experience;" so too, there is some value of knowledge in "attending to the varieties" of affective experience (40). While I am committed to addressing all varieties of the attached experience, one reason I have chosen to center the term "love" in my first-year writing course and in my approaches to

[2] In order to protect the privacy of my students, I have anonymized all student names.

literary studies and pedagogy is that the term evokes a sense of adventure, calling to mind Veronan balconies, affection-driven quests, and the kinds of trials of the heart we all love to think, read, and write about. “Love” is at once both more enigmatic and more accessible to students than “attachment.” Indeed, we don’t say “I’m attached, I’m afraid, to this person, this line from Morrison, this place.” For the most part, when we talk about attachment in the classroom, or in the student lounge, or in the coffee shop, we say “there’s this thing that I love.”

This is the central claim of Anna Poletti’s “More, Etc. Less Love?” in the forthcoming *Love Etc.* Poletti argues that loving serves a key role in cultural scholarship, presenting the possibility of “love as a methodology,” the guiding question of their work being “what happens when these two forms of doing”—that is, practicing loving and practicing scholarship—“come *together*?” (1, italics added). In the process of attending to this question, Poletti draws a clear parallel between the actions of scholarship and love: “like loving, doing scholarship requires that we aspire to be a certain kind of subject, involved in a process of relating with the object we are drawn to” (1). Study and love, in other words, both involve the invocation of the interest and attention of the subject. The similarities continue; aligning with Paolo Freire’s conception of an “education of question” as an ongoing practice, Poletti cites bell hooks’ claim that “love is an action rather than a feeling,” offering that scholarship, too, “is a practice rather than a product” (2).

While the actions of loving and doing scholarship are similar in practice, Poletti also argues that love is intrinsic to the work of the humanities. Even though, as Poletti points out, “love is widely recognized—though barely discussed—as a common relation to one’s subject area in academia,” this relationship is something like an institutional secret (4). Poletti attributes this to the preconception that humanities scholars should, in Felski’s words, remain “free of ties”

and unbiased (Felski 2). Still, as Felski argues, attachment plays a profound role in all scholarship, as attachment is “a nonnegotiable aspect of being in the world” (3). Perhaps the most important assertion here is the most basic one: that love can and often does provide a significant motivation for scholarship. Or, as some scholars playfully put it, all research is “mesearch.”

More than shining light on the behind-the-scenes loving involved in humanities scholarship, Poletti’s essay posits that by embracing love as a method, we might cultivate a kind of model for cultural studies in which attending to love in fact allows scholars to approach a more productive state of *ambivalence*, citing Roland Barthes’ hypothesis that one sees a beloved object or person as “unclassifiable, of ceaselessly unforeseen originality” (Poletti 4). Love, as it inspires ambivalence or unclassifiability, offers something like defamiliarization for Poletti: “the value of ambivalence lies in its capacity to simultaneously affirm and destabilize our understanding of the world, of others and ourselves…To this end, we could develop loving as a critical method that allows us to attend to the cluster of feelings and attachments” (6). Counter to the image of the unbiased, un-loving scholar, Poletti’s conception of ambivalence in love offers a mode of scholarship that integrates love, pointing to a relationship with the object of study that is deeper still, offering even more insight. Considering love to make way for ambivalence leads to a more thorough understanding of not only art and cultural objects themselves, but also of scholarship as an integrative practice of attachment.

Though Poletti gestures toward the classroom, their paper does not make the pedagogical opportunity embedded in this claim explicit. Still, considering love to be a method imparts some significant pedagogical rationales. The fact that love motivates scholars to perform their work is one worth sharing with students. Taking up Poletti’s thread, I would like to posit that teaching

from a framework of love and attachment lets students in on the institutional secret that humanities scholars often relate to their work with love, while also introducing a useful theoretical model for thinking about the way art and literature operate.

Affective and attachment lenses open up a handful of meaningful possibilities for engaging with art and literature in the classroom. As Felski offers in *Hooked,* artworks depend on “our devotion” to exist; “their existence depends on being taken up by readers or viewers or listeners, as figures through whom they must pass. Without these intermediaries, they are destined to fade away into nothingness” (7). Art exists in the space between itself and its viewer; the magic is in this moment of attention. Students, like scholars, become activators as readers, viewers, and listeners. An attachment framework lends itself to a student-centered pedagogy in the sense that it champions the relationship between the artwork and the viewer, the attachments being codified between each student and their worlds.

Enabling this mode in the classroom lends itself to organic student scholarship and writing. By giving students the opportunity to write about the things they love, they actually mimic the loving practice of scholarship to which Poletti points. At the same time, working from an attachment framework legitimizes their experiences and relationships with the content of their writing. Working within these modalities makes way for a multifaceted and personal experience of scholarship and writing. As a result, I have found that teaching a first-year writing course centered on love makes way for motivated, engaged, and curious student writing. What Poletti figures as a scholarly practice, I have figured as a teaching method, crafting a syllabus that orbits around love as a concept alongside assignments that cultivate loving writing practices.

I have found several ways to scaffold a kind of loving practice when it comes to student scholarship in the first-year writing classroom: by assigning a commonplace method project, by

teaching close—or intimate—reading, by centering classroom and literary atmosphere, and by fostering, ultimately, loving, process-based writing practices. In each of the sections that follow, I detail my specific approaches to these scaffolded assignments, methodologies, and practices as they play out in my writing classroom. I have found that when taken together, these approaches to teaching through a loving method promote a skills-based learning process that centers a student's own attachments, affects, curiosities, and questions. When put into play in the classroom, a love methodology opens up a world of inquiry for a student—embodying Freire's "education of question" as a practice for investigation (Freire 31).

III. Attached Scholarship

When I printed out a picture of Claricia's self-portrait in "Women in Art," I affixed it to my commonplace, a personal note-taking and writing project that I have kept up since I was an undergraduate. My commonplace has evolved into a lengthy document recording book excerpts, ideas, questions, images, and more: attaching and coalescing all of these disparate artifacts and excerpts into one common place. In this way, my commonplace can be considered something of an experiment in attachment: it is something that I use to record things that have "moved" me, to use Felski's term: a message from my grandmother, a Psalm I found compelling, a line from Woolf, Claricia herself (Felski 1). It is also a vessel for things that I simply do not want to forget: a paragraph I think I might someday use in a paper, a teaching strategy I encountered online, a moment in a poem that confounded me. The commonplace is a way of recording these moments, of codifying these strands into accessible cognitive attachments. What's more, by virtue of its nature, the commonplace is a mechanism of attachment in that it links these disparate items, extracts, and medias by collecting them in a single place.

Claricia is right at home in my commonplace because the commonplace method is, in fact, a Medieval and Renaissance practice, one that young scholars kept when books were difficult to access. As Lisa Jardine puts it, commonplace books were a vessel in which a young scholars "recorded useful phrases, effective arguments and particularly successful rhetorical devices noted in the course of his reading, for his own future use (these commonplace books also served incidentally to provide the teacher or tutor with a check on his pupil's reading progress)" (12). Creating a commonplace is a learning-based reading practice that ultimately lends itself to the purpose of writing: the student transcribes rhetorical fragments that might serve them in the future.

Contemporary pedagogues have also adopted the commonplace method as an instrument for teaching—an impulse I share and have adapted to the framework of my own course. In *Using Commonplace Books to Enrich Medieval and Renaissance Courses* (2023), Sarah E. Parker and Andie Silva make a case for the commonplace in the modern classroom, arguing that "beyond its practical uses as a form of information management, the commonplace book assignment can promote knowledge retention and encourage originality, corroboration, and creativity." The commonplace offers, too, an entry point for "active learning and critical thinking" (13). While not a course that centers Medieval or Renaissance content, their points hold for the first-year writing classroom. Indeed, I have found that in the first-year writing classroom, the commonplace practice provides an important touchstone for students working to hone these exact skills: note-taking, creativity, concept integration, engaged learning, critical thinking, and more.

I am a subscriber to the notion that good writing is often the result of good reading. To write well, it is imperative that students should read often, widely, and with attention. What's

more, I believe that writing is a strategic gathering of the important building blocks: syntax, diction, structure, form. Indeed, as Wendy Bishop articulates in *Acts of Revision,* having encountered many different "possibilities of sentences," everything a writer has ever read in some way informs their work (71). Or, as Mikhail Bakhtin puts it in "Discourse in the Novel," "language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and other. The world of language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the world, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (328). Writing is a process of re-population, reappropriation. In this way, there is a mimetic rationale to commonplacing. If Bakhtin is correct— "the world of language is half someone else's"—then taking note of the half that works well seems like an important place to start.

In this sense, the act of writing, like the art of commonplacing, is performed by an individual who is really at the center of a collective project. In my writing practice, for example, perhaps there is a habit of punctuation I picked up from years of devouring Jane Austen, a particular syntactic construction I recently encountered while reading a *New Yorker* article, an idea I tucked away after reading an email from a friend, a word oft-used by Professor Gale Murray that entered my lexicon. Bishop encourages students—and their writing teachers—to harness this phenomenon. She argues that "the writer who wants to improve does so by experiment as well as by memorization. Anyone can embark on this course of study; it just requires careful reading and perhaps a file or journal page"—or, even better, a commonplace method— "for copying down examples" (71). In this way, Bishop argues, writers can "learn the possibilities of sentences" while building a "tool kit" for the page (71).

Other commonplacers take a broader approach to the method, choosing to record not just rhetorical structures but memories, ideas, dialogues, and more—all stowed away for future use in writing. In this sense, the commonplace practice offers a kind of map of experience and attachment, and a place to begin. In *Bird by Bird,* her 1994 instructional work on writing, Anne Lamott shares her method for taking notes on index cards, and more importantly, keeping index cards ready for use in every corner of her life. It is a more chaotic method than I would advise to my students, but it works for Lamott. For her, the index cards prefigure a certain kind of writerly engagement with the world. Indeed, the most revelatory thesis of the chapter is not the method itself, but the change in the way we relate to the world when we begin to take meaningful notes in some kind of habitual system: "one of the things that happens when you give yourself permission to start writing is that you start thinking like a writer. You start seeing everything as material" (Lamott 128). In this way, the commonplace system is not only lucrative for notetaking, but also for transforming one's relationship to the world by committing to writing about the world. Lamott's position is that of a fiction writer, but the same advice stands for scholars and students of writing: especially in the context of attachment, taking note of something noticed or curious makes it worthy of inquiry.

In this sense, the commonplace practice requires close attention in reading and in life. The commonplace becomes a record of attention: what has one noticed and thought worthy of recording? One essay that I frequently see make its way into student commonplaces is Mary Oliver's luminous work, "Upstream," the first in her 2016 collection of essays by the same name. The essay, which gorgeously traces a walk upstream, attends to the numinous details of forest life as it collides with the human. "Upstream" tackles so much: the importance of attending to and conserving the natural world, pedagogy, love, grappling with lack of love, parenthood,

childhood. Oliver concludes the piece with a simple phrase: "attention is the beginning of devotion" (8).

"Attention," which comes to us from the Latin "attendere," meaning "to stretch toward," is indeed the first step in building any kind of attachment, including that of devotion. By keeping a commonplace practice—a kind of attention journal—and by attending to works closely, students are primed to pay attention to their worlds, to themselves, and to language. Or, as Lucy Alford puts it in *Forms of Poetic Attention*, "when we practice attending to attention, we practice being in the world. Not to say that practicing attention by reading poems makes us 'better people,' but, insofar as this practice hones and refines our capacities for perception and response" (20). While Alford figures a poetics of attention, the same line of thinking holds for students in the writing classroom. Attention, here, is foundational. In Alford's conception, practicing attention makes way for not only "perception," but also "response." Giving students frameworks for attention—like the commonplace method—in turn scaffolds the way they think and write in response to texts, art objects, and the world around them.

So too, the commonplace practice serves as a way to scaffold the scholarly process Poletti points to in "More etc. Less Love?," where love makes way for curiosity, attention, care, and ultimately, attached scholarship. Taking a page from the books of Bishop, Lamott, Alford, and those long-ago Medieval tutors, assigning a commonplace practice to students provides a low-stakes opportunity to experiment with paying attention to the world by recording the attachments that follow, all while helping students to bridge the gaps among reading, being in the world, and writing. As I have already suggested, the commonplace practice is about amalgamating different curiosities, thought patterns, and meaningful excerpts in one singular place. The commonplace practice is, at bottom, a practice of attachment: a literalization of the

web of attachments figured in Felski's consideration of Actor-Network Theory. Commonplacing gives students a way to record, watch, and reflect on their relationships to the things they read, perceive, and think about: a bit of practice and a bit of reflection.

The commonplace project I have designed for my first-year writing course spans the whole semester. We spend the first unit discussing the commonplace method as a notetaking and writing practice. We view different types of commonplaces, including a collection of original commonplace books stored in the University of Virginia's Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library. Students conceptualize and propose their commonplace system in the first month of class. Midway through the semester, they submit a commonplace "report," in which they detail the progress of their method: attaching pictures of their commonplaces, including meaningful entries, and giving a brief reflection on how the commonplace method is going for them. At the end of the semester, students write a reflection on their experience with the commonplace project. Their reflection must be written in a personal voice and orbit around one anecdote about their experience of commonplacing.

In my experience, using commonplace books (and documents) in the classroom allows students to experiment with attachment while shifting into a self-reflective mode. They want their commonplaces, as one student put it, to be an "artifact" representing their first year of college. This kind of motivation to reflect, as Anne Beaufort contends in "Reflection: The Metacognitive Move towards Transfer of Learning," is the precursor to metacognition (25). A reflective practice in and of itself, the commonplace method opens a window to a student's own patterns of thought; an opportunity for a glimpse at metacognition, or, the understanding of one's own mental processes, which has been noted by cognitive scientists as being key to learning. By reflecting on the processes they used for problem solving, connecting concepts, and

understanding how new information constellates with information they already know, students can build their capacity for metacognition and learning.

Reflection, in a sense, works as a kind of retroactive attention. The commonplace method grants students a place to do this work while simultaneously developing a physical or visual map of this information. It also allows them to trace what they reach for their commonplace to write down, what patterns might drive their thinking. As one student, Dani, wrote (unprompted) in her commonplace reflection at the end of the semester:

> In a way, keeping the actual physical commonplace itself made me want to look back at what I had thought in the past. I can just open the book and pick a random page to land on something great like an inspirational quote. Or I could land on something brainless like a drawing of a penguin wearing a tophat. Either way, being able to look back at what I'd written in my commonplace before has allowed me to tap into my metacognition.

The commonplace practice gives students some insight into their own writing practice—mimetically, motivationally, and metacognitively. This project invites students to read attentively, to trace attention in the world, and to thereby chart and attend to attachments: a place for recording, reflecting, and remembering.

IV. Intimate Reading

If Oliver is right about "attention" figuring "the beginning of devotion," then a student's attentive commonplace practice might make way for a devotional approach to reading: a loving reading practice. Zen monk and writer Thich Nhat Hanh might agree with Oliver about this characterization of the beginning of love, writing in his 2011 volume, *True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart,* that in the Buddhist conception, the first steps for loving are "being there" and "recognizing the presence of the other" (13). These two modalities, Thich Nhat Hanh offers,

serve a larger encompassing goal of "deep listening," an ability to attend to the complexities of another through presence, recognition, and receptivity (33).

In this sense, "deep listening" is not incompatible with the kinds of modes of reading postcritical theorists have proffered; both involve attending, recognizing, and seeking to understand. This modality works in opposition to the practice of the so-called "hermeneutics of suspicion" in literary studies. Toril Moi calls this kind of preemptive, suspicious engagement "deep reading," which is confusing given Hanh's similar-sounding concept of "deep listening," but the two modes could not be more different. "Deep reading," or the hermeneutics of suspicion, espouses the idea that the depths of a text must be plumbed to be understood, and that this is the task of the wetsuit-clad critic. And yet, as Moi argues, a suspicious reading is not more lucrative than an attentive one: "we have seen that partisans of critique believe that the only alternative to 'deep' reading is banal paraphrase, simplistic and superficial descriptions," Moi writes, "I want to show that the language of the hidden and shown, of mystery and revelation, isn't the private property of the hermeneutics of suspicion, but can be used in other, different ways" (11). Indeed, the "close reading" method is integral to literary studies, and, when reframed, it is completely compatible within a postcritical framework. What's more, in losing suspicion there need not be a loss of rigor, as critics of postcritique have argued.

Rather, attending to a text in its wholeness in attentive devotion—instead of its symptoms in suspicion—produces a more integral, more thorough process of analysis. In a kind of Hanhian approach, Moi contends that a postcritical framework merely rejects *suspicion* of the texts it attends to in favor of something else:

> There is no assumption that the critic is superior, more knowledgeable, more sophisticated than the text. Nor is there an assumption that the text hides anything. There

> is just the idea that the text is an enormous challenge to the reader, that the reader's task is to understand why every word is exactly the way it is. This attitude turns reading into an arduous expedition of discovery, a genuine adventure. (12)

Indeed, rather than performing an investigation to reveal the hidden symptoms of a text, the language of postcritique that Moi employs here transforms the process of close reading into "a genuine adventure." It is a process of paying attention, a commitment "to understand why every word is exactly the way it is." It is a method of attention and devotion to the text, rather than one of suspicion.

This methodological shift holds a significant pedagogical opportunity. Of course, close engagement with texts—close reading—is integral to literary scholarship, as it is to all disciplines that deal with artworks. But perhaps even more importantly, *teaching* close reading is vital to teaching more than a handful of important skills: reading comprehension, analytical thinking and writing, and close attention, to name a few. So how do we recuperate "close reading" practices within the attentive, wholistic postcritical framework that Moi posits? By fusing attention, devotion, and the teaching of careful engagement, postcritical methodology and a class centered on love work in tandem.

I would like to posit "intimate reading" as a term to describe Moi's approach to "close reading" from a pedagogical perspective while distancing it from the "deep reading" she warns us against, the two having become almost synonymous in literary and teaching practices. For the purposes of this paper, I define intimacy as a *quality* of engagement. Artworks, as Felski articulates, "create, or cocreate, enduring ties"—attachments—with us (1). I contend that how we experience a connection—how we "cocreate" it—is at least half up to us. If attachment, as Felski has argued, is "nonnegotiable," or a prerequisite to dealing with an artwork, then intimacy might

serve as something like an intentional way of meeting that artwork (3). Attachment is the outcome of reading, while intimacy becomes the method *for* reading. In this sense, attachment might be the thread between entities, and intimacy might reflect the quality of that thread: its material, craftsmanship, and texture.

"Intimacy" comes to us from the Latin verb *intimare,* to make something known. Intimacy, then, is about knowing and understanding. It indicates the first step in attentive reading: seeking to understand a text's complexities and know it in its wholeness. Beyond knowledge, the term "intimacy" is also deeply entwined in our language with love. Intimacy qualifies the kinds of attachments between friends and lovers, and indeed even serves as a sort of metonymic euphemism for sex itself. As such, "intimacy" accesses the same sense of spatial and cognitive closeness that "close reading" engages, but infuses it with the devotional care implied by Buddhist loving-attention and redemptive postcritical models. Unlike "close reading," the language of intimacy indicates a kind of vulnerability in the act of reading; in order to secure intimacy, both parties must be made known to each other. As the text is made known to the reader, the reader might also make *herself* known to the text via written analysis in a kind of symbiotic intimacy; the process of writing about an intimate reading experience is also an act of intimacy, wherein the reader/writer shares her experience, in turn.

I teach students to read intimately through the "understand, notice, explain" method. Students must first seek to understand the text: what it means in its entirety. Then, students can begin to notice important qualities of the text—what sticks out to them: perhaps a literary device, a particularly striking image, a curious sonic effect, a strange repetition. Finally, the students explain what they have noticed and why they found it important to their understanding of the text as a whole—in a sense returning to the first step, but this time understanding the text in a new

light, or from a new perspective. These steps are like training wheels for intimate reading, but they give students a place to start, and a pattern to practice. I encourage students to use "I" statements in their early practice with close reading: "I understand, I notice, I can explain," to develop students' senses of being in relationship with the texts with which they engage.

Pushing this further, I also provide students with Felski's theory of attachment in order to enable and encourage students to think about their reading as being a relationship—a co-creation—between themselves and the texts. Early on in the semester, I ask the students to read the first chapter of *Hooked,* "On Being Attached." As a warm-up, the students create mattering maps in which they chart the contours of a personal attachment of their choice. I share an example with them, my attachment to the *Claricia Psalter*, explaining my attachment to it much in the way that I did in the introduction. Next, we chart the movement of Felski's argument, focusing on the duality of the term "attachment" and Bruno Latour's concept of ANT, which they have just recreated via their mattering maps. Finally, we look to a few poems that trace different attachments, including Rita Dove's "American Smooth" and Margaret Atwood's "[you fit into me]," and spend time reading them intimately, tracing poetic form, looking to see how these poems depict attachments, and questioning how the poems attach to us as their readers and activators. Via these methods, we practice intimately "reading" both life and texts through Felski's lens.

We return to Felski's model for attachment throughout the semester to read through a theoretical lens. At the end of the 2023 fall semester, we practiced again with new art objects in a new environment: The Fralin Museum of Art, the University of Virginia's campus art gallery. At the museum, the students wandered through the gallery rooms before individually selecting an art object to sit before and write about; they spent fifteen minutes this way, observing and

writing. I instructed the students to look at the artworks with the same attention we had paid to literary works throughout the semester; in other words, to "read" them intimately. I told them to spend a longer time than felt comfortable—about five minutes—just looking at the art object and seeking to know and understand it. After those five minutes, I prompted the students to record everything they noticed about the artwork. Finally, I instructed them to explain the art object—what did everything they noticed about the artwork mean? How could they understand their viewing experience? After the students wrote, we returned to our circle to debrief the exercise.

One student, Emily, had written about LeWitt's 2015 *Wall Drawing 686*, a large kind of globe that was drawn not by a human hand but by a machine, done directly on the white wall of the gallery in pencil graphite (Image 2). Unprompted, Emily had reflected, theorized, and written about this artwork in terms of Felski's conception of attachment, and Emily shared her keen observations with the class. She explained that the drawing was intrinsically *attached* to the wall. Inside of the circle, there were thin, interconnected lines—lines that looked to her like those described in Felski's explanation of Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory. Emily explained that the structure of her free-writing also reflected this kind of complex network of thought. She asked herself, in her writing, a web of interrelated questions: What did it mean for the artwork to be authored by a machine? Was it still art? What did it mean for the artwork to be irrevocably attached to the building in which it was created? It was in graphite; was it meant to be someday erased? Painted over?

What was more, over time, Emily came to realize that selecting this particular piece was related to an attachment of her own. She disclosed that when her mother and father met, her father, an artist, had been working on a machine that would draw circles in pencil. Her mother

now jokes that she knew, at that point, looking at the circle-drawing machine, that she was going to live her life with this man, and with no money (evidently on the budget of a circle-drawing artist). Emily placed her folding chair in front of this piece, unconscious of these disparate questions, throughlines, family mythology. By using Felski's model as a starting point, she followed the lines of these attachments, landing in an important web of questions about art, stories, humanity.

Like commonplacing, teaching students to intimately read via an attachment model opens a window to metacognition. Emily was not only able to analyze *Wall Drawing 686*, but was also led by the attachment framework to analyze her own relationship to the artwork, asking herself "why did I choose to sit before this wall drawing, when there is a whole gallery of objects worth noticing?" Another student, Sam, wrote about a triptych of architectural paintings. In our larger class discussion, her reflection centered not on the paintings themselves, but on the quality of her own writing in response to them. Extended attention to an object with the framework provided by attachment made way for a moment of metacognition. "As time went on," Sam reflected, "I felt like I was close reading my own close reading."

This keen observation was made in response to a question I had posed; because we were nearing the end of the semester, I wanted the students to reflect on the semester: the goals they had when they entered my classroom and the new skills and practices with which they were preparing to leave it. "The first time I asked you to close read something," I told them, "for about three minutes everyone looked at me, looked at their papers, and looked around the classroom before finally beginning to write." We laughed together, remembering those first days in the classroom. I told them about the change I noticed: "today," I reflected at the museum, "I watched you plant your folding chairs in front of paintings, sit down, and immediately enter your writing

practice. What changed?" They were silent for a while, and pensive; only the dull hum of the Fralin's climate control system sounded until Sam spoke up. Sam's response—and the ease with which all of my students now approached intimate reading—indicated to me that she (and the rest of the class) had become comfortable thinking about her own thinking. Perhaps more critically, they had become comfortable allowing themselves to engage with the artworks in a way that championed their experiences of art and their relationships to art.

Figuring intimacy as a method for reading and responding to artworks makes way for relationships *with* artworks. Reframing close reading as intimate reading for students enables generosity in reading, and a sense of ease. Prioritizing intimacy as a model for reading removes the possibility of there being a wrong answer—a balm for students who are used to working in a hermeneutic of suspicion. Meanwhile, Felski's model for attachment offers students a theoretical way forward, and gives them a language to talk about attachment, the way art and literary works operate, and their own reading practices. An intimate reading practice and an understanding of Felski's attachment framework grants students permission to read and write in a kind of tandem practice that enables intuition, self-trust, and feeling—a practice that ultimately values and legitimizes their reading experiences. Indeed, most importantly, this framework makes students' relationships to the artworks and world around them feel worthy of writing about—worthy of sharing.

V. Atmospheric Intimacy

A teacher, it could be said, is always intimately reading her classroom in the sense that she is seeking to understand it with devoted attention. Engaging in this way opens up a world of attachment in the classroom. Indeed, relationships in the classroom—student to teacher, student

to student, student to material—too, are attachments, in the sense that they are meetings that require discerning, sharing, monitoring, deepening, evolving.

Especially in the fall semester, the first-year writing classroom is electric with meetings: everyone is new, to the school and to each other. For maybe the first time in their lives, each student is building completely new attachments all of the time, inside the classroom and outside of it: a new roommate, new friends, a new campus to navigate. For each student, all of these new attachments add up to something like a new life, really. A love pedagogy prioritizes relationships and fosters an environment where students feel safe to know and be known; the first-year writing classroom provides a unique space for an atmosphere of intimacy in this time of enhanced attachment-building.

Atmosphere, in this sense, prefigures cognitive attachment. Psychologist Brenard Weiner makes a case for prioritizing this kind of *feeling* of the classroom in *Learning and Motivation in the Classroom*: "teacher and pupil both form and alter constructions of each other and the educational context in which learning occurs. It is assumed that there is an active construction of social reality, that this process is engaged in by children as well as adults, and that thinking, feeling, and behaving form a constellation" (177). These shared social "constellations" "have important consequences for self-attribution, self-esteem, and, in turn, achievement striving." In other words, how an individual student *feels* in the classroom matters for their motivation and learning outcomes. "Thinking, feeling, and behaving" form a constellation in any given student in a way that directly relates to their socially constructed classroom environment (177). Though it may sound obvious or banal, I have found in my own teaching practice that attending to the atmosphere of the classroom improves the quality of student engagement—in class discussions,

peer-review, and workshops—in innumerable ways. This engagement, as a result, improves the quality of assignments and deepens student learning and growth.

As a small way to practice this attention to atmosphere, I like to start my classes with a brief check-in. For the first seven or so minutes of every class, the students take turns sharing how they are and volunteering notable stories or reports from their lives (a beautiful run in the Blue Ridge, a date, the birth of a niece, a better–or worse–grade than expected on a Mandarin test, the death of a family dog). Over the course of the semester, I witness the check-ins become more honest and more intimate. Meanwhile, the atmosphere of the class becomes closer, more engaged, and, as a result, the check-ins become more earnest and more fun.

Atmosphere is, of course, a literary term as much as it is a pedagogical one. Teaching students to read for atmosphere is another way to invoke affect in analytical reading and writing while providing them with concrete tools to do so. So too, I have found the language of literary atmosphere to be particularly engaging in the first-year writing classroom. Students are confused and curious about the mysterious literary device—atmosphere—defined once or twice for them in an AP English Literature course. They have also written to me and visited me in office hours, concerned about the *mood* or *atmosphere* of their own papers. Thomas Sorensen engages atmosphere in “Reading for Atmosphere: A Pedagogical Approach” with a similar kind of pedagogical rationale, arguing that “atmosphere remains hard to teach,” though it is enjoying “a newly prominent place in the humanities” with the emergence of affect studies (Sorensen 188-9). Sorensen presents his theory of atmosphere in terms of a lesson plan, one that I have adopted and found engaging and successful. Following his lead, I will present my findings on atmosphere in terms of a reflection on his original plan.

In my class on this particular day—literary atmosphere day—I bring the class tangerines, which the students peel and eat during the initial class check-in. After our check-in, I briefly introduce Sorensen's theory of literary atmosphere in a PowerPoint presentation. For Sorensen, atmosphere in its literary conception is constructed, most basically, in language. All concepts and words themselves, he argues, have a "haecceity," or an essence: "the 'thisness' of a thing" (189). Any literary artifact is, then, a compilation of haecceities. In Sorensen's conception, "when haecceities resonate, they enhance one another. We aren't usually conscious of haecceities. But when all the haecceities in a given work are similar, they come into saliency" (190). In this saliency—or non-saliency—lies Sorensen's particular interest: "different haecceities form a unified feeling that haunts the background or periphery of reception. This background, peripheral feeling is atmosphere. Atmosphere is the sum total of all the haecceities that have occupied and departed the attention" (191). In short, different signifiers amalgamate to infuse an aesthetic work with an affective atmosphere.

For this class on atmosphere, the students read Carmen Maria Machado's 2017 short story, "Real Women Have Bodies." The story is atmospheric in several interpretations of the term. In the felt sense, the atmosphere of "Real Women Have Bodies" engenders a pervasive sense of doom throughout. In the environmental sense, the women in the story face a mysterious illness in which their bodies become "faded," like vaporous ghosts. Put simply, the women become atmosphere themselves. Following Sorensen's instructions, I ask the students to post passages that strike them as being particularly atmospheric before the start of class. Usually, several students post the same passage:

> On a warm Sunday, Petra wants to go for a hike, so we do. Spring seizes the valley in fits and spurts, and today the paths through the woods are muddy. Snow melts and drips

> water into our hair. We follow a creek that is practically a living thing, surging messily through its own curves and bends. We take a break in a sunny clearing and eat oranges and cold chicken. Petra has taken to treating every meal as her last, so she peels the skins off the pieces of chicken and chews on them with her eyes closed, and then on the meat itself, and then she sucks hard on every bone before throwing it off into the trees. She sets each wedge of orange in her mouth reverently, as if it is the Eucharist, bites into the meat, and pulls the rinds away like hangnails. She rubs the peels against her skin. (Machado 144)

During our discussion, I project this passage on the screen in our classroom. In partners, I ask the students to identify and discuss the different haecceities—or objects—operating within the scene. As a larger group, we take stock of the haecceities the individual partners noticed. The passage is full of rich visual signifiers in terms of the environment: the valley in the spring, the mud, the snow, the surging snowmelt creek, the sunny clearing. The picnic is also particularly visual: the chicken and chicken bones, the orange peel, the slices of orange placed in the mouth like the Eucharist. There are the bodies: Petra's skin, the skin of the orange, the skin of the chicken, all of it peeling or fading away.

We map all of these haecceities on the board, and discuss the notable dissonances within the atmosphere of this passage. The valley explodes to life in the spring while the picnic seems "creepy"—deathly—to the students: the chicken bones, the Eucharist. The students note that the dissonance in the haecceities in this scene reflect a narrative dissonance: the characters have taken a hike—a picture of suburban bliss and free time—and brought a picnic along to boot, but Petra is dying. She has caught the story's mystery illness. The skins peeled from the orange and the chicken both mirror the eerie reality that *Petra's* skin is becoming translucent, peelable.

Talking through this framework leads to a proliferation of analyses and hypotheses from the students, which we add to the board in an enormous interconnecting mind-map.

Sorensen's model for interpreting atmosphere seems to me an example of rigorous literary analysis that is attentive, curious, and even politically engaged without defaulting to a hermeneutic of suspicion. In this case, a discussion on atmosphere led to a discussion on the political valences of the story. For example, one student reflected that "in patriarchy, if a woman ceases to objectify herself, she ceases to be real." Providing students with the frameworks for reading via attachment and affect gives them access to these kinds of revelations in a way that is compatible with postcritical methodology. They make reading a "genuine adventure," to use Moi's phrase (12). Ultimately, these methods for intimate and atmospheric reading are ones that serve the students' thinking, reading, and writing practice.

The last thing we cover on literary atmosphere day is the longevity intrinsic to Sorensen's conception of atmosphere. So I ask the students at the end of our discussion on Machado, "how long does atmosphere hang around?" They stay silent for a while, afraid of a trick question. I follow up, "about an hour ago, we all ate tangerines. Can you still smell them in the room?" They smile and nod, the orange peels still on their desks. Like the ghostly faded women hovering in the different scenes in the story, we agree that atmosphere haunts the background of a story. Like the picnic scene, the story often transposed images of contemporary bourgeois life with eerie images of death or decay; a dress store was like a "casket," etc. (Machado 125). The atmosphere was one of doom, captured most poignantly by the fading epidemic. Luckily for us, the atmosphere in our classroom is exciting, close, and jovial; the reading has solicited not the doom of the text but the adventure of engaging with it closely. Students, through this lesson, can understand classroom atmosphere and literary atmosphere at the same time.

Like Felski's framework for attachment, prioritizing classroom atmosphere as a lived experience indicates, to me, another example of the symbiosis between postcritical models and pedagogical thought: thinking about atmosphere in terms of its duality as a pedagogical and literary phenomenon opens a door to this symbiosis. Classroom atmosphere is something that we read and foster as educators, but it is also something that we can teach students to read and think critically about in terms of its use as a literary approach. Both are about intimacy. Curating an atmosphere of intimacy in the classroom is an attentive practice—it is about knowing and being made known. So too, reading for atmosphere is an example of an intimately engaged reading practice that prioritizes affect in its effort to understand the nuances of a text. Like the commonplace method, in the students' hands the theoretical models for atmosphere and attachment are touchstones and scaffolds: places to start and frameworks for proceeding. Playing in the confluence of these two methodologies—pedagogical and theoretical—makes way for a writing classroom whose felt atmosphere and enacted reading practices might become attuned.

VI. Loving Writing

Sometimes attachment is immediate: the instant toss and pull of a lasso. Sometimes attachment is ongoing—a slow *process*: something like the methodically repetitive cast of a fly-fisher's imperceptible line until the bite is finally made. For this particular ongoing aesthetic experience—this slow attachment—Felski looks to "attunement," an experience marked by evolution: "to become attuned is to be drawn into a responsive relation" (41). Perhaps more often than not, learning to embrace practices, skills, and ways of being in the classroom involve this kind of ongoing transformation. In the writing classroom, this plays out in the possibility of coming into positive attachment—attuning—to the writing practice. Loving writing, in this

sense, might become an affective possibility for the unattached student when thought of as an attunement.

In order to define and explore the nuances of attunement, Felski cites Zadie Smith's luminous 2012 essay, "Some Notes on Attunement." In it, Smith gives a winding personal account of becoming attuned to the music of Joni Mitchell. Importantly, Smith had not listened to Mitchell's music as a child. She hears Mitchell's music for the first time in college as "a piercing sound, a sort of wailing" (Smith 101). Her adverse relationship to Joni Mitchell—at worst self-described as her own "philistinism"—goes on like this for at least ten years. Soon, however, we find Smith in the car, hungry and irritable. Smith's husband has a Joni Mitchell CD playing on the car's stereo, over which the couple bickers; she hates the "wailing," he loves it.

The couple pause their road trip (and musical disagreement) to tour the ruins of Tintern Abbey. Here, Smith paints a picture of structural porousness: the Abbey is roofless and exposed to the elements, a "Gothic skeleton," and "penetrated by beauty from above and below" (103). A series of events ensues for Smith in the ruin: "sun flooded the area; my husband quoted a line from one of the Lucy poems; I began humming a strange piece of music" (103). The strange music is Mitchell's. Smith is *attuned.* There's a transformation, a sudden opening to Mitchell's music: "in a sense, it took no time. Instantaneous. Involving no progressive change but, instead, a leap of faith. A sudden, unexpected attunement. Or a returning from nothing, or from a negative, into something soaring and sublime" (110).

For Smith, attunement is an epiphany; an aesthetic trust fall, of sorts—an exercise in blind trust for Mitchell while her critical and physical guards are down. After ten years of un-attachment, in the scene of the attunement she is hungry, annoyed, and distracted by another kind of beauty. Like the ruins of the roofless abbey, her barriers are open to the elements. "Put

simply," Smith writes, to become attuned, "you need to lower your defenses" (113). While attunement is similar to Felski's concept of attachment, its qualities are slightly different: attunement is a process of moving from negative attachment, or total detachment, into a kind of strong, revelatory attachment.

What's more, attunement is, importantly, related to love for Smith. After the attunement, Smith reports: "this is the effect that listening to Joni Mitchell has on me these days: uncontrollable tears. An emotional overcoming, disconcertingly distant from happiness, more like joy—if joy is the recognition of an almost intolerable beauty" (105). Later Smith calls this emotional response love: "I loved her" (106). Love, then, may be thought of as a byproduct or result of attunement. Love, like intimacy, describes the *quality* of the attachment.

When we think about shepherding students into loving attachment for method or practice—as in a writing practice—we might think about laying the foundations for a longer-term, ongoing attunement. As Poletti posits, loving and doing scholarship are both verbs in the sense that they are ongoing practices—ways of being in and engaging with the world. Writing, too, belongs in this camp in the sense that it is a skill, a process, and a practice. Talking with students about loving and writing in these terms helps to attune them, so to speak, to thinking about writing in this way. When the two—writing and loving—come together, this analogy plays out in a way that transforms writing: writing about love makes way for writing as a process, as continual practice.

Joseph Harris' popular writing textbook *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts* also champions this process-based approach. Harris identifies a key difference between professional and student writing: professional writers "imagine a text they are writing less as a performance (which is what an exam calls for) and more as a work-in-progress, as an ongoing project that

they can add to and reshape over time" (101). Harris's concept of writing is a lot like how my students and I have come to think about love: an evolving concept that changes over time and in different contexts. Writing, like love, is a verb: a practice, a work-in-progress.

What's more, writing about love as content, in particular, demands the repetition, revision, and practice required of a comprehensive writing process. Roland Barthes famously writes in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments,* "to try to write love is to confront the *muck* of language" (99, italics original). I am in full agreement with Barthes: to try and write about love is to find yourself in a field of muck. The words are not quite right; the writing will never be perfect. Paradoxically, writing about love makes way for an ambivalent writing *process,* as Poletti has argued, destabilizing any notion that writing or scholarship have a concrete end—skills to be achieved and then abandoned, grades to be earned and then exiled to a transcript. Writing about love transforms the essay into a sandbox: an opportunity for students to demolish their sandcastles and try again. In other words, writing about love is an invitation to mess around—and to learn something in the process.

From the start of the course, I talk about writing in these terms. Early on, we read another chapter from Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird,* "Shitty First Drafts." In it, Lamott offers up another practical secret about "shitty first drafts": "all good writers write them. This is how they end up with good second drafts and terrific third drafts" (20). For Lamott, the shitty first draft is not only a place to start, but an antidote to writing anxiety. She recalls an experience of writing food reviews for a magazine, an assignment that sent her into a state of "panic" every time she sat down to write (22). The panic subsided when Lamott allowed herself the luxury of the shitty first draft: "I'd start writing without reigning myself in…I'd start writing up descriptions of the food,

one dish at a time, bird by bird" (23). By this method, Lamott writes, "I would eventually let myself trust the process" (23).

Process-based writing, for Lamott, is a remedy for writing anxiety; to write a "shitty first draft" is to allow oneself to enact a kind of trust-fall into the writing process. In my class, the phrase "bird by bird" has become a sort of mantra, thanks to Lamott. I say it when students report feeling overwhelmed in office hours or in class check-ins. In turn, throughout the course of the semester the students begin to respond to each other's anxiety (and their own) with the phrase: "bird by bird." The "bird by bird" approach soothes the paralysis of enormity because it is an invitation to begin with the opportunity to revise embedded in the process.

Helping students to build a writing practice calls for a high-structure course with plenty of low-stakes opportunities to practice (enter: the commonplace practice, reading journals) and built-in opportunities for the revision of major assignments. What's more, writing about love as content leans into the kind of sandbox process that Barthes points to—the difficulty in getting writing about love right. This is because love is always changing; it is always unfolding.

The final assignment in "Writing About Love" is to do just that: an assignment that asks the students to write about their own attached experience. Their personal essay takes the form of a lens essay, in which the students select a particular theoretical lens through which to "read" their own experience. The two lenses I offer are Felski's theory of attachment and Zadie Smith's concept of attunement. In turn, the students respond to one of these two lenses with a personal essay about their own experience with either an attachment or an attunement.

When students write about their own affective experiences, they often do not know where the essay will go. But they begin with a lens—a kind of framework for beginning, a way to attach to the work of other authors. All writing—as Graff and Berkenstien argue again and again

to the first-year writing classroom—is about making these kinds of connections. Graff and Berkenstein promote the "they say, I say" model in their aptly titled writing textbook, *They Say, I Say.* All good academic writing, they argue, boils down to this formula. As we have seen in considering the commonplace practice, writing, too, is about attachment; the author's craft is in attaching disparate voices, ideas, problems of thought. Using a theoretical lens allows the students to clip their metaphorical carabiner to this kind of structure before repelling into their personal essay.

The students have the opportunity to use the personal essay as an opportunity to "write to think," or to learn from the process of writing, rather than beginning with an argument in mind. In a sense, this kind of writing is like an attunement—an attunement to one's own ideas. It demands revision and reflection in a way that argumentative writing does not always, opening up a place to practice these important skills.

As students "write to think," the personal essay provides an opportunity for what Kate Vieira and others have called "testimony" or "testimonio:" an opportunity to tell one's story in a way that is communicative, liberatory, and perhaps even healing. As Vieira puts it,

> The potential of testimony may be especially important for those writing from marginalized positions, for whom experiences of personal healing must often entail efforts to challenge the social conditions that have labeled their bodies as in need of recuperation in the first place. In these contexts, moving a personal story into a public realm, and naming it or enacting it in front of others can be powerful medicine, not just for writers, but also for those privileged to hear their words. (Vieira 23)

Testimony serves a political purpose. It champions identity, story, and life. It is a process, an enactment, and an opportunity for personal recuperation or growth.

One student, Gaby, wrote her personal essay about an attunement to Spanish, her mother tongue. As a child, Gaby experienced bullying and ostracization at school for what she calls her "difference" from the students around her—her multicultural and multilingual family world. She began, she confides, to resent her difference, even to hate it. For Gaby, however, attunement was not an epiphany—a sudden attachment—but a tide: a coming and going, rising and falling attachment to watch, to attend to. "Attunement," Gaby writes,

> is a funny thing. You could start out absolutely hating something to somehow not be able to go a day without it. In Zadie Smith's essay, *Some Notes on Attunement*, She highlights her journey from hating to loving Jonie Mitchell. She argues that putting pride aside allows people to appreciate things more, almost as if she is preaching the importance of open-mindedness. She says, "I feel this deep current running between us. I think it must have always been there. All Joni and I needed was a little attunement" (Smith 116). I agree with this, In a way, there is always an emotion that attaches you to something. Those emotions can always change their currents. Just like how the moon strengthens and weakens the tides, my acceptance of who I am, took my emotions to wane and wax again.

The essay that follows is beautifully woven, following the metaphor, like a refrain, of the moon and ocean tides. Throughout the essay, Gaby takes us through the instance of bullying that led ultimately to her un-attunement, then takes us back again, to Columbia, where a winter with her grandmother reattunes her. It is as if, she writes, "I was hit by Cupid's bow while staring at a map of Colombia."

Gaby's attunement was world-building—an opportunity to experience her family and herself in a new way. This affective experience also made way for a kind of self-actualization:

> I grew to love what I thought I used to hate by understanding my own culture more. We tend to throw hate at something we do not understand because we fear the unknown. Hate is what is given when you do not understand what to love and love is given to things that you stop and take time to understand. We need to stop and smell the roses every once in a while right? My roses happened to smell like *Arepas con quesito* and sounded like two people yelling at each other (lovingly of course). I am guilty, and so are you, and so is everyone else. When coming into contact with something "different" it is important to not try and throw it away, but find ways to understand and embrace it more.

Gaby's testimony is a recuperation in the same way that her attunement is: a return to love. Her thesis is striking and homeopathic in this way. She closes her essay with an invitation for her audience "to find ways to understand and embrace [difference] more." In other words, like Gaby has attuned to her mother tongue, she invites us to attune to one another, and in so doing, to build our worlds in love.

Attunement, as Gaby has offered, makes way for the proliferation of attachments, and in so doing, of worlds. In the classroom, especially, attunement is affective magic. As Felski puts it in her chapter on attunement in *Hooked*, "education…can be a process of coming to care for things one did not previously care for" (43). Attunement in the classroom is the oft-discussed "lightbulb moment:" the opportunity for "a returning from nothing, or from a negative, into something soaring and sublime," as Smith puts it, or the epiphanic moment of understanding (110). These are the moments that educators revel in: watching a student move "from nothing" into "something soaring and sublime" as they make a discovery, attaching in a new way to something that changes their world.

These have been the most pivotal moments to witness in my experiences as a writing instructor: watching students attune to something new in class or in their writing. Because the process of writing makes way for attunements, epiphanies, and discoveries, helping a student to cultivate a writing practice is, in a way, helping them to cultivate a practice of attunement. Considering—and teaching—writing as a process of inquiry makes space for attunement: the unexpected thesis, the integration of seemingly disparate ideas, the movement from confusion to understanding. Especially when writing about the very messy—namely, love—the writing process enables a sense of possibility and an opportunity to learn something in that process.

Most importantly, for me, attunement might offer the possibility of fostering positive attachments for students who come to the writing classroom with indifference or even negative sentiments about writing. Attunement, for me, is the most hopeful way to think about students and their relationships with writing because it hinges on the flexibility of our attachments, and offers up the possibility of seeing the classroom's cognitive and affective ties as ongoing processes: processes that we might begin to harness as educators by taking note of attached and affective experiences in the classroom. In this affective landscape, loving writing seems, to me, a possible—and maybe even transformative—course objective.

Conclusion: Love as Pedagogy

Love, like writing and world building, is a practice. It's a verb: a way forward, a way to engage, in which attention, intimacy, and learning are intrinsically involved. Love, as Poletti has indicated, can serve as a postcritical method in contrast to the detached engagements of critique. So too, love might serve as a pedagogy. I have chosen to center love in my first-year writing course because of a conviction about the ways in which we should engage with each other in the classroom setting—a conviction that the classroom should be "life-affirming," as Kevin Gannon

puts it in *Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto* (11). Love is attentive: it recognizes the life of the other attentively, with intimacy. A loving classroom is concerned with intimacy in terms of atmosphere, relationships, and understanding.

The alternative is true too: a pedagogy that champions critique and suspicion might fail to recognize its students entirely. The phrase "hermeneutics of suspicion" is one that could be applied to the atmosphere of what Gannon calls "classrooms of death," that is, classrooms that are not life-affirming, that do not center a student's experience attentively (9). I caught myself in a hermeneutic of suspicion at the end of my first semester of teaching. My students had submitted gorgeously crafted essays with vibrant ideas and well-formulated prose. I ran a few through a plagiarism detector: nothing. An AI detector: nothing. I am embarrassed to admit that I had not trusted my students to write so beautifully. That is not to say that students do not sometimes plagiarize or use AI, or that there is anything wrong with teachers who use the tools available to screen for those things. But I knew my students. I knew that they were writing about things that they *loved*: popular music, hiking, fashion. They did it with motivation, style, and skill—so much so that I was surprised at their final products. I had failed to recognize them. Indeed, reading student work and engaging with students more broadly should not be acts of suspicion. These acts should be ones of intimacy, as a part of a relationship: to be made known. In other words, engagement with students should come from a loving pedagogy.

To embrace a "love ethic"—as bell hooks would articulate it—in the classroom is to infuse a course with these kinds of ideals for education: love, intimacy, and atmosphere (*All About Love: New Visions* 85). hooks argues that "love in the classroom prepares teachers and students to open our minds and hearts. It is the foundation on which every learning community can be created… Love will always move us away from domination in all its forms. Love will

always challenge and change us. This is the heart of the matter" (*Teaching Community* 137). When we commit to practicing love in our scholarship, in our writing, and in our classrooms, we leave "domination," suspicion, and fear. Love, in contrast, enables what hooks calls "challenge and change" and what Moi calls "genuine adventure" (hooks *Teaching Community* 137, Moi 12). As teaching is a practice, a love pedagogy infuses a constellation of small interactions—check-ins, readings, assignments, group discussions, office hours appointments—with a feeling of heart, attention, and adventure.

In "The Heart of a Teacher: Identity and Integrity and Teaching," Parker J. Palmer describes this constellation of everyday actions as a kind of woven tapestry. If the daily actions of teaching are the threads, then the teacher's heart is the loom: "as good teachers weave the fabric that joins them with students and subjects, this heart is the loom on which the threads are tied: the tension is held, the shuttle flies, and the fabric is stretched tight" (Palmer 18). Importantly, "the courage to teach is the courage to keep one's heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able, so that teacher and student and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require" (18). And so teaching, too, is a practice of loving attachment. Different threads are woven together: this student, that skill; a reading, a reflection, a revelation.

Like all attachments, the ones drawn together in teaching are not always positive. As Palmer suggests, teaching is not always fun, or easy, or loving in a way that is easy to see. Keeping an open heart is a courageous commitment. A love pedagogy is not one that is un-rigorous. Loving a student might mean holding firm boundaries, making hard decisions, assigning a failing grade. But by infusing pedagogy, writing, and the work of the first-year writing classroom with a "love ethic," there is a ceaseless sense of hope; a hope that Gaby might

correlate with her metaphor of love as a tide, one that ebbs and flows (*All About Love: New Visions* 85).

There is hope, too, in a humanities classroom—and, in particular, a first-year writing classroom—that leans into attachment and affective experience—into love. Seeing the work of the humanities as a labor motivated by love is hopeful. Reading works intimately and cultivating a positive classroom atmosphere is hopeful. Teaching writing from a love pedagogy is hopeful. From this lens, I begin to see hope in watching Claricia swing on that letter Q. My initial analysis of her status was pessimistic—maybe even suspicious. I thought that at the time of her illustration, she was working in a drafty abbey with little hope of recognition, determined as she was to place a kind of signature on this day's work. But I was wrong. Claricia's self-portrait is her testimony; it's a playful, ebullient swing. The self-portrait is not defiant (well, maybe it's a little defiant), but mostly it's loving, in the sense that it shows a few extra hours spent on this manuscript, perhaps a laugh shared with the nuns at the drawing table. It's a bit of fun, it's a bit of work.

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Appendix A: Images

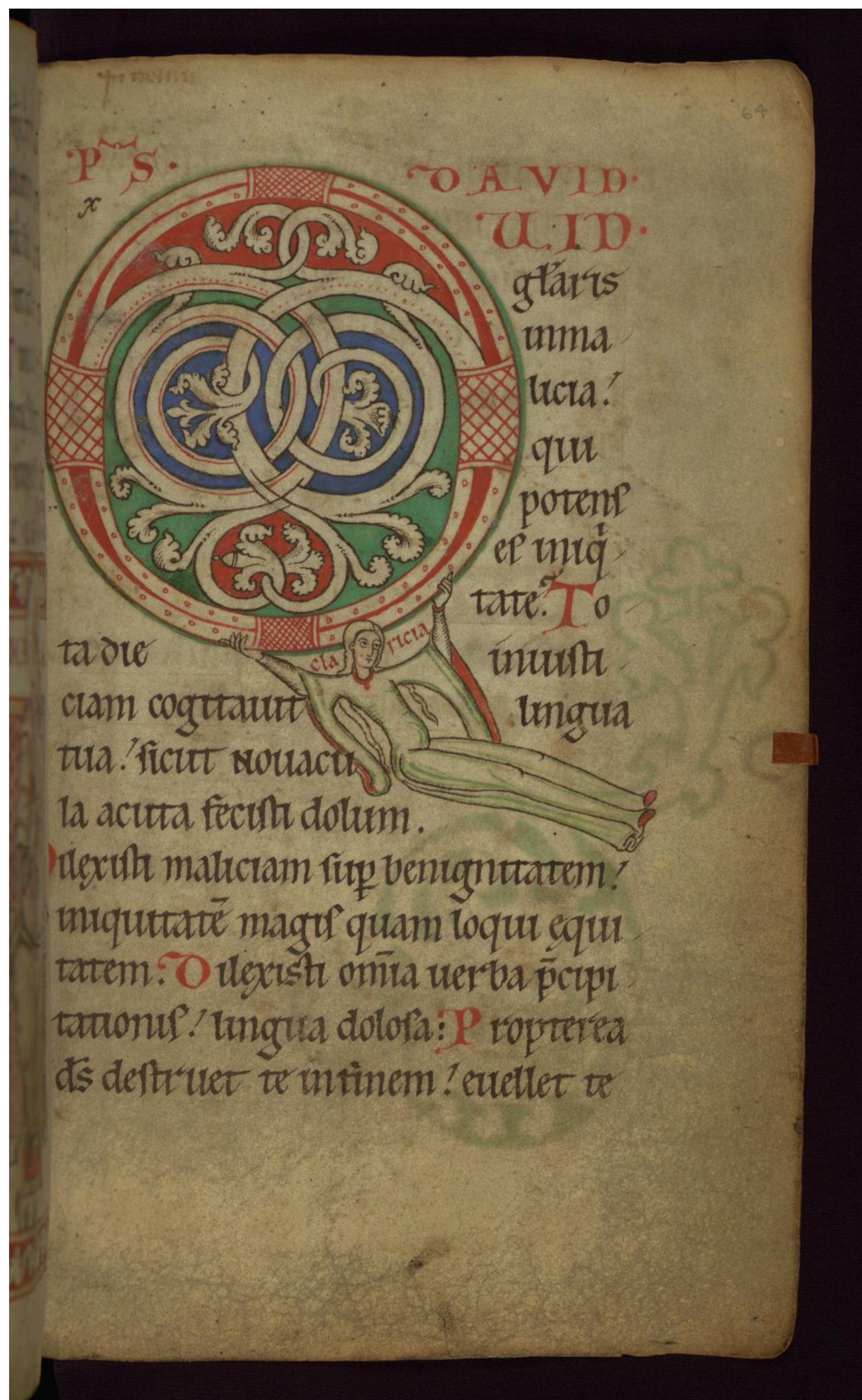


Image 1: Claricia. *Leaf from Claricia Psalter: Claricia Swinging on Initial Q*. ink and paint on medium-think, well-prepared parchment, late 12th-early 13th century. The Walters Art Museum.

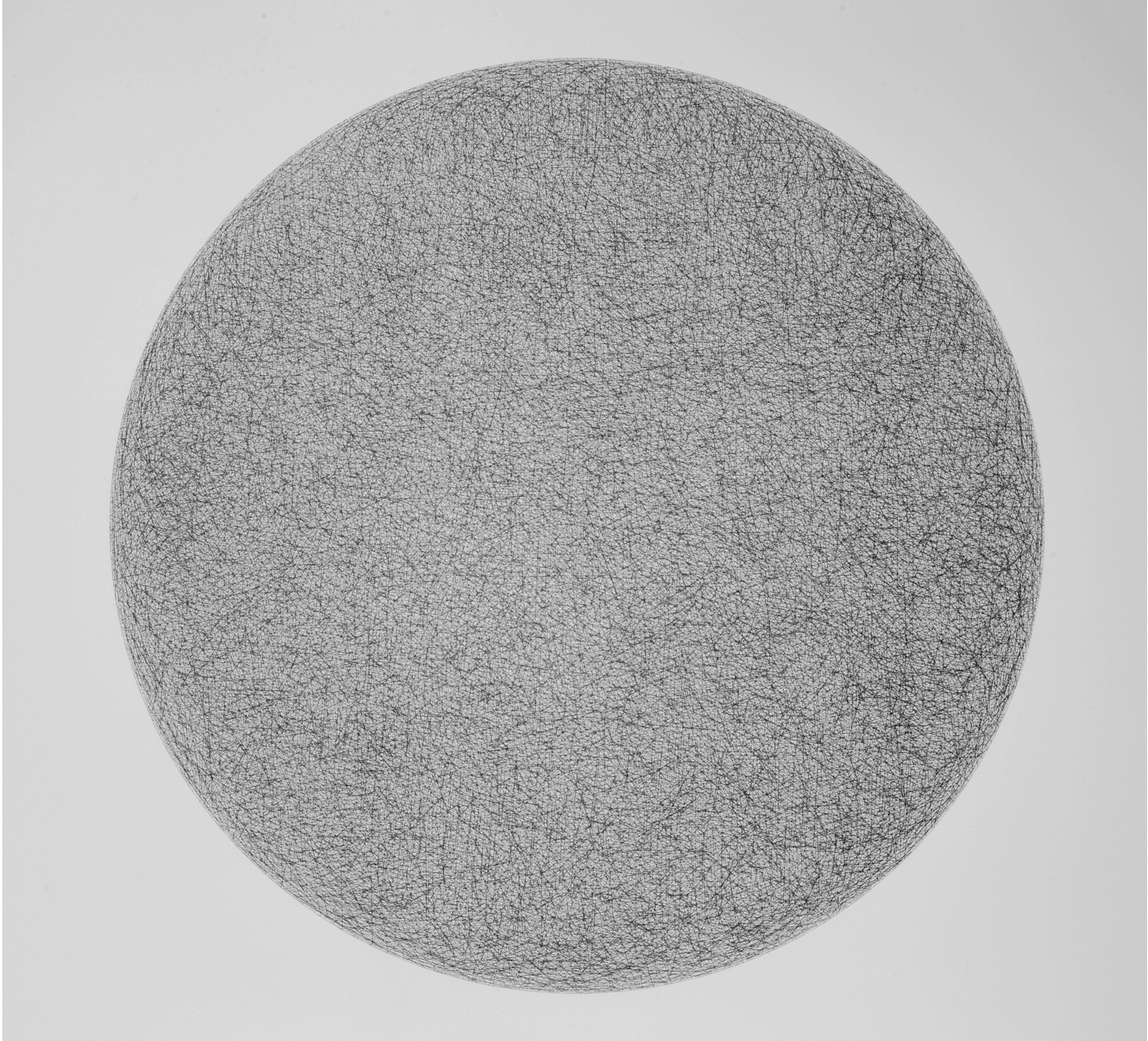


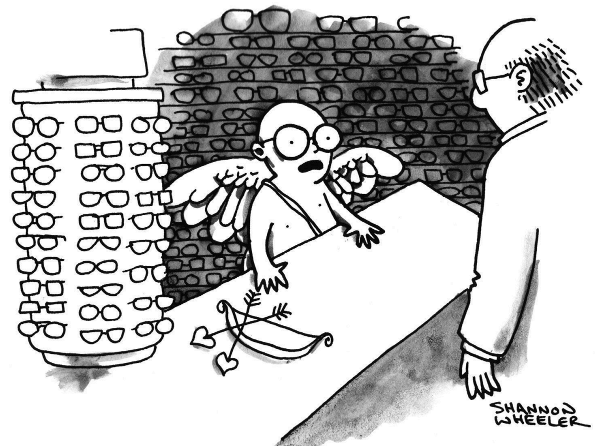
Image 2: LeWitt, Sol. *Wall Drawing 686*. Graphite, 2015. The Fralin Museum of Art.

Appendix B: Sample Syllabus

Allison Gish
yzt6fd@virginia.edu

ENWR 1510: Writing About Love
Tuesday & Thursday 8:00-9:15 am
New Cabell Hall 115

Office Hours: Mondays 3:30-4:30 pm
Fine Arts Library Conference Room
or by appointment



Course Description
In *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments,* Roland Barthes writes, "to try to write love is to confront the *muck* of language." In this section of ENWR 1510, we will allow writing to serve as our grounds for exploration–a field of language to muck around in. Orbiting the concept of love, we will consider its theorization and account for the various shapes love can take–and the ways it informs our scholarship. This course will consider writing, like love, to be a process and practice of continual commitment. As such, it will entail practice-based attention to the writing process through consistent writing habits, contemplative practices, and the cultivation of a commonplace method.

Course Objectives
By the end of the course, students will:

1. understand both writing and love to be continual practices requiring constancy of effort and devotion
2. cultivate contemplative practices through writing, reading, and engaging with the class community
3. attend to texts effectively using a variety of approaches, including close reading and engaging with theoretical lenses
4. engage critically with and incorporate outside sources effectively in writing
5. identify and write to conventions of genre, audience, and form.

Course Units and Calendar

Unit 1: Love & Method: The Commonplace Practice

Date	Objective	Reading Due	Writing Due
R 1/18	Welcome	N/A	N/A
T 1/23	Methods: Commonplace	Anne Lamott, “Index Cards” Holiday, “How and Why to Keep a Commonplace Book”	Commonplace Journal
R 1/25	The Analog Commonplace	N/A; Field trip visit to Special Collections. Meet at Special Collections at 8:00 am	Special Collections Writing Response (in-class writing)
T 1/30	The Digital Commonplace	Explore Maria Popova’s digital commonplace, The Marginalian	Marginalian Journal
R 2/1	Commonplace Workshop	Anne Lamott, “Shitty First Drafts”	Drafted Commonplace Proposal Due to Canvas
T 2/6	Methods & Frameworks	Felski, “On Being Attached”	Attachment Journal Finalized Commonplace Proposal Due to Canvas

Sometime during unit 1: Sign up for a time to visit me in office hours. Deadline Tuesday, 2/6.

Unit 2: Love & Attention: Intimate Reading

Date	Objective	Reading Due	Writing Due (Journals due 10:00 pm the night before class)
R 2/8	Love and Attention	Mary Oliver, “Upstream” Dwight Garner, New York Times “Close Read”	Close Reading Journal
T 2/13	Ekphrasis	Field trip visit to the Fralin Gabbert, New York Times “Close Read”	Writing About Art Journal
R 2/15	Reading For Atmosphere	Carmen Maria Machado, “Real Women Have Bodies”	“Real Women Have Bodies” Journal
T	Reading	Toni Morrison, “Recitatif”	“Recitatif” Journal

2/20	Through Lenses	Spoiler Alert: read Zadie Smith introduction *after*!	
R 2/22	Reading Film	*Portrait of a Lady on Fire*	*Portrait of a Lady on Fire* Journal
T 2/27	The Art of Analysis	Frank Ocean, *Blonde* *Dissect* Season 3 Episode 9, "Ivy by Frank Ocean"	*Dissect* Journal
R 2/29	Introduction to the Analytical Project	N/A	Commonplace Report 1 due to Canvas

Spring Recess March 2nd - March 10th

Unit 3: Love & Integration: Intimate Writing

Date	Objective	Reading Due	Writing Due (Journals due 10:00 pm the night before class)
T 3/12	Methods: Research	Graff and Berkenstein, "Research as Conversation" Field trip: library orientation Meet at 8:00 am in Shannon Library Room #415	Research Object and Question due to Canvas
R 3/14	Methods: Form	N/A Field trip: media orientation Meet at 8:00 am in Shannon Lobby	Analytical Project Pitch due To Canvas
T 3/19	Analytical Project Workshop	N/A	Analytical Project outline and annotated bibliography due to Canvas
R 3/21	Writing Magic	No Class: Writing Day to visit the writing center *Or* Schedule an appointment with me by emailing yzt6fd@virginia.edu	Writing Center report due to Canvas 3/27 by 5:00 pm
T	Analytical	N/A	Analytical Project Draft 1 due

3/26	Project Peer Review		to Canvas
R 3/28	Presentations	Analytical Project Presentations	Work on Analytical Project
T 4/2	Presentations	Analytical Project Presentations	Final Analytical Project Due on Canvas 5:00 pm Wednesday 4/3

Unit 4: Approaches to Love: Writing About Love

Date	Objective	Reading Due	Writing Due (Journals due 10:00 pm the night before class)
R 4/4	The Art of the Paragraph & Reflective Writing	New York Times Modern Love College Contest “Minis” (in class)	N/A
T 4/9	The Personal Essay	Layla Kinjawi Faraj, “My Plea for a Sixth Love Language”	Faraj Journal
R 4/11	Frameworks: Attachment (review) Commonplace Reflection Workshop	Rita Felski, “On Being Attached” (review)	Commonplace reflection rough draft due to Canvas Final Commonplace reflection due Sunday 4/14 5:00 pm
T 4/16	Frameworks: Attunement	Zadie Smith, “Some Notes on Attunement”	Attunement Journal
R 4/18	Another Personal Essay	Michelle Zauner, “Crying in H Mart”	“Crying in H Mart” Journal Personal Essay Pitch due to Canvas
T 4/23	Personal Essay Workshop	Ross Gay, “Have I Even Told You About the Courts I’ve Loved?”	N/A
R 4/25	Personal Essay Peer Review	N/A	Personal Essay Draft 1 Due to Canvas

T 4/30	Celebration & Reflection	N/A	Reflection Journal Finalized Personal Essay Due to Canvas Friday 5/1 5:00 pm

Course Grading

My goal for our time together in ENWR 1510 is to promote your growth as a writer. Grading and providing feedback are not only ways that I can measure learning, but also mechanisms that enable me to provide meaningful learning opportunities. I believe that writing should be joyful and that revision is a part of the writing practice, which is why I offer you a token system. See “tokens” in policies for more information.

Grading Breakdown

Class Attendance and Participation 15%
Reading Journals 15%
Commonplace Project 25%
- Proposal 5%
- Report 5%
- Reflection 15%

Analytical Project 25%
- Annotated Bibliography, Presentation, and Writing Center Report 10%
- Project 15%

Personal Essay 20%

Final Grade: /100

A+	100	B−	≥ 80%
A	≥ 93%	C+	≥ 76%
A−	≥ 90%	C	≥ 73%
B+	≥ 86%	C−	≥ 70%
B	≥ 83%	No Credit	<70%

The passing grade for ENWR 1510 is a C- (70%). I am unable to give the grade “incomplete” for this course.

Course Policies

Contacting Me

I am here to help you grow as a writer. Please reach out if you have questions or concerns, or if you would like additional feedback. When you email me, please format your email thoughtfully. All emails should include a **salutation** and a **signature**. Alternatively, you can sign up for a meeting in Office Hours. Feel free to call me Allison.

Tokens: Extensions and Revisions

You will have three tokens to use as you wish throughout the semester. Tokens can be used for **extensions** or **resubmissions** if you are unhappy with your grade. Tokens must be redeemed 24 hours before the due date. Redeem tokens—either for extension or revision—by emailing me at yzt6fd@virginia.edu. Please use "token" as the first word of the subject line.

Extensions: All extensions will be three-day (72-hour) extensions. To be included in the course grade, all outstanding coursework (resubmissions, extensions, late work, etc.) must be submitted by 8 am on Tuesday, May 7th.

Revisions: Revisions should come accompanied by a 250-word coda indicating the changes that you made to the work, why you made those choices, and how you see the revisions as improving the work as a whole

Late Work Policy

Work that is submitted after the due date without a token will be subject to a penalty of 5 percentage points per day it is late.

Attendance

Please attend class regularly. However, if you anticipate having to miss more class due to illness, required varsity sport obligations, religious observances, crises, and etc., please get in touch with me. **Please email me and stay home if you are sick.** You are allowed two unexcused absences. Any further unexcused absences will cause your grade to drop ⅓ of a grade per day (an A+ becomes an A, etc.)

Tardiness: A key part of attendance is also showing up on time. Because of this, lateness (more than 5 minutes late to class) will result in a 15% reduction of the day's attendance grade.

Participation

Class will be driven by our discussions of reading materials and writing exercises. Therefore, it is imperative that you come to class prepared to discuss the readings, workshop writings, and engage thoughtfully and actively with the class community. It can be a helpful benchmark to try

to speak at least once or twice in class. Preparing notes and questions for each text beforehand can help you do so.

Technology
I have a no-technology policy in class. This means that we will be using our course packets and notebooks during class. During some classes, we will workshop our writing, in which cases computers are allowed and encouraged. I also expect that phones stay silent and be put away during class. That said, life happens and you may need your phone in cases of family emergency or other reasons; should these situations come up, please feel free to use your discretion in having your phone at hand.

Academic Integrity
Here's the thing: plagiarism is wrong, and it doesn't get you anywhere. (Anywhere good, that is). I would **much** prefer you to turn in something that is half-baked or not your best work–and take advantage of the opportunity to revise–than to turn in something that is not your own work.

Citation: We will rely on the hard academic work of others to locate and expand our thinking. It is all of our responsibility to cite our sources responsibly. Plagiarism or another form of academic fraud may result in a failing grade for an assignment, a failing grade for the course, or even dismissal from the university. If you are unsure about what constitutes academic fraud, see the Honor Committee's statement here: https://honor.virginia.edu/academic-fraud.
Generative AI/Chat GPT: I am happy to talk about the ways in which generative AI can help us in our scholarship and writing processes. Here are some examples of ways we can appropriately call on AI: asking AI to come up with writing prompts for us, or writing an essay about one's experience working with AI (example here). Here are some ways in which it is inappropriate to use AI in school: copy-and-pasting AI-generated prose of any kind, asking AI to generate citations (it is almost always wrong), and the like. Don't do it. If I find that you have used generative AI to produce a paper in an inappropriate way, I will ask you to rewrite the assignment. If this happens again, you will not receive credit for the assignment, and you may find it difficult to pass the class as a result. If you are unsure about these guidelines, or wish to use AI for an assignment in a way I haven't noted, please feel free to ask me.

Class Environment
I expect kindness, respect, and generosity of spirit. I will not tolerate any form of discrimination on behalf of one's race, gender, sexuality, religion, and the like. You are responsible for the language you use both on online forums and in the classroom, including when the language is well-intended but has harmful effects. This does not mean you are not allowed to disagree with anything that is said. Instead, I am simply encouraging you to be sensitive to others' responses, considerate in how you present your own ideas, and open to revising them as we process and reflect on certain ideas in class together.

Accommodations
We all have unique learning profiles. If you need accommodations of any kind, please notify me. If your accommodations are recognized by the College, please present the appropriate paperwork from the Student Disability Access Center (SDAC) early in the semester. https://sdac.studenthealth.virginia.edu/.

Support and Resources

The Writing Center: http://professionalwriting.as.virginia.edu/welcome-writing-center
Located in 314 Bryan Hall, the Writing Center provides experienced tutors who'll work with you individually by discussing drafts of your papers in detail. Visit their website for instructions on how to make an appointment.

Office of African-American Affairs (OAAA): Located behind Bryan Hall, OAAA is committed to providing space and programming for black students on Grounds. The office provides counseling, one-on-one mentoring, advising, resources for building community, and community outreach opportunities. For more information, visit http://oaaa.virginia.edu/.

Women's Center: The Maxine Platzer Lynn Women's Center is located at 1400 University Avenue and provides a number of resources to students of all genders. Inside the center, there are study spaces, a library, a meditation room, group workshops, psychological and counseling services, and a staff prepared to discuss any and all issues with you. Learn more at http://womenscenter.virginia.edu/.

LGBTQ Center: "Located in the center of Grounds, in the Lower Level of Newcomb Hall, the LGBTQ Center is both a physical space and a programming center for the university. Whether you're questioning, coming out, LGBTQ-identified, or an ally, the LGBTQ Center has something for you." To learn more, visit http://www.virginia.edu/deanofstudents/lgbtq/.

Counseling and Psychological Services: Commonly known as CAPS, this service is an invaluable one and a great network of which to take advantage if you find it necessary or desirable. CAPS is located at the Student Health Center, 400 Jefferson Park Avenue. More information is available here http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/caps.html.

Appendix C: Sample Assignments

The Commonplace Project

The commonplace method was popular prior to modern publishing methods because books were valuable and scarce. Students and scholars kept commonplace books containing transcribed book excerpts, notes, and journal entries. In an era of surplus information, the commonplace method can again be useful to us; it forces us to curate a personal collection of information.

Design a commonplace method that excites and invites you. You will keep this document (or book, or filing system) as a collection of passages that strike you, conversations with friends, poems you encounter, reading reflections, images, questions, text messages, etc. This method should be a way to record and reflect.

Successful commonplace methods are:

- Searchable: consider creating a digital document, like a Notes page, a Google Doc, a PowerPoint, etc. I have also used a paper journal and created an index by theme.
- Consistent: what medium will compel you to use your commonplace? A Notes page is convenient and portable, but a paper journal can be more fun and creative.
- Multi-medial: the brain loves variety. Color swatches, clippings, notes, pictures, etc. can be great to include in a paper journal. Digital documents lend themselves to links and images. You may even have a two-part commonplace: one physical notebook and one digital document.

Grading:

The Commonplace Project amounts to 25% of the final course grade

- Commonplace Proposal: 10%
- Commonplace Report: 5%
- Commonplace Reflection: 10%

Commonplace Assignment Part 1: Commonplace Proposal

Consider your commonplace method; we have looked at different commonplace books in Special Collections and online. I am open to any medium as long as it supports the considerations of a successful commonplace listed above. Draft a commonplace proposal articulating your commonplace design and the design's rationale.

In your proposal, identify and explain your commonplace system. Provide, too, a rationale for the choices you have made in designing this system. What will it look like? How will it be organized? Why have you made these particular choices for your commonplace?

To locate your ideas, please **cite one commonplace book from special collections and one article (Lamott or Holiday)** that we have read to consider the commonplace method. Perhaps you write a few sentences about a commonplace book of interest in special collections–what was successful about that book? What can you improve about that design? Even if your commonplace method is digital, you can still glean something from the old manuscripts. Perhaps Lamott or Holiday made a point about form or the notetaking practice that made you think twice about your system. How have these articles shaped your thinking?

The proposal should maintain MLA formatting: 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced. It should conform to MLA conventions for headers and page numbers. It should use in-line citations, and a works cited page.

Assessment

Standards for grading:

- ☐ The proposal is at least 500 words
- ☐ Content; the proposal:
  - ☐ Identifies and explains the commonplace method and its organization
  - ☐ Makes an argument for why that particular method will be useful to you, in particular, and your writing practice
  - ☐ Cites one commonplace book from special collections **and** one of the articles on commonplace-keeping as a reference (Lamott or Holiday)
- ☐ Structure; the proposal:
  - ☐ Has a clear structure that is easy to follow, paragraphs with clear transitions, and a guiding thesis
  - ☐ Is thoughtful, complete, and precise in terms of logistical matters: active voice, spelling and grammar, and formatting
  - ☐ Has a works cited page in MLA format, citing both one commonplace book from special collections **and** one of the articles on commonplace-keeping as a reference (Lamott or Holiday)

Commonplace Assignment Part 2: Commonplace Practice

“Always be thinking of your Commonplace. When reading a book, or scrolling through your phone, while watching a video, visiting an exhibition, listening to a podcast, attending a lecture, or having a conversation, during all these activities: look for those sparks of excitement or recognition or energy that indicate you are really interested in something. When

this happens, write it down (also note its source or context: which book, what page number, which author; which friend; what website). Date each entry too, as this will provide chronological context when you look back and reorganize entries."
-Emily Larned, University of Connecticut

Weekly, enter passages, images, ideas, etc. into your commonplace. These entries can reflect works you read in this class, works you read in other classes, ideas you encounter online or among friends, and more. To get into the habit of using the method, I recommend finding one passage per reading to enter at first, until you get the hang of remembering to transcribe what strikes you. I'm looking for about two passages per week.

This is your chance to show me how your commonplace project is going. Commonplace reports should be brief reflections of about 300 words that indicate how the commonplace project is going, any revelations or breakthroughs you've had in keeping your commonplace, and any reflections or patterns you've noticed. You should also include pictures, examples of entries, and other media in your report.

Assessment
Standards for grading:

- [ ] 300-word report indicating the progress of your commonplace method
- [ ] Photos, examples of entries, and other media of your choice to show satisfactory progress throughout the commonplace project
- [ ] Reports are thoughtful, complete, and precise in terms of logistical matters: active voice, spelling and grammar, and formatting.

Commonplace Assignment Part 3: Reflection

Write a reflection on the commonplace process. Perhaps you return to your commonplace proposal–perhaps you even cite yourself. This reflection might be something like an artist's statement or a note on form; why did you select that particular method? What are the benefits? Are there any drawbacks?

You now have had some time to experiment with keeping your commonplace. Has it changed the way you read? Has it changed the way you go to class? Has the commonplace itself changed form over time?

Use this reflection as a way to experiment with reflective writing in the personal voice. Perhaps your reflection might begin with an anecdote or curiosity. Has keeping the commonplace been difficult? Easy? Has the commonplace changed the way you read or perceive the world? What

have been the benefits of keeping the practice? If you could change the form of your commonplace method, would you? This reflection should be around two pages.

MLA formatting: 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced. It should conform to MLA conventions for headers and page numbers.

Assessment

Standards for grading:

- ☐ The reflection is at least two pages
- ☐ Content; the reflection:
    - ☐ Describes one anecdote about commonplacing that gives some insight into the practice you've established
    - ☐ Makes a statement on the form and utility of the commonplace you have designed
    - ☐ Explains and reflects upon the commonplace practice you have cultivated
    - ☐ Is creative, vibrant, and written in a reflective personal voice
- ☐ Structure; the proposal:
    - ☐ Has a title
    - ☐ Has a clear structure that is easy to follow, paragraphs with clear transitions, and a guiding thesis
    - ☐ Is thoughtful, complete, and precise in terms of logistical matters: active voice, spelling and grammar, and typo-free
    - ☐ Is in MLA format with a header and page numbers, Times New Roman font in 12 pt.

The Analytical Project

Overview:
In our lives and schoolwork, art objects—songs, stories, paintings, poems, films, and more—continually challenge, inform, or construct our ways of seeing, being in, and relating to the world. In this class, we have delved into readings, paintings, and songs that have orbited questions of love in terms of identity, community, environment, the body, and more. This assignment is an opportunity to delve into another particular inquiry—this one of your own choosing.

Analytical Project Components:

- [ ] Research object and research question
- [ ] Project pitch
- [ ] Annotated bibliography
- [ ] First draft
- [ ] Writing center report
- [ ] Presentation
- [ ] Final draft

Step One: Asking the Question

1. Identify a particular **research object** that you would like to delve into in terms of close reading and research. Your research object must be some kind of art object (examples: a song, a poem, a short story, a painting, a film, etc.) Your research object should be specific and researchable.

   Ideas for your consideration:

   - Your research object might be one of the stories or poems we have read together in class
   - You might be interested in analyzing a novel, movie, song, etc. that we did not read/watch/listen to; that's fine too
   - Popular music/film/etc. Is ok too, but your object must be broadly researchable. Reach out if you have questions about what counts as "researchable."

2. Develop a research question. Some examples:
   - How do race and stereotyping play out in Toni Morrison's *Recitatif?*
   - Is *Real Women Have Bodies* an example of a pandemic story?
   - How does Gerwig complicate bodies in the *Barbie* movie?

- ○ How does Noah Kahn's song "Stick Season" relate environmental factors to mental health?

Step Two: Making a Plan

Choose a format. In order to best represent the arc of your thinking, you may wish to explore a different format from the traditional written essay. Some food for thought on possible formats are below; if you have an idea for another format not listed, please consult with me. Do consider the importance of play between form and content; certain research themes will lend themselves better to certain formats. Be considerate of this possibility while selecting a format. Likewise, consider your audience; who would consume a video, essay, or podcast? (*Audio/visual formats should be turned in with an accompanying script).

- Essay (7 pages)
  - Think: the introduction to "Recitatif" by Zadie Smith
- "Close Read" in the style of the New York Times "Close Read" on Prezi presentation or another format (accompanied by a 5 page "script" of prose)
- Video essay (~10 minutes, accompanied by a 5 page script)*
- Podcast (~10 minutes, accompanied by a 5 page script)*
  - Think: *Dissect*

Deliverable: Your **pitch** should be between 200-300 words. It should identify your research object and question, why you would like to engage with this research object and question, the medium you would like to engage with, and the audience you foresee writing to. Your pitch should also include an idea of the structure in which you foresee your project taking.

Step Three: Selecting the Sources

Citations: you will cite at least four sources in your project. All sources must be reliable.

- At least two citations must be peer-reviewed articles (use the skills we learned in the library orientation to find these on Virgo)
- Other citations can be alternative reliable sources; think: the New York Times, a book chapter, an interview with the artist/musician/author, etc.
- Use in-line MLA citation and a works cited page in a written form, like an essay or list essay. If you are working on a podcast or video essay, prepare to write a citation into your script (ie "Butler identifies the performative nature of gender in her pivotal work, *Gender Trouble…*") and provide a bibliography at the end.

Deliverable: As a part of the preparation for this assignment, you will prepare a short **annotated bibliography**. An annotated bibliography is a list of sources followed by a short paragraph about how each source might be of use to your individual project. You will collect **four** possible

sources and provide a short paragraph about each of them. **Two** sources should be peer-reviewed and come from research using the tools we discuss with the librarian on the UVA Library website.

Standards for grading

- ☐ Follows the structure of an annotated bibliography in MLA format
- ☐ Citations are relevant to the proposed project
- ☐ Citations are correctly formatted
    - ☐ Four citations total
    - ☐ At least two citations are peer-reviewed articles
    - ☐ Other citations are from alternative reliable sources
- ☐ Each citation is followed by a short paragraph (at least four sentences) that summarizes the text and reports the expected usefulness of the text to your final project

Step Four: Writing Magic

Use your project as a way to work through or examine your thinking about your research question. Use this as an opportunity to "write to learn." Perhaps you plant the seed of your thesis in the beginning of the essay/video/podcast/close read, and then expand on that thesis or revelation at the end of your work. The project should show analysis of the research object through close reading skills, and it should incorporate research in a way that builds your argument. The project should be clearly structured, feature a centering thesis, and offer clear transitions between parts. The project should address an *audience* rather than an *assignment sheet.*

Writing Center Report: as a part of this assignment, you are required to visit the writing center. Appointments can be made by visiting the Writing Center website:
https://writingrhetoric.as.virginia.edu/welcome-writing-center
If your project is in video or audio format, you should bring your project script to your meeting. Here are some ideas to discuss with your consultant, regardless of format:

- Structure
- Thesis/Argument
- Transitions
- Clarity
- Citation/Quote Integration

You will have the Writing Center email a report to me with the time/date of the appointment, the name of your writing consultant, and a brief description of what you worked on with the consultant.

Standards for Grading

- ☐ 7 page paper OR 10 minute video essay with a 5-page script OR 10 minute podcast with a 5-page script OR a "close read" style presentation with a 5-page script
- ☐ Is in MLA formatting
- ☐ Has a title
- ☐ Has a centering thesis that is specific and disputable
- ☐ Has a clear structure with transitions between paragraphs
- ☐ Has an introduction and conclusion
- ☐ Performs a close reading of the research object
- ☐ Does due diligence to four citations
    - ☐ At least two citations of peer-reviewed articles
    - ☐ Other citations are from alternative reliable sources
    - ☐ Accurate and integrated quotations and/or summary of each source
- ☐ Care and precision of logistical matters: citation, active voice, proofreading, and formatting

Step Five: Presenting Your Findings

Everyone will give a short (4-6 minute) presentation or their project and findings. This presentation is an opportunity to share your hard work with your peers, to practice public speaking, and to experience the work of others. All presentations should feature some kind of visual aid (a presentation or a handout).

Standards for Grading

- ☐ 4-6 minute presentation
- ☐ Shares the project and process of completing the project
- ☐ Shares any major findings
- ☐ Features some kind of visual aid
- ☐ Thoughtful, complete, and practiced presentation

The Personal Essay

Overview

In "My Plea for a Sixth Love Language," Layla Kinjawi Faraj writes about her experiences of familial love in terms of Chapman's theory for the five love languages, positing "WhatsApp Intimacy" as a sixth love language. In so doing, Faraj explores family love, technology, and the ways in which a family stays together across borders.

In the same way, the works we've been reading help us to consider love through different theoretical "lenses" or viewpoints. When we consider an experience, a theoretical text can offer us a new way of seeing and understanding. This personal essay offers us a structure for exploring a life experience in a new light.

Structure

1. Select one of the theoretical frameworks we have read/discussed.
   - Attachment, Felski
   - Attunement, Smith

2. Consider a personal life experience with the theory in question. Identify particular moments in the course of that experience that particularly lend themselves to your theoretical framework. Do some "close readings" of the experience in order to understand what applying that particular theoretical lens *does* for your "reading" of it.

Personal Essay Pitch

Your pitch should be between 200-300 words. It should identify the theoretical framework you intend to use, the personal experience you intend to explore, and should briefly illustrate how you see your theory illuminating something about the experience in a new way (i.e. the thesis of the essay).

The Personal Essay: Logistics

Your essay should:

- Orbit an overarching thesis
- Feature a paragraph that gives a short summary/understanding of the theory that leads into a description of how your theoretical framework changes, sheds light on, or otherwise makes available a unique reading of the experience. This paragraph should also integrate a quotation from the theoretical text to illustrate your summary.
- Perform "close readings" of specific moments in the experience that support your claims, or otherwise illuminate the path your essay is taking toward your claim.

- Reflect thoughtfulness, care, and diligence with the theory and primary text. It should feature careful citations, active voice, and attention to conventions of proofreading (ie attention to typos, spell-check, etc.)
- Convey its purposes in 1,000-1,500 words
- Maintain MLA formatting: 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced. It should conform to MLA conventions for headers and page numbers. It should use in-line citations, and a works cited page.

Standards For Grading

Personal essays will be graded on the following criteria of expectation:

- [ ] At least 4 pages long
- [ ] Essay follows the following forma:
    - [ ] Introductory paragraph indicating the thesis of the essay
    - [ ] A paragraph following the introduction which **summarizes** and **cites** (quotes) the chosen theoretical framework (Attunement or Attachment)
    - [ ] A body of the essay which describes and analyzes the experience being examined by the theoretical framework, written in a narrative style and in the personal voice
    - [ ] A conclusion that captures the outcome of the essay (perhaps expanding your thesis in some way)
    - [ ] A works cited page in MLA format
- [ ] Care and precision of logistical matters: citation, active voice, proofreading, and formatting