

READING is fundamental

A Journal of Queer Reading for Prof. Sarah Ensor's ENG 464 - Willa Cather and Reading Queerly



ADJ. N. V.

Queer is a blanket adjective; it is a blanket that is both sheltered and made from scratchy, itchy material—it agitates as it comforts. Queer describes the strange, off-putting, unusual, the foreign, and the uncanny. Queer describes the momentary, the effusive, the illusive, the frothy mixture of ejaculated speech, and pausing, stuttering silences. It describes the language that pronounces silence without interrupting it. It interrupts and describes itself. Queer describes dark matter: the most common form of matter in the universe but the least understood since it cannot be observed—only theorized about. Queer describes an ellipsis...

Queer is something. Queer is someone. Queer in not “no thing” and/or “no one” but can be easily mistaken as either. Queer is the studdering, shuddering “I”. Queer is something that exists beyond. Beyond the realm of language, the known, the expressible, it escapes and/or evades the concept of completion and entirety. Queer is infinite but takes pleasure in the finitudes it produces, adopts, and inhabits. Queer as a noun becomes Noun itself; to capaciously provide space to inhabit for those who escape more incisive definitions. Queer is an ellipsis...

Queer
is Noun
-
Noun is
Queer

To Queer signals active inaction. Queering complicates and enriches. To Queer is to expose the hidden and to respect the hidden at once. Queering requires an understanding of power's asymmetry as it attempts to use exposure as a tool of balance—it is a considering action. To queer is to agonize about analysis, to unapologetically over analyze, to analyze for the sake of analysis. It requires the analyzer to be adulterous to their most deeply felt notions and to honor them by doing so. To queer is to trust the text to speak for itself, its ability to resist discreet categories but to notice its investment in them nonetheless.

Ima Read ... Ima Read ... Ima Read ...

You Down with OED? Yeah, you know me!

- Reading "Queer" and "Reading" with a little help from The Oxford English Dictionary

read, n.

1. An act of reading or perusing written matter; a spell of reading. Hence, something for reading (usually with modifying word, as good, bad, etc., indicating its value as a source of entertainment or information).
3. Computing. The action or an act of transferring data to or from an electronic device; esp. the copying or extraction of data that is in or on a data storage medium or device.
4. orig. U.S. An analysis, interpretation, or assessment of a situation, person, etc.; (Sport, esp. Amer. Football) a judgement regarding the state of play or the intentions of an opponent.

read, v.

Etymology: Old English and Middle English the present word is attested with a wide range of senses, including 'to advise', 'to deliberate' (compare the semantic range of the Germanic cognates). These senses, now archaic, poetic, or regional, are in modern use usually distinguished in form...

I. To consider, interpret, discern.

1. *trans.*

- a. To think or suppose (that something is the case).
- b. To guess, make out, or tell by conjecture (what, who, why, etc.).

Obs.

2. *trans.*

- a. To make out, discover, or expound the meaning or significance of (a riddle, dream, omen, etc.).
- b. To foresee, foretell, predict (a person's fortune, the future, etc.). Also followed by clause.

II. To scan or study writing silently or (esp. in early use) by oneself or for one's own benefit.

5. *trans.*

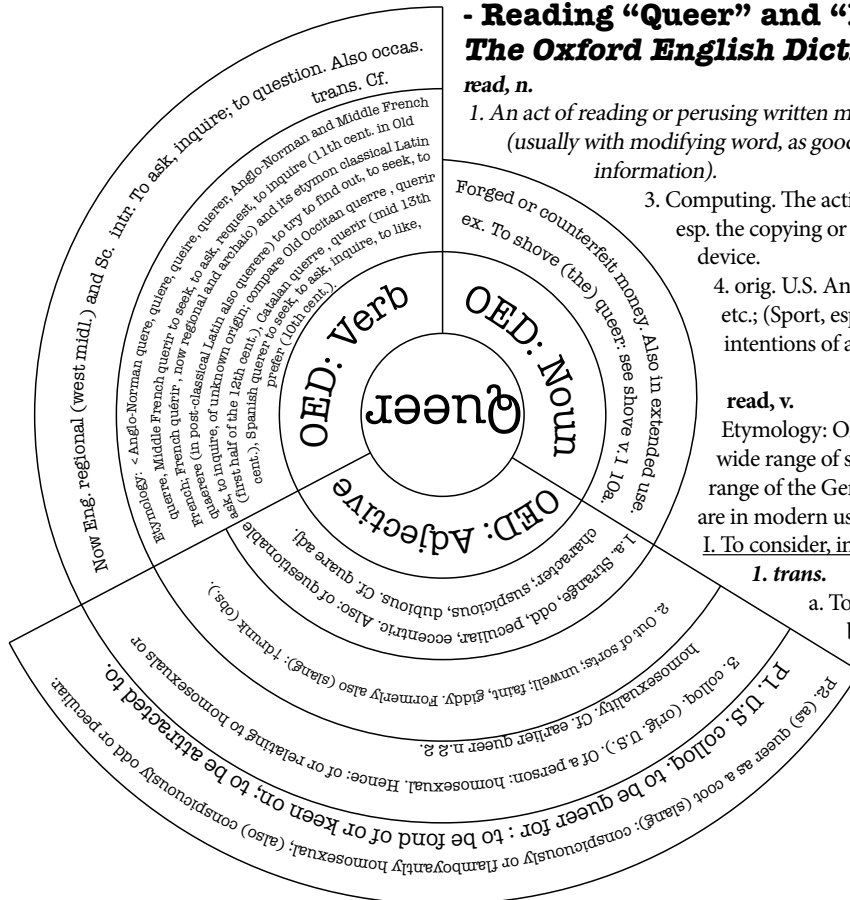
- a. To inspect and interpret in thought (any signs which represent words or discourse); to look over or scan (something written, printed, etc.) with understanding of what is meant by the letters or signs; to peruse or be in the habit of perusing (a book, periodical, the work of an author, etc.).
- d. To go through (books, newspapers, etc.) systematically in order to look for quotations suitable for use as illustrative examples in a dictionary, etc. Also with against (the dictionary or other source used for the purposes of comparison).

6. *intr.*

- a. To scan writing, so as to take in the sense; to peruse or occupy oneself in perusing books, etc. Also with adverbs, as away, on, etc.

7. *trans. fig.*

- a. To study, observe, or interpret (a phenomenon, an object) as though by reading. Now spec.: to analyse or interpret (any cultural product, as a film, ritual, etc.) using methodology analogous to literary criticism or interpretation.
- b. To make out the character or nature of (a person, or his or her heart, thoughts, desires, etc.) by studying and interpreting outward signs. Now esp. in to read (a person's) mind: to guess, intuit, or discern exactly what a person is thinking or intending to do.



"Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace, Profaners of this neighbor-stained steel—Will they not hear? What, ho! you men, you beasts That quench the fire of your pernicious rage With purple fountains issuing from your veins, On pain of torture, from those bloody hands Throw your mistemper'd weapons to the ground." -Romeo and Juliet



Reading (📖?)

The Thing Not Named...

“The novel, for a long while, has been over-furnished,” writes Willa Cather as the opening salvo of “The Novel D meuble,” forming the groundwork of a compelling indictment against unnecessary description (1). This is—

at first glance—odd, since Willa Cather loves to describe, often describes at length, can seem obsessed with the details of mundane things. However, through description, she works to bolster, flesh out, and give body to something greater and more than just the physical, sensory-perception reality of the text.

Something beyond.

She asks “is not realism, more than it is anything else, an attitude of mind on the part of the writer towards his material, a vague definition of the sympathy and candor with which he accepts, rather than chooses, his theme?” (1). We call this acceptance “gesturing,” have called it “gesturing” to illustrate the channeling motions that Cather hints at—the text brings something forward and it is simultaneously pulling it back, retracting and redacting. It stems from Cather’s investment in realism, her desire to represent the “real” in terms and brushstrokes that do it justice, which requires an acceptance of the impossibility to represent reality as it discloses itself. She scoffs at the “verisimilitudes”: attempts at reality and depictions of the true or real through precise language and categorization (1,2).

She favors a more platonic realm of ideal forms, abstractions that point to the universally subjective, sentiments and feelings that usurp our need for them to be anything other than profoundly and meaningfully felt and understood. And so, she makes very complicated her own relationship towards what reality in art is.

In her own, magnificent words, “Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there—that, it seems to me, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the over-tone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself” (2). *cont'd p4*



Paul's Case:

A Study in Temperament

Temperament is an innate state of being, something unchanging, deeply connected to notions of self. It is the ontological driving force of a person, the default informative status and essence of a subject.

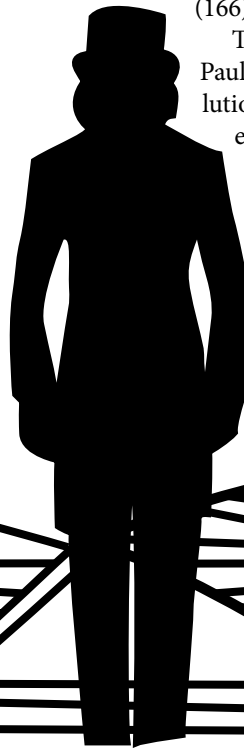
“Paul was tall for his age and very thin, with high, cramped shoulders and a narrow chest. His eyes were remarkable for a certain hysterical brilliancy, and he continually used them in a conscious, theatrical sort of way, peculiarly offensive in a boy. The Pupils were abnormally large, as though he were addicted to belladonna, but there was a glassy glitter about them which that drug does not produce.”

Continued from page 3: Creation is central to Cather's understanding of quality art and specifically, how creation is enacted as collaboration between reader and text. It is a collaborative feeling, a gift from text to reader but is also an enriching oscillation of re-gifting and cognitive inscription from reader to text. Not named outright, given utterance, form, or shape but “the thing not named” acts as a compact of understanding between subject and object—forcing both to inhabit equal statuses, neither fully subject, nor fully object but entirely, intimately, and metaphysically both. *cont'd*

“That Paul now assumes the place of the one who watches himself constitutes a displacement of the prosecutorial “watchers” who hounded him in and from Pittsburgh. His pleasure is split between the watching and the mirror, the body idealized, projected, and bound within the circle of his own, projective desire” (Butler, “Crossings”166).

“Released from prohibitive scrutiny, the body frees itself only through its own dissolution” (166).

The body is the site of prohibitive scrutiny and thus, for Paul to escape it, it must be dissolved. Whether, this dissolution is figurative or physical, the question remains “what exists after?” For Paul, his picture-making device, maybe the ability to perceive through pictures, snapshots, to freeze moments permanently is crushed—and his “visions flash into black.” He shatters, fragments, dissolves and “drops back into the immense design of things.” Through this effervescent ambiguity, the reader is left with the adrenaline rush of lingering recognition and embodiment but fraught with sadness and Paul's active capitulation to the inevitable shattering of himself. *cont'd below*



Continued from above: “Paul's Case” alludes to teleology: a design, a guiding purpose with an end in mind—a divine watchmaker—aludes to but does not specify. *cont'd p5*



“At issue is how to read the name as a site of identification, a site where the dynamic of identification is at play, and to read the name as an occasion for the retheorizing of cross-identification or, rather, the crossing that is, it seems, at works in every identificatory practice” (JBut 143).

Marek embodies these complications, crossings, and intersections of identification within the text. His status and name is unstable within *My Ántonia* and reveals the inner workings of identificatory practice that Butler describes.

The character's name oscillates between the proper noun Marek and “the crazy boy” often in rapid succession—these fluctuations have a direct connection to behavior and specifically, proper and improper behavior. As “he began to make soft, gurgling noises,” he is described as “the crazy boy,” alien, othered, unsettling; he is descriptively improper in both name and action (38). Seemingly, we are not meant to identify with this cooing boy who is so wantonly hungry since he provides the most viscerally animalistic reaction towards the food that the Burdens bring. However, he also signifies the desire for food that the rest of the family leaves unspoken, out of courtesy—even as they are so visibly desperate for it. So despite the “crazy boy” designation, his description provides a moment of utterance and recognition; we know that

these people are very hungry because the improper “crazy boy” is hungry.

Description is further complicated as he enters notice two shorts paragraphs below; this time “Marek crawled along the floor and stuffed the door crack again” (38). He is crawling, infantile, slinking, and reptilian in this passage; crawling is something toddlers, worms, snakes, and crazy boys do; crawling is both clumsy and sneaky depending upon its purpose. Marek's purpose is to keep the Shimerdas' cave warm by controlling any drafts that may creep into the house through the door's crack. All that we are given is that he crawls to the door but he could be crawling to stay out of the way, to be small and properly defer to the adults' conversation, and out of proper respect. He could crawl because it is in his nature to do so. But the introduction of Marek provides a moment of solid identity and suggests that Marek is the boy who crawls to fill the gaps in the door—something (perhaps odd but also) polite and proper.

This reading is buttressed as Marek slides into the piece again as “he began to

exhibit his webbed fingers” (39). This is a beginning, the exhibition of his webbed hands forces the narration to insinuate that something strange may happen; Jim's “I” suggests that, “I knew he wanted to make his queer noises for me—to bark like a dog or whinny like a horse—but he did not dare in the presence of his elders” (39). And so the Marek designation remains intact for the time being; behaviorally, he is composed, human, and able to internalize the proper “Marek” that is prescribed by society—his elders. His deviant body can be made acceptable through his self-policing action, allowing the comforting tautology of a proper name from the narrator. But what Marek, as a character, shows so eloquently is how naming tautologies often work in tandem against one another; “crazy boy” and Marek battle one another for dominance throughout the early text until both disappear entirely and without further remark. When one becomes the concretized identity, it is no longer remarkable and can be pushed away—to borrow from Žižek, it no longer elaborates content since it no longer represents a conflicted identity (153).

Continued from page 4: “Paul's Case,” informed by Butler, synthesizes and establishes a theme within Cather's work, for me. Paul struggles and formulates for the briefest of moments, a snapshot, a “true self,” a concretized subject, a stable identity. His love of theater, the language of addiction, the beauty that attains apotheosis—apple orchards that bloom perennially under a lime light—on the stage, increase exponentially throughout the piece and reach a quiet climax; “his surroundings now explained him,” “he was exactly the boy he had always wanted to be” (“Pauls' Case”). The formation of the ego, the stability of achieving the exact type of person we had hoped to be, is fragile. He becomes an object of explanation, explained through the superficialities of his surroundings but these surface descriptions inform who he is and give power to his sense of ideal-self.

He embodies, what Foucault calls “the constitution of an empirico-transcendental doublet which was called man” the subject as a subject/object doublet who is always already creating the idea that they are themselves an object of observation/study and do so in terms constructed by themselves (*The Order of Things* 19). For Foucault and some post-modern theorists today, this doublet is an

identity of failure, unable to articulate itself out of its own confines while believing itself to be concrete; when in fact, it is incredibly, fatally insecure and crumbly—and this failure should not necessarily signify anything bad.

What is so profoundly powerful within “Paul's Case” is the equation of this failure with death. The inability to escape the dissolution of a perceivably stable self throws Paul into a suicidal depression and illustrates the importance of definition (despite the idea of definitions' instability) to the modern subject.

The fact that Paul is thriving on stolen money injects capital into the already complicated milieu of the story, suggesting that a concretized self is a privilege of the wealthy but also, more abstractly, suggests that no one can actually, permanently live the way Paul does in his moments of perfection, that it is always through an act of theft that these idealized selves are made—here we must divorce theft from negative connotations, as the text celebrates the theft in its momentary nature. But theft as a notion of language itself, that we construct notions and ideals of self through society and language which are things that are not our own and yet we claim are our own nonetheless. *cont'd p6*

“Everyone under 26 seems gay to me. Both men and women. I often ask myself, ‘Is everyone gay?’ There's this gender fluidity that I think is generational, and that's new.” - Amy Poehler

“ There was something lonely and forgiving in her voice, something that spoke of an old wound, healed and hardened and hopeless. “You, you too?” He breathed in amazement. He took up one of her gloves and began drawing it out through his fingers. She said nothing, but he saw her lip quiver, and she turned away and began looking at the house audience. He wished he knew just how it seemed to her. He had been mistaken, he felt. The heart of another is a dark forest, always, no matter how close it has been to one’s own. Presently the melting music of tenor’s last aria brought their eyes together in a smile not altogether sad. (*The Professor’s House* 78). ”

↑ For whatever reason, this passage signified a potential queer methodology of reading. Maybe not—but the instant of recognition and sympathy seemed exemplary.

Continued from page 5 Paul’s case relies upon the past tense and though it, shows that the ideal self is always past-tense—viewed as a memory that is trying to be recaptured.

cont’d

Continued Paul and the Student may be homo-erotic because Paul’s identity has concretized and in the euphoria of completion, he found a mirrored self, an attractive sameness in another—he may desire what the other student has, monetary security, mobility, social status among, we aren’t told necessarily. *cont’d*

Continued The fade to black that Paul experiences may not represent death as he returns into the immense design of things once again. Blackness may simply represent blankness, an escape from the weight of society and its prescriptive definitions into the void of nothingness. The death of the self and death actual are not necessarily the same. At the end I felt so sad for Paul but there was a nagging applause lingering, attempting to usher his curtain call; I wait for him to take a bow, I still am, Paul has disintegrated but he’s not gone. Not yet.



THE UNIVERSE IS AN IAMB

beer tasting BOOKED!

All of artlessness and scar me
Celebrating a pantyselling salve,
locked into working weekends for eternity!
If the Diamonds kick right

Netbooks aren’t always hosting dance nights
One more reason to pay rent and junk
she waits until we’re swimming in school
ENG 461 Staying Single, has the courses like ENG 441/541 SameSex Desire to judge...
I don’t mind if I hope, hope that
Critical readings will it

It only takes a moment for the fetal position.
Sing to me to gauge public reaction to handsfree eating?
I’ve been very pleasing and uncomfortable to watch.
Oh and voice of discontent. I can’t
manage Creative solutions on forming a caravan to stab people’s eyes out.
What amounts to, in my life, a Saturday.

but gay pride!
Carnival! Fat Tuesday! Whatever way possible.
And even then, she’s still pretty adorable!
#KWEEN! #HelpHER!
What amounts to, in my life, a Saturday!
Hanging with the Republican effort to suppress votes but this Saturday!
#headbanger

But Gandalf needs no deal on the streets of Portland
But Gandalf needs no excuse, to be
questioning the banality of evil...

My earlier post is/was inspired by Friday.
Progress is less prevalent, police raids are defined by more traditional familial bonds?
How I hope, hope that
questioning the banality of my LIBERATION IS just
the ability to search JSTOR for queer Studies?

Gandalf hates the head,
the makers of panhandling,
teenage heroin addicts are at Bridgeport,
then downtown.

...cont’d

Ima Read ... Ima Read ... Ima Read ...