ports submitted to him. In addition, Trump has made over 2,000 false and misleading statements in his first 355 days in office (Glenn Kessler and Meg Kelly, *The Washington Post*, "President Trump has made more than 2,000 false or misleading claims over 355 days," 2018). Trump frequently alters his positions. How can he make America great again when he cannot make up his own mind? As Republican Senator Lindsay Graham said, the President agreed to one deal on immigrant reform at 10:00 am and then nullified that two hours later (Paul McLeod, *Buzzfeed*, "Lindsey Graham Says Trump Was On Board With Bipartisan Immigration Deal, Until White House Staff Changed His Mind," 2018). Senator Schumer said: "negotiating with this White House is like negotiating with Jell-O; it's next to impossible" (Alexander Bolton, *The Hill*, "Schumer: Negotiating with Trump 'like negotiating with Jell-O,'" 2018).

Then there is our President's ineptitude in foreign affairs. Trump is unwelcome in Britain, our closest ally for over a century. He was condescending to Germany's Angela Merkel, argumentative with Australia's Prime Minister, plays school boy verbal confrontation with North Korea, has offended most of Africa, and ignores Russia's violations. In less than a year he has done more to undermine America's standing in the world than any other president in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Nixon had an enemies list, used the IRS to go after his political enemies, and conducted a secret war in Cambodia, yet Trump has a viciousness and mendacity for anyone who crosses him that equals Nixon's. Our Commander in Chief is both incompetent and malevolent. Spielberg's movie may have been his indirect way of commenting on our current President, but as he well knows his allusions to the connections between Nixon and Trump barely scratch the surface of the extraordinary Trump Presidency.

Ken Fuchsman's *biography may be found on page 280.* ❑

Reading and Teaching *Citizen: An American Lyric*

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Keywords: Rankine, teaching, name-of-the-father, holding-environment, impingement, structural-racism

Abstract: Reading Claudia Rankine's Citizen: An American Lyric (2014) with undergraduates in a comparative literature course both revealed and enacted the complexities of identity and its relationship to structural racism. The book's articulation and elaboration of individual encounters with racism deeply affected students, whether they had themselves experienced similar things or they felt implicated in the perpetuation of previously ill-understood processes. Students discussed the extent to which it is possible to simultaneously embrace our dependence on our culture of origin and to strike a new path that can escape its traps.

Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* is an extraordinary book. It traces with excruciating accuracy the outlines of everyday racism in American culture, and then goes straight to the core of its lived experience. The reader's core is irrevocably pierced as well, as my experience reading the book with undergraduates in my introductory comparative literature course, "The Nature of Narrative," demonstrated. This is the case whether you have yourself experienced the micro- and macro-aggressions detailed in Rankine's shatteringly beautiful prose poem or are surprised at the ubiquity of the aggression perpetrated by members of the dominant groups to which you yourself belong. Rankine's text is a multidimensional network of stories where, in the words of Zora Neale Hurston, repeated and varied throughout *Citizen*, "[One] feels most colored when [one] is thrown against a sharp white background" (124). Some of the students at my quintessential New England college perpetually experience the throwing, while others are the background against which is thrown.

Citizen documents with the hit-you-between-the-eyes unavoidability of great art: the insidious undermining of the very possibility of healthy dependence in our society. This is taking place on at least two levels, which may loosely be associated with the conventionally paternal and the conventionally maternal side of the developing self and, by extension, society. First, we are experiencing the breakdown of what Jacques Lacan called "The Name of the Father," the Symbolic Order that structures our institutions and our values. The most compelling evidence of this disintegration is the rampant proliferation of police killings of unarmed citizens, mostly of color, and—even more alarming—the nearly total failure of any legal instance to hold the officers accountable. While violence against black people, including that perpetrated by officers of the law, is nothing new in the United States, it has experienced what

appears to be a startling uptick in the years since the election of the first black president. Rankine's text enacts both the problem and resistance to it. The stories she tells in the book's latter chapters all have the same basic plot (the "stop-and-frisk" plot), the same outcome, and the same central character, this guy: "You are not the guy and still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description" (Rankine, 105).

Chapter VI is divided into something like obituaries, many of them explicitly "In memory of": Hurricane Katrina, Trayvon Martin, James Craig Anderson, the Jena Six, Mark Duggan, etc.; it culminates in a list that fades into infinity (Rankine, 2014, 134) and the searing words "because white men can't police their imagination, black people are dying" (135). But the very specificity of each story, as narrated by Rankine, and each one's tangible individual texture, counters the normalizing of the officers' exculpatory fear narrative and the iconization of the grieving victims. A single date is attached to each story, reminding us that on that day, the life of individual human beings changed forever.

The corrosive corollary to the perversion of the institution of "the law" has been the fraying of society's structuring web of values; we increasingly cannot depend on the usage of words being true to their supposed definition. Take "fairness," for example. Chapter II is an extended deconstruction of the notion of "fairness," appropriately set in the realm of sports. Specifically, it details the many patently unfair line-judge calls endured by the tennis star Serena Williams, her reactions—99% resignation, 1% outrage—and the backlash of those who are "enraged that they [Serena and her sister Venus] are there at all—graphite against a sharp white background" (Rankine, 26).

More personally, Rankine recounts story after story of her own experiences in a world supposedly committed to "equity," to treating each individual the same in similar situations. White America's colorblindness is exposed as the delusion it is when a grocery store clerk asked if her debit card is likely to be declined; this was after he had run her white friend's without a word (54). Or when the little girl who discovers that her airplane seat is next to Rankine's tells her mother "this is not what I expected," and the mother says "I see. I'll sit in the middle" (12). From the experience of recognition we associate with healthy individuality, the black individuals peopling Rankine's lyric are either invisible—mistaken for one another (14, 143)—or hypervisible, usually in the

context of white people blinded by fear at the sight of a black body in their white space (15, 18). The recognition shared by black individuals is the disappointed realization that "no amount of visibility will alter the ways in which one is perceived. Recognition of this lack might break you apart" (24).

An even deeper level of danger than that associated with the crumbling "Name of the Father," exists in the deterioration of our trust in what D. W. Winnicott calls a "holding environment," which allows us to develop into our own unique selves (Winnicott, "Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 41: 1960, 585-595). As Marilyn Charles notes in her symposium paper in this issue, humans begin in a state of "absolute dependence"; in this state one must be able to rely on the "attentive tracking" of a caregiver in order to master the crucial ability to "recognize internal affective signals as meaningful signs that can guide." Individuals who cannot depend on being "held" by society come to be susceptible to a terror that goes beyond anxiety to "primitive agony." This can be experienced in multiple ways, including the "loss of the sense of real" (Winnicott, "Fear of Breakdown," *The British School of Psychoanalysis*, 1970, 175-6). Rankine touches on such a radical loss when she contemplates the moments of simultaneous disbelief and immediate recognition of the familiar that accompany so many of her experiences with her white friends:

> You need your glasses to single out what you know is there because doubt is inexorable; you put on your glasses.... Each moment is like this—before it can be known, categorized as similar to another thing and dismissed, it has to be experienced, it has to be seen. Did she really just say that? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth? (9).

For Rankine and for many who do not have access to what should be a universal human right—the right to depend on fundamental care from their social world—the very possibility of "meaningful signs" is disrupted. Everyday encounters become simultaneously alien and all too familiar, unable to be integrated into a purposeful and positive life plan because they are both too close and too distant to be reflected upon.

Taken as a class, my students' reaction to read-

ing *Citizen* demonstrated the paradoxical combination of surprised shock and dismayed recognition that Rankine describes as part of her daily life. College students are in an intense stage of the individuation process, in which they "try new identities on for size in relation to increased awareness of the limits of any person's—particularly parents'—omniscience" (Marilyn Charles, "The Psychology of Dependence and Independence," in this issue, 2018). Especially in the United States, the college years are regarded as a heightened repetition of the "intermediate area" experience of the very young child who is just beginning to be able to recognize the self as distinct from, but connected to, the world around them (see Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," *Playing and Reality*, 1971, 2). But in order for young adults to be able to engage in intermediate-area playing, they must feel an ongoing sense of embeddedness in their home or family culture, and they must also be able to trust that their societal culture can withstand questioning by becoming elastic, not breaking and not retaliating (see Winnicott, "The Use of an Object and Relating Through Identifications," *Playing and Reality*, 1971, 91b). The ability of people in chronically oppressed groups to engage in such playing with identity is disrupted by the repeated impingement of micro-aggressions, which creates the necessity of layering over the core self—threatened by sometimes literal annihilation—with false selves that themselves function as a further erosion of identity.

When I assigned *Citizen* for my course, I knew that it would be a tough read for all involved, but the book seemed perfect for "The Nature of Narrative," where we explore how stories work and function in our lives. My class was relatively large (20 students), but thoroughly discussion-based. It was also quite young, with 12 first-years and the rest either sophomores or juniors; this made it all the more important to me to take the time to guide students through all stages and levels of the reading and interpretation process. The first day we discussed *Citizen*, I asked the students first to write down on small pieces of paper (without including their names) their reactions—their feelings—as they read the book. I then collected the slips of paper, divided the class into four groups of five students, and distributed the papers to everyone. Students then read aloud to their small groups the anonymous comment they'd received, and then the small groups discussed the reactions they'd heard. Next, I asked each group to give a succinct digest of their classmates' responses to the book, and I summarized their descriptions on the blackboard. Finally, the whole class discussed patterns

among the aggregate responses. We discovered that they tended to divide roughly into two groups: those who felt "validated" by Rankine's stories, and those who were "shocked" at the ubiquity of racism in our society, and the variety of ways in which it is expressed. My goal was to facilitate a process of feeling feelings, sharing feelings without much risk of overexposure, and then moving beyond feelings to analysis.

It was no surprise that my students from groups that are underrepresented in academia (primarily African American, Latina/o, Native American, and Asian American students, as well as those who are the first in their families to go to college) saw their experience mirrored in Rankine's stories. But despite the "relatability" of the lyric, the students initially found the reading process far from inspiring; on the contrary, they felt "tired," "numb," "empty," "exhausted." One student wrote that "Rankine's writing sounded like an echo, like a little voice in the back of your head that has grown tired over time." Another wrote of feeling "overwhelmed," in a way "more lost and confused" than before. For some, though, the book provoked new questions about their own lives, even through the "heartache": "At what point did we learn that being brown and intellectual is uppity? At what point did we start getting screened at airports, by police, by people uncomfortable at bus stops? At what point did this book unchain my heart?" More poignantly, one student wrote: "I wonder if I will always be seen against a white background?"

Perhaps more surprising was the reaction of my students from more dominant groups in our society (that is, white students from higher-income households whose families have had access to higher education for generations). The principal response here was "shock": "Reading this story made me feel out of it, or oblivious. I always thought I was knowledgeable about racism and how it manifests in our culture, but after reading *Citizen* I realized that I was missing a lot." A good number of these students reported physical sensations: one felt "queasy," another a "heaviness/weight... trapped in anger, sadness, disturbance, something very wrong." On a more emotional level, students described feelings of "shame" and "disillusionment" about their "country and the country's history," or, in another case, "alienation," because "the experience of invisibility... is one [they've] never had." For another student, the temptation seemed to arise to attribute the feelings that arose during reading to problems with the book, but admirably, the student re-

sisted the temptation: "Much of the story seemed disjointed and off-putting. This isn't a criticism, but it served to make me feel off balance reading it." This sense of being "off balance" surfaced multiple times; it was discomfiting for students to realize, as one put it, that "there's a lot they don't pick up on." Ideally, the jolt of realization was followed less by "guilt and defensiveness," which multiple students noted, and more by a kind of thoughtful self-reflection: "How do you read these kinds of stories without making it about yourself?"

Clearly, *Citizen* provoked many strong feelings and anguished questions in my students. It was not as if they did not know, on some level, about the phenomena detailed in Rankine's book; after all, the media have been full of stories of police brutality and other race-based bad behavior. But something about the exquisite narrative artistry with which the incidents were depicted honed their intellectual awareness to a sharper point and bored more deeply into their emotional depths. As my summary shows, however, the work was not yet done—students' feelings after reading the book were still raw and could easily lead to cynicism on the one side and defensiveness on the other. I hope that the subsequent discussion, and even more, the writing about Rankine's lyric that many undertook for their final paper, were able to transform reaction into contemplation, or, as Charles cites Wilfred Bion, potential "evasion" into "growth."

I will conclude with the results of this process for one student, who chose to juxtapose *Citizen* with another story in her paper. The other story is also set in a time of oppression, and has, like *Citizen*, some strikingly unconventional narrative elements. But, as my student discovered, it nonetheless ultimately retains the conventional dichotomy of good vs. evil, and celebrates the customary emotions and phenomena associated with such contexts: heroic individual sacrifice, tragic love, and artistic resistance. She values Rankine's writing because "She dives into the particulars, the many felt experiences contained within a single moment of feeling, and uncovers all the baggage that exists in the human heart. There is nothing triumphant, nothing deliciously extreme." By allowing "an unsettled feeling [to keep] the body front and center" (8), *Citizen* provides a much-needed alternative to what popular media, and even much literature, trains us to think we need in order to move forward; namely a positive attitude, a willingness to leave pain behind and overcome anger, and a conviction that a

belief in humanity will allow us simply to dissolve power divides among groups of humans.

Instead, Rankine makes us live in our ambivalence, and, as my brilliant student writer puts it, allows (or requires) us to do "the immense labor of being fully vulnerable. It is through this vulnerability that the reader, depending on their self-positioning, is either invited to see or is themselves seen." Experiencing such vulnerability can look like a return to dependence that could threaten individuality. But in the extended intermediate area of the aesthetic, engagement with dependence can become faceted and malleable, a possibility for a thoroughly new notion of what it means to live as an individual in relation to others.

I would like to thank the members of my "Nature of Narrative" class for teaching me more than I ever could have learned by reading alone.

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On White Racism: The Dehumanization of People of Color

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Keywords: Racism, Freud, psychoanalysis, splitting, displacement, scapegoating

Abstract: The author explores the difference between racism during aboriginal times and modern day racism. He looks at this from a psychoanalytic point of view. Racism is examined both broadly and specifically, as the author delves into white racism, which he considers to be the cornerstone of historical American racist attitudes