"Anne Saved My Life":

Conceptualizing Reading Characters as People Using *Anne of Green Gables*

by

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To Mama. I know we'll get to read the whole series again someday.

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Abstract

One of the ways in which amateur readers differ from professional readers in their understanding of texts is the way in which many of these readers encounter and talk about characters as if they were fully human instead of invented by an author. I term this mode of understanding character "reading characters as people." Reading characters as people in a text is dependent on unwriterliness, where "writerliness" refers to an author's apparent presence at work on the page. The more writerly a work, the more characters appear as the product of an agentive invention instead of as independent entities, and the less characters can be read as people. Writerliness is in part a function of the text itself. Works of literature that employ textual features encouraging a reader to pay attention to the author behind the scenes are hospitable to writerliness, and therefore inhospitable to reading characters as people. However, equating reading characters as people to a phenomenon from media studies, parasocial relationships, reveals that writerliness is also a function of the reader. Some readers approach a text hospitable to unwriterliness, and therefore hospitable to reading characters as people. In this way, the dual hospitalities of writer and of text to writerliness cultivate or prevent a reading of characters as people. This thesis begins by contextualizing reading characters as people in the scope of current academic character theory and positions this mode of understanding character as outside the purview of traditional literary scholarship. I then explore what reading characters as people looks like in practice, using blog posts about the *Anne of Green Gables* children's book series. Next, I demonstrate how reading characters as people is equivalent to parasocial relationships and extend the idea of hospitality of writerliness to readers as well as texts. This thesis closes by arguing that for many readers, reading characters as people is an important and often indispensable mode of reading.

Keywords: reading characters as people, writerliness, parasocial relationships, uncritical reading, children's literature, Young Adult literature

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Short Titles

Anne: Montgomery, L. M. *Anne of Green Gables*. Special Collector's ed., Bantam Books, 1908.

Harry: Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Scholastic, 1999.

Gatsby: Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Bantam Books, 1974.

Figures

Introduction

In his 2000 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed "Can 35 Million Book Buyers Be Wrong? Yes.," in which he presents a scathing dismissal of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, renowned literary critic Harold Bloom writes: "How to read 'Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone'? Why, very quickly, to begin with, perhaps also to make an end. Why read it? Presumably, if you cannot be persuaded to read anything better" (Bloom). Although Bloom implies early in the article that he will discuss a host of weaknesses of *Harry*, the specific problems he goes on to state—cliché, simplification of content, lack of "imaginative vision"—really boil down to one major flaw of the series in his eyes: the sin of accessibility. Bloom may pretend to uphold a nuanced schematization of what qualifies as valuable literature, one whose generosity allows for the membership of even some children's texts (he cites *The Wind in the Willows* and the *Alice in Wonderland* series as examples). In the end, though, he lets the cat out of the bag: "I will keep in mind that a host are reading [*Harry*] who simply will not read superior fare…. Is it better that they read Rowling than not read at all? Will they advance from Rowling to more difficult pleasures?" (Bloom) For Bloom, value is synonymous with difficulty, and *Harry* lack both.

Predictably, Bloom came under a great deal of fire for his evisceration of one of the best-selling series of all time, but not all protestors were adolescent fans. Instead, one category of those dissenting from Bloom were fellow literary scholars. In the collection of essays *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, Bloom's article is mentioned several times, with multiple academic contributors coming to the same conclusion: that in dismissing *Harry*, Bloom is missing something. To these scholars, Bloom's problem is that he does not recognize *Harry*'s complexity. They argue *Harry*'s difficulty exists after all, right under

Bloom's nose. *The Ivory Tower*'s introduction says as much, referring to "the literary merits" of the series as "the serious discussion we ought to be having," and even go so far as to blame the popularity of the series, and its subsequent commodification, for its failure to be properly recognized as possessing "great literary or artistic value . . . art for art's sake" (Whited 12; Whited 7).

The efforts of these scholars to defend children's literature are understandable, considering the scanty space the genre is offered in even the modern academic literary canon. On the University of Michigan English Language and Literature's website, for example, children's literature is not listed as an area of study. Given that genres as broad as travel are listed and there are over fifty fields categorized in all, this omission—neither a problem of scope, nor of specificity—serves as a stark example of the way literary studies has largely shunted children's literature to the side in pursuit of legitimized scholarship; in other words, it's not just Bloom.

Furthermore, scholars are correct in their insistence that Harold Bloom is wrong to dismiss *Harry* and that literary studies are wrong to dismiss children's literature. As a genre, these works are poignant, immediate, and deeply precious to an audience of millions globally. Children's literature evokes responses in its readers that manifest powerful and influential consequences in their lives. For evidence, look no farther than one of the University of Michigan's most popular English courses: Children's Literature (which, indeed, features Rowling's first *Harry* novel on its syllabus). It is remarkable, in fact, that a genre with such significant effects requires intellectual defense in literary studies at all; indeed, other academic fields like education and psychology welcome children's literature with open arms.

While their cause may be sympathetic, however, these academics that push for valuation of children's literature by critical standards are embarking on a hopeless mission. Bloom and his

colleagues, in insisting upon equating valuable literature with "difficult pleasures" and prizing complexity, obscurity, and sophisticated interpretation, have positioned the critical academy as precisely antithetical to texts like *Harry*, whose identity is grounded in accessibility. Scholars hoping to validate children's literature in the critical landscape therefore find themselves in the impossible position of having to justify the significance of these works within a framework of literary studies that was constructed to exclude them. After all, no matter how effectively Rowling uses language in sophisticated ways—like to "deploy signs of social and cultural difference" (Nel 269), as one scholar argues—any analysis of her linguistic strategy pales in comparison to even a cursory examination of a page of *Ulysses*. Forced into competition of a sport it's not designed to play, children's literature is doomed to failure.

Ironically, recent scholarship of this kind is doing more than simply wasting effort: it is actively damaging its own argument. The reason children's literature was flagged by these critics as deserving recognition in the first place extends beyond its ability to be proven complicated by the English academy, and critics who choose to defend the genre by engaging with traditional literary scholarship on its own terms check their most compelling arguments at the door. The structure of the academic landscape does not allow for the integration of children's' literature texts into scholarship; nor, frankly, are these works served well by being showered with critical attention.

If discussing children's literature—and non-academic literature generally—is at best fruitless (for Bloom) and at worst damaging (for the *Ivory Tower* crew), we are left with the problem of how to do justice and represent fairly the way in which millions of readers encounter these texts. For me, the assumption that 35 million readers read *Harry* only to finish it is one I am unwilling to believe. Bloom may be unable to articulate any program of reading apart from a

critical one with which readers may be engaging, but I am not. It is the project of my thesis to highlight and explore one such program of reading.

What Bloom may have thought of L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, first published in 1908, is anyone's guess; as far as I can tell, he did not spend much time in his Yale office reveling in the misadventures of 11-year-old red-headed orphan Anne Shirley. Perhaps he would have magnanimously extended Montgomery the same qualified praise his op-ed offered the children's literature of Kenneth Graheme and Lewis Carroll (while taking care, of course, to shelve these relatively superior pieces in a children's literature section far from his Shakespeare shrine). It's likely, though, that he would have given it a negative review. Even in Montgomery's own words, *Anne* is "a simple little tale," achieving nowhere near the difficulty literary critics look for when delineating good literature.

For our purposes of exploring texts outside the critical sphere, though, *Anne* is ideal; like the books of the *Harry Potter* series, *Anne* is one of the top selling books of all time at over 50 million copies, and Montgomery's novels have spawned film adaptations, radio and theater productions, and even a Japanese theme park. While *Harry*'s enormous cultural impact today makes it easy to lampoon Bloom and his similarly minded colleagues over snobbish criticism of the series, *Anne*'s cultural footprint does not perform that same work in her defense. Although her influence cannot be denied, and indeed is of similarly large magnitude as *Harry* among some circles, it exists as not an international explosion but as a quiet, persistent force operating for over a century. True, *Harry* and *Anne* have each produced a collection of multimedia cultural artifacts, but these products seem to belong to different categories. While blockbuster Disney films helped vault Rowling's works into ubiquity in popular culture, for example, the beloved *Anne of Green Gables* CBC miniseries seems to have done more to gratify those already familiar

with Anne from the books than to convert non-readers to Anne fandom; you're more likely to hear "I've never read the books, but I've watched the movies," in the context of Harry Potter than Anne Shirley. The consistency of *Anne*'s popularity, absent global branding campaigns and internationally-stocked merchandise to spur it on, ties the series more closely to the practice of reading than the *Harry* content empire allows for. For this reason, although the modern cultural capital of the young wizard makes his books fruitful framing for the importance of my project, *Anne* is of significant utility in the actual work of investigating the practices of amateur reading themselves. The way in which some readers encounter Anne Shirley can provide us answers to the questions, as Bloom might phrase them, of "How to read 'Anne of Green Gables,'" and "Why read it."

Chapter I: Reading Characters as People is an Expansion of the Academic Character Spectrum

For Cavendish, a community snuggled on the northern shore of Canada's Prince Edward Island, May flowers bring not the serenity of summer on a quiet island but instead hordes of tourists from all around the globe. As the childhood hometown of L. M. Montgomery, who famously wrote her character Anne Shirley into the setting, Cavendish boasts several Canadian National Historic Sites dedicated to the author and her works and attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each summer, an annual crowd that outnumbers the population of Prince Edward Island itself. From a historical viewpoint, pilgrimage to the site of Montgomery's hometown and especially to the remains of her childhood house, the Lucy Maud Montgomery's Cavendish Home, is only natural. Montgomery was a prolific and internationally recognized author working around the turn of the 20th century, and the area serves to commemorate both her footprint on Canada's literary history as well as the landscape of life on the Island over a hundred years ago. Such a site is a familiar way of celebrating an area's artistic and cultural roots; in the United States, locations like the Fitzgerald Museum at F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald's family home in Montgomery, Alabama or John Steinbeck's childhood home in Salinas, California serve similar purposes.

Despite the interest generated by sites commemorating famous authors, however, Montgomery's former house is not considered the primary Cavendish attraction. Instead, it finds itself shadowed by another famous home, one that headlines every brochure, propels the bulk of tourism to the Island, and ranks consistently among the top ten most-visited historic sites in all of Canada: the Green Gables Heritage Place. Green Gables, a farmhouse original to Montgomery's time and later restored by the Parks, was previously owned by the author's cousins and sits a short walk from the L. M. Montgomery Cavendish Home. Tourists visit Green Gables for the

same reason they might visit the site of Montgomery's home or, for that matter, why they might visit the former lodging of any famous person—to see where its occupants worked and slept, what they viewed out their windows, and what hills they climbed into town or raced down towards home. In fact, Green Gables differs from other such celebrity historical sites in only one aspect: its famous former occupant, Anne Shirley, is fictional. While Montgomery did spend time there as a child and was inspired by the setting, she neither lived nor wrote in the Green Gables house, and her most meaningful connection to the location is through the fiction of the character she placed within its walls. Restoration, tourism, and historicity of the building, then, has little to do with Montgomery's life. Green Gables belongs to Anne.

In addition to Green Gables, a great deal of Cavendish's other popular *Anne*-related attractions share a similar interest in fictional Anne, and a similar relative disinterest in the real-life Montgomery. The area offers tours of the surroundings through Anne's eyes, guiding visitors through landscapes like "Lovers Lane" and the "Lake of Shining Waters" that Anne names and explores in Montgomery's books. A carriage ride mimicking the one Anne takes on her way to meet her new family at Green Gables at the very beginning of the series is a featured attraction, and an "Avonlea Village," named for the pseudonym Montgomery gave Cavendish in the series, hosts buildings for food and shopping in the replications of those from Anne's time. Visitors can even meet Anne herself; scheduled activities with character actors dressed up as people from the *Anne* books take place daily at the Green Gables farm. Although signs of Montgomery's presence on the island are scattered throughout the area, they often exist in the shadow of Anne's fictional presence; a few small exhibits celebrating Montgomery in the Cavendish post office where she worked, for instance, are eclipsed by the bold lettering of the "Green Gables Post Office." Even the Prince Edward Island Department of Tourism website concedes to the primacy

of Anne's fictional life over her author's real one to sightseers, noting that "Those who love the books . . . visit the many sites that pay tribute to their favourite red-haired heroine," before adding as a near afterthought, "and her creator, Lucy Maud Montgomery" ("Green Gables Shore").

None of this is to say that Montgomery has not enjoyed her well-earned time in the sun. In addition to museums on the property of her other former residences elsewhere in Prince Edward Island and in Ontario, Montgomery, who was named a Canadian Person of National Historical Significance shortly after her death in 1942, boasts a namesake park in Toronto, multiple postage stamps, and even a Google Doodle. The remarkable phenomenon displayed by Anne's popularity in Cavendish, then, is not that the person of L. M. Montgomery has neglected to garner any attention, but that the person of Anne Shirley—who is not really a person at all—has generated enough to distract from her real-life author.

The apparent personhood of fictional Anne in the context of Cavendish tourism is particularly salient in the rhetoric tourists themselves use to describe their experience. This effect is perhaps most stark in the way that it exists in cognitive dissonance with tourists' understanding of Anne as a fictional character. In a post about her trip to the island, one such Cavendish visitor and blogger, Lucy, begins by introducing background information on the text of *Anne* to, appropriately, present it as a fictional work of an inventive author. As if fighting an urge to fall prey to asserting the reality of Anne, Lucy continues the project of emphasizing Anne's fictionality throughout the post, eagerly inserting reminders like "Green Gables Heritage Place . . . bears a bit of resemblance to the book's Matthew and Marilla," and "Prince Edward Island is as much a character in the book as Anne," in an attempt to keep fact separated from fiction. Coming to the moment of her Green Gables tour, though, Lucy cannot help but slip into

the language of reality in reference to Anne and her family: “There’s the cosy kitchen, the formal Victorian dining room, Marilla’s sewing room and Anne’s bedroom in the east gable,” she writes of the house, as if assigning ownership of a brick-and-mortar room to a fictional presence is only part of the work of routine inventory. It is true that Parks Canada has prepared the rooms of Green Gables as such to match details from the books and the reference to “Anne’s bedroom” could be interpreted to be as much a fantasy as an accurate label of how the Parks intended the space to be identified. Tellingly, though, Lucy attempts at this point in the blog to retain the reality check to which she has tried to adhere throughout the piece by conceding that “Green Gables might not be the ‘real’ house from the books.” By implying that there is a “real” house instead of merely words on a page with which to compare this version of Green Gables, Lucy reveals her underlying orientation towards behaving as if Anne were a person, even though she is intellectually aware of this fallacy (Dodsworth).

Lucy is not alone. Despite Anne’s fictional existence, tourist blogs written by fans of Montgomery's heroine consistently refer to the Green Gables location as if the character of Anne once had a real claim to it, calling it Anne’s “home” (Goodmurphy) or “her house” (“Anne of Green Gables Heritage Place, PEI: Worth the Trip?”) and marking “Matthew’s chair” within the building (“Green Gables”). One fan writes of her excitement as she neared “the very spot where Anne came to live with the Cuthberts” (Luna). As before, even Prince Edward Island's Department of Tourism honors the illusion of Anne’s reality, expressing on its webpage that “several museums and sites invite visitors to learn more about Anne,” as if there is anything more for visitors learn about Anne outside of her novels (“Green Gables Heritage Place”). What Cavendish and the Green Gables Shore of Prince Edward Island show us, then, is that imbuing

Anne with a degree of personhood, even subconsciously or against better judgement, is not an offbeat reaction but a consistent trend among visitors.

How is it that a fictional character can have a claim to reality so powerful that it rivals that of her author? How can mature, adult readers fully recognize the separation of text and reality while simultaneously speaking about and visiting the fictional sites of characters as if they really existed? Are these questions that the landscape of current literary character theory can help us understand, or have we struck upon a phenomenon outside the purview of academic study?

In his book *The One vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel,* Alex Woloch describes the field of character theory in literary studies as a conflict between two positions: "the authenticity of a character in-and-of-himself and the reduction of the character into the thematic or symbolic field" (Woloch 15), or the referential and formalist positions, respectively. Although the study of character is notably more complicated than merely these positions, this thesis will use these two theories as rough estimates of the range of academic discussion on the topic.

The formalist view holds that characters work only as structural aspects in a narrative, that there is nothing on the page but words. The referential position, on the other hand, honors characters as individual people and their actions in the text as mimetic of those of humans (Woloch). To describe the opposition between these two theories, Woloch uses in part an exchange between writer and critic William Gass and critic Irving Howe. In his 1971 book *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, Gass dedicated a snarky essay to lampooning a view of characters as anything other than a narrative function, famously pointing out that characters mimic people so minimally that we cannot assume that Henry James' character Mr. Cashmore even has a nose (Gass). This piece was met with an impassioned reply by Howe, in which he

leapt to the defense of the mimetic view of character, arguing in favor of "the spontaneous impulse to describe the moral conduct and psychological motives of characters in the only language we have available" (Howe).

As Woloch notes, the formalist and the referential position have often been presented in literary studies as opposite and mutually exclusive positions. Despite their antagonistic positioning, though, Woloch argues that these two theories are actually inextricable. Describing the relationship between the formalist and the referential position, Woloch writes,

> These two starkly contrasting—and equally convincing—perspectives are typical of theoretical positions about characters…ironically, the formalist and referential positions seem to rely on each other—both are generated only through the opposed position, which they configure into an extreme in order to reverse. … Characterization has been such a divisive question in twentieth-century literary theory—and has created recurrent disputes between humanist and structural (or mimetic and formal) positions—because the literary character is itself divided, always emerging at the juncture between structure and reference. (Woloch 17)

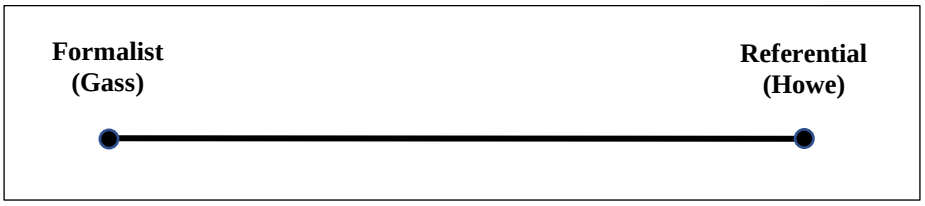
Woloch's solution to resolving the dilemma between opposition and mutual dependence of the formalist and the referential positions lies in his framework of character-space.[1] This thesis, though, constructs a different framework for linking these theories of character. In my framework, the formalist and the referential position lie as two points on one spectrum of ways of encountering characters. Except for the absolute view that a character is nothing but a group of words or the absolute view that a character is only a reference to humanity, every understanding of character features a mix of these viewpoints. Anyone who has winced at a

[1] Woloch's aforementioned book presents and explores this theory (Woloch).

violent Tarantino film scene while thinking, "It's just makeup" will resonate with the concept of harboring multiple, cognitively dissonant beliefs of the reality of a piece of art. Conceptualizing an understanding of character as a spectrum allows for the harboring of multiple opposing positions while simultaneously acknowledging their opposition.

A spectrum dictated by the academic understanding of character that Woloch outlines would feature the formalist and the referential position at each absolute end, from Gass' understanding of character to Howe's. It represents the infinite possible ways that readers can understand characters in the academic context, in varying degrees of formalist or referential.

Figure I. The academic spectrum of character understanding.



Although Gass and Howe's static perspectives on understanding character are useful for conceptualizing what each side of the spectrum entails, in practice most readers encounter different characters at different places on the spectrum. Instead of being a formalist reader, for instance, it is more likely that a reader encounters certain characters on the formalist side of the spectrum, and other characters on the referential side.

What dictates whether a character is understood by a reader as formalist or referential? I propose the concept of "writerliness" as an answer to this question. Writerliness, in my formulation, is an author's apparent presence at work on the page. For an example of writerliness in a text, consider the following passage from James Joyce's *Ulysses*:

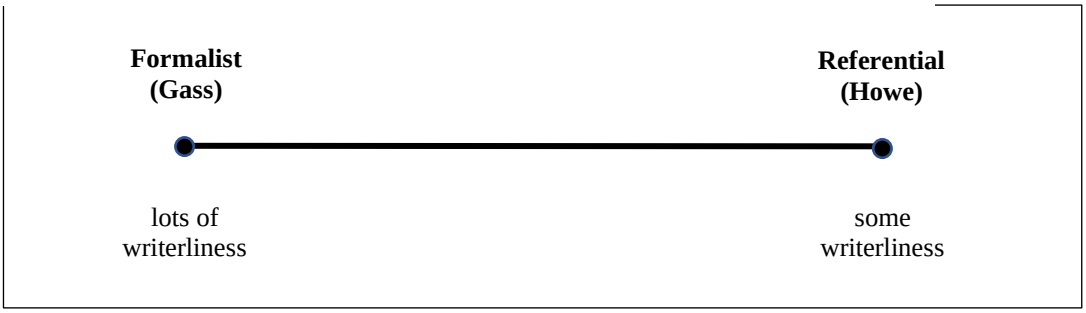
> Woodshadows floated silently by through the morning peace from the stairhead seaward where he gazed. Inshore and farther out the mirror of water whitened, spurned by lightshod hurrying feet. White breast of the dim sea. The twining stresses, two by two. A hand plucking the harpstrings merging their twining chords. Wavewhite wedded words shimmering on the dim tide.
>
> A cloud began to cover the sun slowly, shadowing the bay in deeper green. It lay behind him, a bowl of bitter waters. Fergus' song: I sang it alone in the house, holding down the long dark chords. Her door was open: she wanted to hear my music. Silent with awe and pity I went to her bedside. She was crying in her wretched bed. For those words, Stephen: love's bitter mystery. (Joyce 9)

This moment from Joyce's novel is spent with one of *Ulysses*' central characters, Stephen Dedalus. His mother has recently died, and the passage offers a glimpse into his consciousness as he reflects on lines from a Yeats play and remembers singing them while caring for his mother in her illness. Even as the text presents the fictional Stephen with these fictional struggles, though, this passage of *Ulysses* itself loudly broadcasts Joyce's presence as an author in constructing the physical world through the text. Phrases like "water whitened" and "wavewhite wedded words" draw our attention as intentionally placed by an author. Unfamiliar words like "woodshadows" and "lightshod" force readers to pause and do a double take: "Did Joyce make those up?" Even Stephen draws attention to his own reliance on Joyce by fixating on the construction of Yeats' lines themselves—"the twining stresses, two by two"—reminding readers of the concept of authorship so that we cannot quite fall under the spell of believing Stephen and his sorrows stand

independent of a creator. Here, the text of *Ulysses* makes apparent Joyce's presence at work on the page. This passage is writerly.

From this example of Stephen, we can begin to understand the connection between writerliness and ways of understanding characters. The more writerly a text—the greater appearance of the writer at work on the page—the more removed that text's characters are from humanity. Even in an achingly human moment, as Stephen reflects on his mother's suffering, the writerliness of the text impedes us from understanding Stephen as mimetic of a human being, as referential. Instead, we remain highly conscious of Stephen's as a pawn in Joyce's brilliant game of authorship, and his formalist role in Joyce's structure. In this way, writerliness yields formalist characters. As we move down the spectrum of understanding characters from formalist to referential, we can infer that the writerliness of those characters is diminishing accordingly.

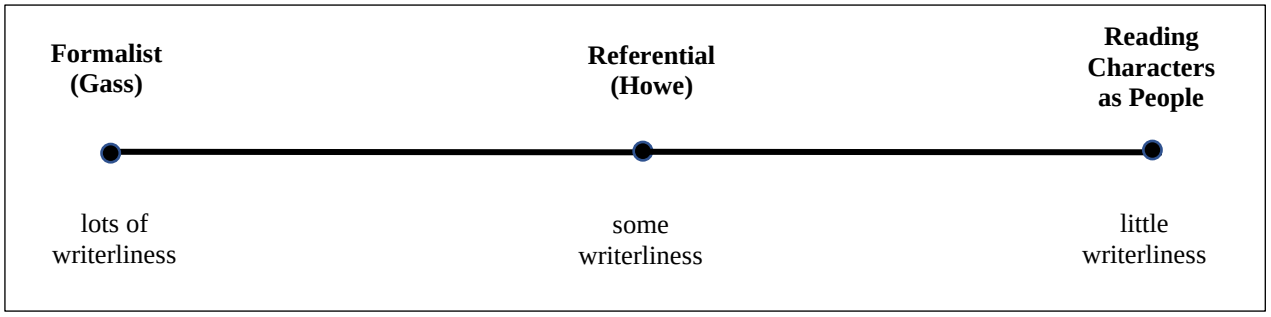
Figure II. The spectrum of character understanding is a function of writerliness.



If a measure of writerliness corresponds to ways of understanding character, therefore, English academia's version of the character spectrum marks the referential position as the most extreme absence of writerliness possible in a reading of a text. In the context of academic work, the most radical unwriterliness possible is one which yields referential characters.

This model of the character spectrum may indeed include the entire range of ways those in the field of literary studies encounters characters in the context of their academic work. Although the referential position may represent the academic extreme of unwriterliness, however, the referential position does not represent a complete absence of writerliness in a character. For every noun the referential theory uses to describe the relationship of characters to human beings—"imitation," "reference," "mimesis"—there is buried an implicit verb—"imitate," "refer," "mimic." As printed symbols, fictional characters have no agency to perform these verbs themselves. The language of the referential theory of character itself therefore begs the question: if characters are references to human beings, where is the agency of the referring sourced? Who is doing the referring? In this way, the referential theory necessarily evokes a Referrer whose agency compels these characters to imitate, to refer, and to mimic. We might call this Referrer an author. In this way, no matter how brilliantly a character works as a reference to human nature, the writer is still making his presence known through this reference, as if saying, "Look at what a wonderful writer of character I am." No matter how effectively referential characters mimic humanity, they are still writerly.

Figure III. The expanded spectrum of character understanding.



If true unwriterliness does not have a place on our current academic version of the character spectrum, then, the only way to examine the complete breadth of ways of understanding character is to depart from the academic and look to non-professional readers. For these readers, there is a way of understanding characters that results from true unwriterliness, that ascribes to characters full humanity outside of authorial influence: "reading characters as people." Incorporating reading experience beyond the academic in this way expands the spectrum of character understanding. The referential position no longer represents the most extreme interpretation of characters as human and of the writer as relatively invisible; it has shifted to the middle of the spectrum.

While a formalist reading of a character tends toward emphasis of the structural instead of human role of characters, virtually no formalist encounters with characters are from an absolutely structuralist perspective—such a view would preclude nearly all discussion of literature at large. In the same way, the vast majority of readers who read characters as people do not do so absolutely. These readers are not ignorant of the reality of an author, for example, and would never expect to run into characters on the street. The practice of reading characters as people gestures, therefore, not necessarily to the most extreme manifestation of the view, but to a general range of the spectrum that is closer to a complete unwriterliness than the referential position.

The fluidity inherent in a theoretical discussion of the referential position versus reading characters as people, while accurate, does nothing to make this division tangible. To get a sense of what the difference between these two ways of understanding character looks like in practice, then, consider the following two passages. Both are selections from North American novels at

the beginning of the twentieth century, and both are from a moment in the text where a main character first encounters a new acquaintance who is to become central to the rest of the plot.

> We walked through a high hallway into a bright rosycolored space, fragilely bound into the house by French windows at either end. The windows were ajar and gleaming white against the fresh grass outside that seemed to grow a little way into the house. A breeze blew through the room, blew curtains in at one end and out the other like pale flags, twisting them up toward the frosted wedding cake of the ceiling—and then rippled over the wine-colored rug, making a shadow on it as wind does on the sea. The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house. I must have stood for a few moments listening to the whip and snap of the curtains and the groan of a picture on the wall. Then there was a boom as Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room and the curtains and the rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor. (Fitzgerald 8)

> When he reached Bright River there was no sign of any train; he thought he was too early, so he tied his horse in the yard of the small Bright River hotel and went over to the station house. The long platform was almost deserted; the only living creature in sight being a girl who was sitting on a pile of shingles at the extreme end. Matthew, barely noting that it *was* a girl, sidled past her as quickly as possible without looking at her. Had he looked he could hardly have failed to notice the tense rigidity and expectation of her

> attitude and expression. She was sitting there waiting for something or somebody and, since sitting and waiting was the only thing to do just then, she sat and waited with all her might and main. (Montgomery 11)

A summary of each of these paragraphs might read as follows: "These sentences provide the first visual of a new character. We learn what they look like and what they are doing when other characters in the book first meet them."

For the first passage, taken from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* when Nick Carraway meets Daisy Buchanan, this summary would be a horrible misrepresentation of the paragraph's work. Even a skim of the sentences reveals the ornate decadence of the section that such outlining fails to capture. Fitzgerald pours simile and metaphor, apostrophe, and loaded imagery into his phrasing; the pictures "groan," the curtains are "like pale flags," the room is "fragilely bound." Particularly notable is the sensory overload in these sentences. The touch of the breeze fluttering everything in the room, the sound of the snapping curtains, the visually sharp colors of the deep red carpet, fresh green grass, and white dresses, and even the virtual taste of the wedding cake ceiling all contribute to an atmosphere of individually delicate but together overstimulating elements. All of these effects, furthermore, although initially appealing are upon closer examination reliant on illusion. The grass, for instance, "seemed to grow a little way into the house," but in reality remains outdoors in its more pedestrian usual location. The ballooning of the women's dresses and the twisting of the curtains, too, are immediately silenced with the closing of the window at the end of the paragraph, casting all of the previous sensory effects in a light of falsely heightened perception. Fitzgerald is pointing, with dazzling language, to the hollowness of Daisy and the equally delightful and artificial quality of material things.

Fitzgerald creates a captivatingly human character in depicting Daisy's shallow, fickle nature. Not only, though, does his phrasing ensure that readers find it nearly impossible to forget the genius of his work in the backdrop of his characters, he actually requires us to recognize it as such. To read this passage in *Gatsby* and to ignore the writerliness, as our quick summary did in focusing only on the introduction of Daisy instead of the way Fitzgerald introduces her, is to miss messages integral to Fitzgerald's work and to fundamentally misread the text. Not only does Fitzgerald makes his presence known in his novel, but he demands that it is acknowledged. In this way, Daisy Buchanan can be understood as referential. She imitates humanity, but readers never—or should never—forget that she has a Referrer.

The second passage comes from a moment in *Anne* in which Matthew Cuthbert meets Anne Shirley, the child he and his sister are planning to adopt. In comparison to its *Gatsby* counterpart, there is not much to say about it. The passage features no simile or metaphor, no poetic imagery, and barely even an adjective. Furthermore, our synopsis is fairly complete in representing the work the text is accomplishing. This section does indeed provide a bit about what Anne looks like and what she is doing when we first meet her, and unlike *Gatsby*, it does not provide anything else between the lines. Characterizing the passage as merely introducing characters is not turning a blind eye to any underlying allegory or metaphor, because Montgomery has not placed any allegory or metaphor in the text for us either to recognize or ignore in the first place. Where Fitzgerald's writing is a patchwork of character actions stitched together by authorial techniques, Montgomery's work hides her stitches so that she appears invisible in her text. Anne Shirley has no Referrer lurking in ostentatious sentence structure or loaded imagery; she is accompanied by no writerliness. Consequently, she is left to stand on her

own, free of mediation from an author. Where Daisy Buchanan is a reference to a fully dimensional person, Anne Shirley is one herself.

Our comparison between these two passages yields two insights. First, although the boundary between the referential position and reading characters as people may be invisible to theory, simply sitting down with these two excerpts in practice demonstrates that a disparity in writerliness and in character autonomy exists between the two positions.

Furthermore, textual examination of *Anne* in particular helps to demonstrate why the academic spectrum of character understanding ends at the referential position instead of incorporating reading characters as people. The language of academia is that of analysis, of *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, and the function of literary studies is to describe the strategies writers use in their work and the ways that these writers are at present on the page. In other words, the language of academia describes writerliness. It is for this reason that our discussion of the writerly *Gatsby* was so robust with academic vocabulary, while our examination of the unwriterly *Anne* consisted entirely of negative terms: it has *no* similes, *no* adjectives. While formal literary study is well-equipped to encounter texts and characters with writerliness like Stephen Dedalus or Daisy Buchanan—whether that value be as a structural narrative component or as a human imitation—it is not equipped to encounter characters without writerliness like Anne Shirley. And in not being equipped to encounter these characters, literary theory is not equipped to encounter the method of reading that these characters like Anne and their unwriterliness yield: reading character as people.

Anne, herself, does not wait for literary theory to acknowledge her. When Matthew finally notices her and learns she is the child he is to adopt, Anne leaps from her seat: "I suppose

you are Mr. Matthew Cuthburt of Green Gables?" she said in a peculiarly clear, sweet voice. "I'm very glad to see you" (Montgomery 11).

Like Anne, I am not waiting—or arguing—for literary studies to acknowledge unwriterly characters and the resulting ways of reading them. I do not aim to rewrite *The Oxford Definition of Literary Terms*. The language of academia and the fixation on writerliness has a great deal of value to offer readers, as formal literary study has thoroughly documented. Instead, like Anne, I hope to give these unwriterly characters and the readers who encounter them their own voice, and a vocabulary of terms like "writerliness" and "reading characters as people" so that they will be able to introduce themselves. Anne is "very glad" to see us and, as we will discover, literary studies should be very glad to see her too.

Chapter II: Reading Characters as People is a Recurring Practice

If *Anne*, with the unwriterliness of its text, offers its audience the opportunity to read characters as people, who are the readers who take the novel up on this offer, and what does that acceptance look like in practice? For insight on these questions, I turned to first-hand accounts of *Anne* readers via online blog posts. Using already constructed blog posts allows me to investigate the reading experiences of a far greater number of people than the time required to conduct individual interviews, for example, would allow. This project is interested in one particular mode of understanding characters over a broad swath of readers, not in the nuances of one particular reading experience; in other words, I am interested in a particular running thread between reading experiences, making quantity rather than in-depth quality the priority for my project.

Who reads Anne Shirley as a person? Sara, for one. In a post about *Anne*, blogger Sara writes of her own complicated relationship to anger and beauty, describing a childhood characterized by deep-rooted fury and a tense relationship with her frustrated, miserable mother who placed utmost priority upon "making herself beautiful, making our home beautiful." "I found words about feminine beauty and rage that resonated with me," Sara writes of Montgomery's novel. Anne's tantrums served to make her recognizable to Sara, encouraging the young girl to trust Anne and introducing Anne as a teacher to Sara. She writes of learning from Anne's deep appreciation and heightened awareness of beauty that "beauty seems to be the key, the key to being seen, to being noticed, to being taken seriously." As she read on in the *Anne* saga—beyond *Green Gables* and into the other books of the series in which Anne marries, births children, and fades gradually out of focus—lessons of the primacy of beauty became inextricably linked with domesticity for Sara. "[Anne] taught me that it was ok to be angry as a girl, but once

older, anger could be wrapped up with a tidy, beautiful bow, because motherhood and domesticity should make a good woman happy. I was hopeful" (Petersen).

The assumptions Sara relied on for this thinking as a young child are twofold. One assumption is tied to Anne's behavior. If Anne was angry as a young girl, Sara determined, it was okay for her to be angry also. If Anne did something, then Sara should do the same thing. The other assumption depends not upon Anne's behavior, but upon the mere fact of her worldly experience. Anne's motherhood and domesticity made her happy. Anne's anger melted away as she grew into womanhood; her husband and her children softened her and provided her fulfillment. And if Anne experienced this, Sara concluded, then she herself would experience this too. Sara was hopeful.

Notable is the way that Sara attributes the act of teaching here in both instances—whether through behavior or through experience—directly to Anne herself. An understanding of "Anne" in a formalist sense, as a collection of arbitrary English words, would not permit the phrasing "Anne taught me," with its internal logic of "if Anne … then I." A collection of words does not yell at Mrs. Rachel Lynde or marry Gilbert Blythe or enjoy fulfillment; it merely lies as symbols on a page of print. The "if Anne" clause would be failed, since the words that comprise "Anne" never accomplished or experienced anything. Certainly then, Sara's understanding of who or what "Anne" must extend beyond the literal.

Perhaps, instead, her phrasing speaks to a mimetic view of Anne. Is Sara encountering Anne as a referential character? The key to answering this question lies in the directness of the relationship Sara cites between herself and Anne. With the implicit logic of "if Anne … then I," Sara is placing her own personal pronoun and Anne's personal pronoun on equal footing, describing a scenario in which she and Anne are the only two people contributing to the

experience. What this reasoning ignores is a third party—an author—contributing to the dynamic between Sara and Anne. In her comments here, Sara ignores the fact that Anne is not an independent authority over her own consciousness and experience, as is Sara herself, but instead is propped up by Montgomery.

Indeed, it would be incongruent to acknowledge Montgomery here; the presence of an author is fundamentally inconsistent with the logic of Sara's learning from Anne. Incorporating into her reading Montgomery's influence on Anne would be to conceive of Anne as a product of a motivated author instead of a person in her own right. Not only did Anne's experiences never happen, they were constructed to serve a particular purpose. A consideration of what incentive Montgomery might have to place Anne's fight with Mrs. Rachel Lynde at a particular moment in the narrative or how she might be creating rage in Anne to push her own particular point instantly pollutes the authenticity of Anne's experiences and therefore of her lessons. "If Anne … then I" ignores any mediation between Anne and Sara through a third party of Montgomery. At this moment in Sara's blog post, Anne is freestanding and in identifying Anne as a teacher, Sara is reading Anne as a person.

Identifying Anne's role as an instructor and mentor is a common theme among many such blog posts. I encountered dozens of pieces with titles such as, "10 Life Lessons We've All Learned from Anne Shirley," and "Don't Be a Drama Queen, and Other Lessons in Friendship from Anne Shirley" (Pacheco; Bogel). These lists are stocked with both types of learning that Sara's blog post witnesses: that inspired by both Anne's behavior and by her experience. Behavior lessons are exemplified by blogger Anne, who asserts "Give freely" as a lesson in her blog post based on Anne Shirley's generous gift of chocolate to her best friend Diana (Bogel), and Rachele who cites lessons like, "Own your anger" and, "But don't be afraid to apologize

once your temper has cooled," inspired by the way Anne lashes out at Mrs. Rachel Lynde's criticism (Hollingsworth). Other lessons based on the simple existence of Anne's experience are exemplified by bloggers like Maija, who writes, "We're all slaves to fashion," citing Anne's insistence on a dress with puffed sleeves as the source of this insight (Hoggett) and Lindsey, who writes, "Every girl needs a father or father figure to love them and make them feel like the light of the world" (Thompson) based on Anne's reliance on her father figure, Matthew, in the novel. Likewise Kristian, in perhaps the most animated of the examples, writes of the shared humiliation of Anne's inadvertently dying her hair green and her own embarrassing experience of vomiting on a dog: "If Anne could get over accidental green hair, I could get over my stunning digestive pyrotechnics" (Colyard).

As in Sara's post, both types of lessons learned from Anne depend upon an underlying "if Anne … then I" logic—sometimes even made explicit, as by Kristian—that reveals their understanding of Anne to be freestanding. To extract lessons from Anne's experience as these readers do requires them to abandon, or at least forget, Anne's mediation through a potentially biased author. If these bloggers are reading Anne as a direct, unmediated teacher, then they are reading her as a person. In understanding character in this way, then, Sara is not alone.

While many of the bloggers authoring these list posts describe their understanding of Anne as a teacher in a static way, Sara's post tracks a more dynamic relationship to Anne. After describing her encounter with Anne as a child, Sara's blog pivots to her continued acquaintance with Anne as an adult and a mother, and signals a significant shift in her relationship to Anne; for her, encountering Anne as a teacher represents not a developed relationship to Anne but merely an introduction to her.

As Sara grows older, has children of her own, and returns both to the *Anne* series and to her relationship with Anne herself, she begins to turn a more critical eye towards Anne's behavior. "Reading Anne now, I'm troubled that she is better suited for beauty and happiness once she adheres to certain societal expectations," she writes, "as if only marriage and a man's approval would calm her down, quell her anger" (Petersen). Sara locates the root of this problem partially in Anne's own willingness to be subdued, to be "submerged in the happy waters of domesticity." In frustration, she draws a comparison to herself: "I want something more complex, less confined by the traditional expectations of how a woman's life *should* turn out. I am not content to be beautiful, calm, and sweet like Anne … I [want] more" (Petersen).

This comparison signals a shift in Sara's way of relating to Anne. While the "If Anne … then I" logic from understanding Anne as a teacher remains intact, Sara completes the second clause not with imitation, but with judgement. If Anne was content to be a quiet, subdued, domestic wife, then Sara does not want to be like her. Moreover, Sara's anger suggests that she feels that if Anne allowed herself to be confined by traditional expectations, she made the wrong choice. No longer is Anne a mentor, to be imitated and wholeheartedly trusted. Instead, Anne is a fair target for criticism, for judgement, for comparison to Sara herself. To Sara, Anne is now a peer.

As it turns out, many readers similarly encounter Anne as someone to critique, appraise, and make judgments about as if she were a peer. "I was furious with Anne of Green Gables for being so ungrateful for her red braids," Bea writes, referring to her personal childhood struggle with alopecia (Davenport) and echoing Sara's sentiments of anger towards Anne. The result of other bloggers' critiques of Anne, though, is a more positive judgement. Although noting that "Anne has many faults," one blogger goes on to write, "It is what I especially admire about

Anne, her ability to change a bad situation into a romantic one with her imagination" (Purple Kitty 2001). Admiration, in fact, is a common reaction in many readers to Anne's behavior. Kara touches on a similar theme: "It's [Anne's] ability to learn from [bad choices] and see beyond them that is admirable." "I admired Anne because she was so outspoken and did not care what other people thougth [sic] of her," notes Niina. "I wish I would have been that brave in [sic] the same age" (Niskanen). Mattie writes, "I hope one day to be as wise as Anne … I think it's important to not only find inspiration from those older than us, but also from those younger…" (Midwest Mattie Mae).

Others assess Anne not in pursuit of making a value judgement on her character, but instead in service of providing a general diagnosis of her behavior. In her blog post "Anne of Green Gables Is Obviously Bisexual," for example, Heather uses Anne's friendship with Diana Barry as evidence to triumphantly conclude, "Anne Shirley is *very clearly* bisexual … Case closed" (Hogan). Based on Anne's hyperactive and impulsive behavior, Emily writes confidently, "Anne is an incredible face for ADD" (Wenstrom). And Amy notes the similarities between Anne and her own daughter who had been diagnosed with ADHD, proclaiming: "[My daughter is] an utterly textbook case of how ADHD-Combined type presents itself in girls. And so, of course, is Anne Shirley" (Weir).

Although the dynamics of the relationships may differ, an understanding of Anne as a peer relies upon the same "if Anne … then me" logic that an understanding of Anne as a teacher does, and therefore is dependent upon the same lack of mediation between the character and the reader. Of course, Anne is a group of words and cannot perform any action. Nevertheless, even to take the mimetic view and to accept for the sake of reading that she resembles a human and that she therefore did marry and have children, for example, in the way a person would is not

enough to allow Anne to incur judgement about her actions in the way that encountering Anne as a peer describes. After all, it was Montgomery who took action to marry Anne and to make her birth children. To express anger or admiration towards Anne for doing something requires not just the existence of the actions Anne takes, as the mimetic view grants, but for them to be initiated by Anne herself instead of by her author. In the same way, Anne can only be diagnosed with a condition or assigned a sexuality if she is a fully dimensional person; otherwise, she would merely be an imitation of someone with that quality. To understand Anne as a peer, the cardboard cutout version of her, performing actions as she is lugged here and there by Montgomery, must instead stand alone.

Furthermore, the evidence of these blogs points not only to these readers' experiences of reading characters as people but also to the accuracy of the spectrum model in allowing for complexity and cognitive dissonance in readers' encounters with characters. As much as reading Anne as a teacher or a peer seems not to allow for any mediation between Anne and the reader—not to allow for any writerliness at all—many of the blog posts simultaneously acknowledge this mediation. For example, these bloggers commonly reference Montgomery's role in creating Anne, referring to her as some variation of "Montgomery's heroine" (Colyard; Fallon; Hollingsworth) even as they diagnose her with ADHD or draw real inspiration from her fictional life. In blogs criticizing Anne as a peer, this flexibility of understanding character and writerliness is particularly salient. Although Sara directs anger towards Anne and her willingness to be submerged in domesticity, she also expresses frustration towards the "book": " I'm angry that when I was a young girl, books taught me that to be a good woman is to be a quiet woman, a content woman, a woman subdued" (Petersen). Even as Sara blames Anne for the outcome of her life, she blames the narrative Anne is a prop in—and therefore implicitly blames Anne's author—

almost in the same breath. In Sara's reading, Anne simultaneously has agency and no agency, is concurrently both an author's creation and her own independent being. Sara is reading Anne as a person, but her understanding of Anne's character is not at the most extreme pole; instead, her reading lies on the spectrum.

Chapter III: Reading Characters as People is a Function of Reciprocal Hospitalities

Although reading characters as people may be a term invented in this thesis, a similar concept—that of parasocial relationships—has already been articulated and studied for over half a decade in the context of television and visual media. For more insight into our developing conceptualization of reading characters as people, it will be useful for us to investigate the work that has been done in this parallel field.

The phenomenon of parasocial relationships has been subject to confusion and imprecision since its original conception in 1956. In their foundational article, Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl identified and coined two terms that continue to inspire and structure current media and communications research: "parasocial interaction" and "parasocial relationships." Parasocial interaction as defined by Horton and Wohl is perceived face-to-face interaction between the audience and the performer in a mass media context. This interaction is illusory and often relies upon cues from the performer, who may "duplicat[es] the gestures, conversational style, and milieu of an informal face-to-face gathering" (Horton and Wohl 217). Horton and Wohl focused their discussion particularly on televised talk show hosts to illustrate this concept, but research on parasocial interaction has since been broadened to examine the experience in other media contexts, including broadcast news, reality and fictional television shows, vlogs, and even social media accounts.[2]

Horton and Wohl also alluded to a different parasocial phenomenon, the parasocial relationship, that represents a long-term, unreciprocated intimacy between a persona—talk show hosts, in their example—and his or her audience. However, their work does not use the term "parasocial relationship" consistently; at times they describe the relationship between a media

[2] For some examples of this variety of media contexts in which parasocial interaction has been measured, see Rubin et al.; Dibble and Rosaen; Cummins and Cui; Xiang et al.; and Liu et al.

performer and his or her audience during parasocial interaction as a parasocial relationship, therefore countering its characterization as long-term and extending beyond the moment of media exposure. In short, although Horton and Wohl articulated the existence of both illusions of momentary mutual interaction with characters and persisting one-sided relationships to characters, they made no move to clearly differentiate them from each other or to give each parasocial phenomenon its own territory.

The initial blurriness between these two categories of phenomena has spawned a body of parasocial research that is varying, inconsistent, and even sometimes clumsy in the way it conceptualizes parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships. Either by consolidating the two into one category such as "media interaction" (Nordlund) or "interpersonal involvement" (Rubin et al.) or by maintaining an inextricable link between the two such that parasocial relationships do not exist without an initiating parasocial interaction experience, scholars have blurred the lines between these two concepts and muddied the waters for future research. Rubin et al.'s 1985 Parasocial Interaction Scale, for instance, was designed "to create a useful and reliable empirical scale of parasocial interaction" in the context of newscasters. Indeed, a few of its measures, such as, "I sometimes make remarks to my favorite newscaster during the newscast" and "When I'm watching the newscast, I feel as if I am a part of their group" work as an appropriate metric of Horton and Wohl's initial definition of parasocial interaction. Other items, though, like "The news program shows me what the newscasters are like" and "I think my favorite newscaster is like an old friend" are better suited to measuring a parasocial relationship, the long-term relationship with the newscaster that exists externally to the media itself (Rubin et al. 166). The tremendous impact and reliance on this scale, which is even now the most frequently used instrument in parasocial interaction research (Dibble et al.) and often serves as a

model for the design of other metrics, underscores the degree to which the two phenomena have been conflated, or at least associated so closely so as to minimize any distinction between them.

Since this type of ambiguity is so prevalent in the study of these concepts, for clarity I want to pause here to clarify my use of parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships in this project as two separate concepts.[3] In the words of an article titled "Parasocial Interaction and Parasocial Relationship: Conceptual Clarification and a Critical Assessment of Measures,"[4]

> Parasocial interaction refers to a faux sense of mutual awareness that can only occur during [exposure]. In contrast, parasocial relationship refers to a longer-term association that may begin to develop during [exposure], but also extends beyond the media exposure situation . . . parasocial relationships can develop without any parasocial interaction. Such might be the case for an [audience member] who observes a character that does . . . not directly address the [audience member] (e.g., most fictional characters). Thus, even though no illusory mutual awareness is occurring (no parasocial interaction), the [audience member] can still form a longer-term association with the character (parasocial relationship). (Dibble et al. 25)

Making this distinction is crucial to my project for two reasons. First, divorcing parasocial relationships from parasocial interaction allows for parasocial relationships to be examined in the context of literature and reading experience. Research on parasocial relationships and parasocial interaction has largely avoided books altogether; even the definition of the concepts from Dibble et al. that I used above was written with a bias towards visual media and against printed words, requiring substitution of "exposure" for "viewing" and "audience

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[3] This is not to say, of course, that the two are not related. For the purposes of this project, though, I am interested in the differences in these experiences, not their similarities.

[4] The relevance of an article with such a title sixty years after Horton and Wohl's initial work reveals a great deal about the chaotic state of the field.

member" for "viewer" to make the description applicable to books. Moreover, my extension of parasocial relationships to books is not particularly unwarranted by scholarship; the gap in parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships research in literature exists even while scholars concede that there is no reason why parasocial relationships may not develop between readers and book characters in theory (Liebers and Schramm).

Why, then, have readers' parasocial relationships not been studied in practice? One reason for this is likely due to the persistent association between parasocial relationships and parasocial interaction. Because parasocial interaction is the audience's perception of mutual awareness and engagement with the media character, it is heavily reliant on visual and auditory cues that generally do not accompany the printed words of books. Without these elements, books are much less likely to offer an illusion of immediacy, and therefore are unlikely candidates for promoting parasocial interaction. Media like television, radio, and online social platforms, in comparison, offer much more fertile ground for parasocial interaction research. The same, of course, is not true of parasocial relationships, which in existing outside of media exposure are often independent of any appearance of immediacy occurring within an exposure situation and can exist without this illusion.

When parasocial relationships are lumped together with parasocial interaction, though the concept inherits parasocial interaction's irrelevance to books, and both concepts are written off as inapplicable to literature. Although it may seem plausible from a theoretical standpoint that readers can have parasocial relationships with characters, scholarship that blends the two concepts prevents this research from being explored in any real way; parasocial interaction is best suited to non-print media, and parasocial relationships, lacking independence from parasocial interaction as a concept, are resultantly dragged away from application to literature.

Giving the concept of parasocial relationships its own space allows it to be freed from the limitations of parasocial interaction and permits it to be placed in the realm of books and readers.

Liberating parasocial relationships from the methodological limitations of parasocial interaction has another consequence as well. Parasocial interaction, with its requirement of a certain semblance of mutual awareness, is definitionally dependent on the actions of the character or performer of the media: his or her diction, body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, etc. In other words, the phenomenon is initiated and controlled by the performer (Horton and Strauss; Hartmann and Goldhoorn), making parasocial interaction a response: to acting techniques, to production choices, to what the audience is hearing or viewing. Given the association between parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships, it is therefore unsurprising that parasocial relationships, too, have been conceptualized as a response to media. Research questions about parasocial relationships have concerned the qualities of media that encourage an audience to respond with a parasocial relationship, such as character attractiveness and realism. Research has also investigated the qualities of audience members that may contribute to the formation of parasocial relationships as a response to media encounters, such as shyness, and loneliness, and a love of television. In this way, parasocial relationships have been conceptualized as a response to media, just as parasocial interactions are.

Notably, though, in contrast to parasocial interactions, there is nothing inherent in parasocial relationships that makes them a response, or at least *only* a response. True, the formation of parasocial relationships is in part indebted to the qualities of the media itself, as is consistent with current conceptualization. Sitcom characters with certain features or scenes featuring specific lighting schemes, for example, are qualities that have the potential to dictate whether a viewer responds with a parasocial relationship to the media's characters, that make the

media hospitable or inhospitable to the formation of parasocial relationships. In this way, the formation of parasocial relationships is indeed influenced by the media's hospitality to their formation.

The term "relationship" in parasocial relationship, though, indicates the interplay of two parties: the media and the reader. Unlike parasocial interactions, parasocial relationships are dictated by not only the hospitality of the media to their formation, but the hospitality of the viewer. No matter how hospitable media may be to the formation of parasocial relationships, viewers who refuse to seek these relationships in media and who instead act in ways to resist and shut down such reactions will prevent any such relationship from forming. By isolating parasocial relationships from parasocial interaction, then, we arrive at a fundamental duality that was obfuscated by parasocial interaction's more limited dimension: the formation of parasocial relationships is dependent on both the hospitality of the media and the hospitality of the audience to parasocial relationships.

Once making the distinction between parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships has given us theoretical permission to apply parasocial relationships to literature, it does not take a rocket scientist—or even a parasocial theorist—to demonstrate the concept's relevance. The same language used to describe parasocial relationships rings immediately true in the context of books and their readers. What audiences of Anne Shirley have we encountered thus far if not those who feel like they know her, admire her, want her to be their friend, or look to her for advice—all characteristics of parasocial relationships? While a term for "reading characters as people" in the world of literature may not have existed before this thesis, media studies has long had one for this concept in the context of film and television. Reading characters as people and having a parasocial relationship with a character are one and the same.

Establishing this equivalency is crucial to our investigation of reading characters as people. In conceptualizing understandings of character as resulting from varying degrees of writerliness, we have examined writerliness as a text-initiated phenomenon, using close readings of the way prose attracts and requires attention to its author as a metric; in other words, we have examined the hospitality of texts to writerliness. *Ulysses* and *Gatsby* are both hospitable to writerliness in the way that they underline the presence of an author through their prose.

Understanding reading characters as people as a parasocial relationship, though, encourages us to consider that the writerliness of a text and the resulting understanding of character as equally dependent on the hospitality of readers. Writerliness, as an author's apparent presence at work on the page, relies not only on the actual texture of the words but additionally on the willingness and ability of the reader to perceive this texture as implying an author's presence. No matter how strongly the text may suggest the presence of an author, a reader who is blind to these cues will see no appearance of one. Instead, these readers' hospitality to unwriterliness will cause them to encounter the work's characters as unmediated people.

On the flip side, an unwriterly text—one that lacks hints in the prose itself as to an author at work—does not necessarily lead to a reading of characters as people. Readers who are hospitable to writerliness even in the face of an unwriterly text, and who are unwilling to accept lack of an author's apparent presence in the features of a text itself, will prevail against any unwriterliness of the text. These readers will fail to read characters as people, no matter what the text itself encourages.

For evidence, look no further than a group who have made hospitality to writerliness their livelihood: academics. Our own close reading may have found the text of *Anne* decidedly unwriterly—recall the sparse phrasing, functional imagery, and absence of literary devices.

However, such qualities have not discouraged some determined readers from digging up writerliness in it anyway. André Narbonne's article "Carlylean Sentiment and the Platonic Triad in Anne of Green Gables," in fact, refers to this same spare quality of the text as in fact "overblown, imaginative realism" that presents "a burlesque on Romantic attitudes" (Narbonne 433), thus rescuing the prose from a unwriterly fate. Van Czerny takes a similar tack, noting the way that Montgomery exemplifies the Moerae through Anne's character (Czerny). To these readers, Anne is explicitly the tool of Montgomery with mimetic, if not formalist, utility. We can be assured from our examination of *Anne* that this writerliness is not sourced in the text itself. Instead, it comes from the reader's approach to the novel, which in this case is a scholarly perspective determined to uncover writerliness because it is the object of their study. If readers who are hospitable to writerliness are not insisting upon it, like these scholars and like the *Ivory Tower* scholars in regard to *Harry*, then they are refusing any interest in texts without it, like Bloom. Either way, these readers' hospitality to writerliness prevails in preventing them from reading characters as people, regardless of how hospitable the text may be to such a reading.

A readers' role in determining the writerliness of a text can work the opposite way, too—not by providing hospitality of writerliness to an unwriterly text, but by providing hospitality of unwriterliness to a writerly text. Based on our close reading of *Gatsby*, we identified some writerliness in the features of the text itself, enough to understand Daisy Buchanan as a character referencing humanity but still retaining enough authorship to prevent independence from a Referrer. If a text's hospitality to writerliness was the only factor in its characters' placements on the character spectrum, Daisy Buchanan would be understood universally as referential. Since parasocial relationships have directed our attention to the reciprocal hospitalities between text and reader necessary for reading characters as people, though, we know that readers' hospitality

to writerliness also yields influence over how characters are understood. We should expect to see an understanding of Daisy Buchanan varying depending on the hospitality of readers to writerliness.

And indeed, even a cursory skim of online blog posts about *Gatsby* reveals that some readers encounter Daisy much the same way they encounter Anne—as a person. Surprising as it may be to those who have read the novel, readers' relationships to Daisy as a person can be positive. One such reader, blogger Katey, writes, "I fell in love … with Daisy Buchanan, the beautiful, floaty, carefree woman—mysterious and funny, bubbly and sensual, attainable but somehow still out of reach" (Katey). In describing Daisy and her relationship to the character, Katey uses some of the same admiring, idolizing language that we have seen other bloggers use in regard to Anne Shirley—language that signals reading characters as people, and language that, this time, is certainly not welcomed by the text itself.

At times in her post, Katey seems to be aware of and even apologetic for the friction between the text's presentation of Daisy and her own understanding. She provides a caveat to her original interpretation of Daisy, that after rereading it she "figured out that the novel wasn't as romantic as I originally thought," and appears to be on her way to denouncing her understanding of Daisy as a person in favor of a more abstract, mimetic understanding of the character. Even the title of her blog, "Why Daisy Buchanan Sucks and We Should Start Imagining People Complexly," appears to allude to the shallowness of Daisy's character as reflective of humanity but not independent of an author seeking to highlight that trait.

And indeed, Katey does move towards a more negative perception of Daisy throughout the blog. However, although she assigns Daisy more disapproval and unfavorable judgement, Katey continues to use language of assessment and critique of Daisy as an independent character

that reveals that her reading retains Daisy's personhood. "[Daisy] is flighty to a fault," Katey writes. "She plays with … hearts and leads each man into thinking he's the one—yet she has no intention of following through with any of the illusions she's created." She concludes, "These women who idolize Daisy, as I did, are falling in love with a person who might quite literally be the worst role model in American literature" (Katey). For all her recognition of Daisy's faults, Katey ends the blog post asserting that these faults are shortcomings of Daisy as a person instead of pieces of commentary from Fitzgerald as an author. Katey may disapprove of Daisy as a role model, but she still maintains in her writing that Daisy is person enough to be a potential role model at all. Daisy has shifted from a teacher to a peer in Katey's eyes, but she continues to read her as a person.

Katey's almost determined reading of Daisy as a person speaks to the role of the reader in producing writerliness in a text. *Gatsby*'s prose is layered enough to imply mediation of Fitzgerald between Daisy and the reader, to offer apparent presence of Fitzgerald in his text. In this way, the text of *Gatsby* is hospitable to writerliness; it welcomes readers to pick up on this presence and to become aware of Fitzgerald working behind the scenes. We know from her reading of Daisy as a person, though, that Katey disregards this hospitality and refuses the text's invitation to writerliness. Instead, she approaches the text with her own hospitality of unwriterliness and emerges with a reading of Daisy as a person.

Understanding the way that readers influence the writerliness of a work by offering awareness, or lack thereof, to the author's presence helps to contextualize the slippery aspect of character understanding as on a spectrum. One a work is published, the text cannot change, so if the physical words were the only factor affecting writerliness, understanding of a character would be fixed immovably somewhere on the scale from formalist to reading characters as

people, and every literary character would have a designated location. Stephen Dedalus would be forever relegated to a position at the formalist end, while Anne Shirley would be stationed near reading characters as people.

Instead, though, the nuances of personal approaches to literature allow not only for characters' positions to waver depending on who reads them, but even for the same reader to encounter a character in multiple ways. Years of decoding the difficult language of *Ulysses*, for example, may allow a familiar reader to look past the writerliness of the text and see more mimicry of humanity in Stephen than first ascertained, moving him rightward on the character spectrum. Likewise, a reader who is familiar with L. M. Montgomery's personal history may approach her characters primed to spot echoes of the author's own private tragedies and life experiences in her novel, and may understand Anne not as a freestanding person, but as inspired by Montgomery's life, shifting Anne leftwards on the character spectrum from personhood to referential. We need parasocial relationships, then, to help us construct a dimensional understanding of how reading characters as people comes about: as a result of the way a readers' hospitality to writerliness or to unwriterliness meets that of a text.

At this point, though, it seems as if readers hold all the power. A text may be writerly or unwriterly but what does it matter? The hospitality to writerliness or unwriterliness—and resulting hospitality or inhospitality to reading characters as people—always holds the trump card. In the end, it is the reader who determines the writerliness of a work, and the reader who therefore determines how the text's characters will be understood. If readers like Katey can read characters as people simply by being hospitable to unwriterliness, then, what value does unwriterliness of texts themselves have? Why is it important that *Anne* is hospitable to

unwriterliness and therefore to reading characters as people, when this is an outcome that readers can produce on their own?

Both Sara, in her reading of *Anne*, and Katey, in her reading of *Gatsby*, understand the characters of their respective novels as people. The key difference, though, is that Sara's reading is sanctioned by the text, whereas Katey's is not. Montgomery, in avoiding writerliness in her text, makes reading characters as people an appropriate interpretation of her writing. Fitzgerald, on the other hand, peppers his novel with writerly cues surrounding Daisy, cues that are intended to remind readers of his presence. To ignore his presence as a mediator between the reader and Daisy and to treat her as a human in her own right is to misread the text.

This, then, is why the hospitality of a text to writerliness matters: it serves as a source of legitimacy. While the hospitality of readers determines the outcome of the reading—what understanding of character they will take away from the work—the hospitality of texts determines the fairness of the reading—whether it is a reasonable interpretation of the text, or whether it is a misreading. In the end, although readers' hospitality to unwriterliness provides the material for this thesis, *Anne*'s hospitality to unwriterliness legitimizes it. No scholar is likely to take seriously an undergraduate thesis defending a reading of Daisy Buchanan or Stephen Dedalus as human beings independent of their makers. Fitzgerald and Joyce have produced writerly texts; they have not sanctioned such a reading. A thesis defending a reading of Anne Shirley as a person, though, is safe from intellectual dismissal. Montgomery gave us a text hospitable to unwriterliness and therefore to reading characters as people. Why not read Anne as a person? If Montgomery has made no moves to stop us, who else has the right to do so?

Conclusion

The way a reader understands the characters of a text is a function of the writerliness of the text, where writerliness refers to an author's apparent presence at work on the page. The more writerly a work, the more characters appear as the product of an agentive invention instead of as independent entities, and the less characters can be read as people, as freestanding individuals of their own consciousness and experiences. Writerliness is in part a function of the text itself. Some texts employ features encouraging a reader to pay attention to the author behind the scenes. These works are hospitable to writerliness, hospitable to the appearance of the author on the page, which makes their characters appear obviously tethered to this author. Therefore, they are inhospitable to an understanding of characters as freestanding people. Other texts are devoid of any writerly features, and in fact leave little to comment in by way of literary analysis. These works are hospitable to unwriterliness, in that they encourage readers to forget any author exists as a world builder. These texts are therefore hospitable to reading characters as people.

However, equating reading characters as people to a phenomenon from media studies, parasocial relationships, reveals that writerliness is also a function of the reader. Some readers approach a text hospitable to writerliness, looking for evidence of a writer on the page regardless of whether or not the text offers clues suggesting an author's presence. These readers ultimately fail to read characters as people, because they insist upon being aware of a controlling author in the shadow of every character. Other readers are inhospitable to writerliness, blind to any features of the text that indicate its scenes or characters are the construction of an author. These readers emerge with understandings of characters as people, even when to do so is unfounded and unsanctioned by the text. In this way, the reciprocal hospitalities of texts and of readers to

writerliness—or to unwriterliness—work together to provide readings of characters and to legitimize those readings.

In creating the terms "reading characters as people," "writerliness," and "reciprocal hospitalities," this thesis has invented a vocabulary for talking about a broad category of literature. Literary studies are founded upon around writerly works, works that are what Bloom would term "difficult." This means that this field, although immensely useful and necessary in its own right, definitionally excludes unwriterly texts. Some of these unwriterly works are such as a result to hospitality of the text itself to unwriterliness. It is in part these texts, children's literature like *Anne* and *Harry* as well as those of other "simple" genres like Young Adult or some fantasy, that the study of reading characters as people rescues for consideration and closer examination.

From our exploration of reciprocal hospitalities, though, we also know that some unwriterly works are such as a result of the hospitality to unwriterliness of their readers. It is a common complaint of professors of first-year undergraduate English courses that they constantly have to remind students not to speak about characters as if they were real people. In his essay "Uncritical Reading," Michael Warner refers to this problem, combining it in more generally into a category of ways that students "read in all the ways they aren't supposed to" (Warner 13). In nothing this, Warner is referring in part to this category of works—works that are rendered unwriterly because of the hospitable to unwriterliness of their readers, works that are themselves writerly but that find themselves approached by unwriterly readers. The study of reading characters as people also rescues for consideration these texts, made uncritical by their readers. Although their reading may not be sanctioned by a hospitality to unwriterliness from the text, the concept of reading characters as people provides them an avenue of exploration.

One question, though, still remains about those who read characters as people: why choose hospitality to unwriterliness? We know, after all, why scholars choose hospitality to writerliness: not only because their career depends upon it but also because they seek to unpack the complexity of ideas that writerliness can convey. But what motivation can readers have in choosing to approach texts hospitable to unwriterliness and therefore choosing to read characters as people? What value can reading characters as people offer?

In one sense, the answer is simple. On my first night away from home at college, I remember unpacking the last few items: some clothes, a couple notebooks, and one package of pink cardboard I called the Special Box. Inside the Special Box was three items: *Miss Rumphius*, a picture book by Barbara Cooney, *Fifteen*, a children's novel by Beverly Cleary, and *Anne of Green Gables* by L. M. Montgomery. Whenever I felt lonely or scared, whenever I was sick or exhausted, whenever I wanted to snuggle up in my covers and forget about the world, I turned to my Special Box. Reading characters as people without writerliness or authorial agency, reading them just as they are in their worlds, is a source of comfort and sweetness and uncomplicated pleasure for me. To read Anne as a real person is to read Anne's world as a real world, a world simultaneously divorced from and distracting from my own problems. As a person, Anne herself never changes or grows apart or moves on without you. She's always waiting on the shelf and always available to spend time with you. All of this value of my Special Box to this day relies on reading characters as people, and I rely on it. And I have a feeling I am not alone in doing so.

Reading characters as people has more utility than just pleasure, though. Our blog post evidence has described the multiple roles of Anne in different readers' lives. Anne is a teacher, is a peer, is a friend and foe alike. Running through all these responses, though, is a common undercurrent. It's an undercurrent that blogger Tiff refers to in the context of recovering from her

severe depression: "Anne taught me that there is color in the world, even when it looks black and white. She showed me that it's OK to be a sensitive soul. She helped me discover and accept all the parts of myself I was fighting against. Anne's love for the beauty around her saved me from the dark." It's an undercurrent that author Jen Sookfong Lee writes of in her account of her relationship to Anne: "Even she, the irrepressible Anne, couldn't stop the war from coming. There was nothing she could have done, in the same way there was nothing I could have done to prevent my father from dying and nothing I can do now to change the decisions I made during the last years of my marriage. Acceptance, perhaps, is the antidote whenever we fear disaster." It's an undercurrent that writer C. E. Gatchalian articulates in his essay, "Anne Shirley Was the Best Friend a Queer Brown Boy Could Have": "I—a little brown Filipinx boy who had just started feeling the first vague stirrings of queer desire … needed something to empower me, something to help me survive. Anne Shirley came along at just the right time. She offered solace and hope; she showed a way out. Perhaps, through smarts and hard work, I, too, could carve out space for myself in the world" (Gatchalian). Near the end of his essay, Gatchalian makes this common theme explicit: "Anne saved my life."

It is no coincidence that so many of the bloggers, and so many readers at large, who encounter Anne as a person are female, are queer, are of color, are adolescent. Since reading characters as people requires the hospitality of the reader, readers who encounter characters as people are a self-selecting group. Those to whom a relationship with Anne Shirley would be inconsequential have no reason to approach the novel with an openness to unwriterliness and to reading characters as people; why should they form a relationship with Anne? They have no need. Those readers who open *Anne* desperately seeking a source of hope, of comfort, of guidance, even of critique against which to mold their own values, though, and those readers

who therefore make themselves hospitable to reading characters as people, are readers who need those characters—those people—in their lives.

Not every reader who has ever harbored a relationship with a character as if they were a person has been subject to extreme marginalization or trauma, of course. But in fact, this speaks even more to the importance of reading characters as people as a primary mode of understanding character. Those hospitable to reading characters as people and who let these characters into their lives are all in some ways healing and hoping, seeking a little bit of guidance or a touch of companionship. Reading characters as people is a sign of a need, and a reaching out to fill it. If not strictly an academic value, unwriterly texts and ways of encountering them offer a distinct human one.

I write this concluding paragraph in March 2020, sitting on a couch in the middle of a strange and frightening world. Coronavirus is running rampant as a global pandemic. Classes are online, commencement is cancelled, and my thesis cohort will celebrate the completion of our projects over BlueJeans. Outside my home, nearly all businesses are shuttered and unemployment numbers rise every day. Neighbors shout to each other six feet apart. I know that Anne Shirley cannot not help humanity develop a vaccine or manufacture ventilators. I know that she will not help my father find work or keep my grandparents safe. Still, though, after I have submitted this thesis and stowed my laptop away, I know I will turn to her because I also know that for her, providing hope and healing and maybe even a little pleasure is not a tall order. She's done it many times before.

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