Dr. Katherine (Kate) Scarth

Teaching Philosophy

In grade five, my eyes were open to the possibilities of education. At our teacher's lead, the class collaboratively wrote a play about the sinking of the *S.S. Florizel* off the coast of our native Newfoundland. Not only did we become playwrights, but also set designers, sound technicians, box office assistants, and actors. Along the way we learned about the *Florizel*'s involvement in World War I and the seal hunt, and finally its conversion into a passenger ship. We became the key players in the fateful night of the sinking: the flawed captain, the heroic fishermen, and the doomed little girl whose grieving grandfather later erected a Peter Pan statue in her and her favorite character's honor. We visited the statue and the beach off of which the ship went down. All this instilled in me a deep awareness and interest in the intersection of place and story.

This experience has shaped my research and teaching interests in critical literary geography. I have developed critical literary geography teaching strategies which allow students' learning to be interdisciplinary—not only does the combination of geography and literature inherently cross disciplines but space provides a way into discussions of culture and society from a whole range of angles including urban form, gender, race, and class. This approach also allows for tailoring according to learning styles. For example, I have students modify or create textual maps of literary spaces, act out characters' movements through various significant locations, or explore an historical setting virtually (this could include virtual tours of London streets or of a country estate). By critically exploring literature and geography simultaneously in the classroom, students can think about the nature and politics of representation, specifically the ways literature reflects very particular versions of material, social, and conceptual spaces back to the reader. I also encourage students to analyze the details and practicalities of the represented world, and they thus gain an enhanced insight into the historical world that literature represents.

In order to model critical literary geography pedagogy, I use mapping as a teaching strategy. For example, when teaching Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* for "The English Nineteenth Century Novel," I gave students "maps" of key areas in the novel: a floor plan approximating that of the fictional country estate, Mansfield Park; a map of the local region; and a map of the transatlantic area. Students modified the maps to reflect how the protagonist, Fanny Price, interacts with spaces and how various factors like gender, rank/class, and family dynamics shape these experiences. Meanwhile, in a first-year seminar on Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, students chose a space in the novel—an apartment, a train station, the metropolis as a whole—and created a map that reflected how power dynamics, in terms of race, gender, and/or nationality, played out in that space. In order to create these maps, students had to consider the physicality and functionality of specific spaces, such as an early nineteenth-century country house or Piccadilly underground station in the 1950s. Students adjusted room dimensions, added furniture, and traced characters' movement or lack thereof. Group discussion and the maps themselves revealed that students improved their understanding of the time and place that the novels were representing. By following a character's experience in a space, students brought themselves closer to the lived life of that character. For instance, students noticed Fanny's limited mobility compared to the other characters, driving home the greater agency enjoyed by her older, more affluent relatives. Mapping, moreover, allowed students' learning to be interdisciplinary—they could approach the text from various angles simultaneously by

considering how a wider context of religion and social rank shaped Fanny's experience of home. Mapping also allows for tailoring according to learning styles. In the lessons described above, students were able to interpret the concept of a "map" broadly so that some produced highly visual maps, including detailed drawings of rooms complete with furniture, decorations, and people; others carefully labeled their maps with words; and others used the maps I had given them as a basis for talking through Fanny's movements in space. My research-led teaching strategies thereby empower students with varied learning styles and interests to become engaged literary and social critics. I also use academic writing skills as teaching strategies in the humanities classroom. Students use an academic writing skill—brainstorming, devising a thesis statement, or incorporating secondary criticism—as a way of exploring that week's assigned literary or theoretical text. This integrated approach allows students to hone their reading, writing, and critical abilities simultaneously.

I have implemented these two approaches at undergraduate and graduate levels. I taught for two years on the first-year undergraduate core course, "Modes of Reading," an introduction to literary criticism and theory. I have experience teaching academic writing to first-year students in the humanities and the sciences as a seminar tutor for "Modes of Reading" and as an occasional instructor for "Professional Skills and Development for the Computer Sciences." I have moreover consistently sought out opportunities to gain teaching experience relating to my research interests in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature and critical literary geography in courses including "Society, Economics and Empire in the British Novel, 1688-1815" (graduate), "The English Nineteenth-Century Novel," "The Romantic-Period Novel," "Literature of the Modern World," and "The Eighteenth Century." I would look forward to developing courses on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature; Romanticism; the novel; the city in literature; critical literary geography; environmental criticism; and women's writing.