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WHAT IS SO ORDINARY ABOUT LITERARY STUDIES?

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BY

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ABSTRACT

WHAT IS SO ORDINARY ABOUT LITERARY STUDIES?

BY ERIN ONARECKER

This thesis investigates ordinary language philosophy as it pertains to literary studies following what has been called the post-critical turn. I analyze Toril Moi's book *Revolution of the Ordinary,* wherein she argues that ordinary language philosophy fundamentally alters the way language is understood. According to Moi, ordinary language philosophy has the potential to drastically change how literary studies are conducted. Accepting Moi's challenge, I examine how this reimagining of language actually functions in the context of literary studies. I begin by analyzing Moi's own account of Wittgenstein before evaluating what "ordinary" literary scholarship looks like in practice against critical theory. Finally, I assess how incorporating the values of ordinary language practitioners into undergraduate pedagogy would affect students, and ask what the post-critical turn means for the undergraduate experience. This thesis responds to Moi's provocation that ordinary language philosophy will revolutionize literary studies, and in so doing, considers the effects upon undergraduate students' education.

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To Professor Panagia, who introduced me to Revolution of the Ordinary *and ordinary language philosophy. This project could not have happened without you and the readings from fall 2019. Thank you for providing me an opportunity that was instrumental to my time at UCLA!*

To my professors at Palomar College who inspired me, encouraged me, emboldened me to move forward with my education. I cannot express the impact you have had on my life, and your dearness to my heart. Thank you for all that you have done for me.

Lastly: To my partner, James, who has lovingly read through each draft of my thesis and given many reassuring hugs. I don't think I could have done it without you. You make my world a better place. I love you.

Contents

Introduction

This thesis will examine the recent post-critical turn in literary studies, focusing on ordinary language philosophy as articulated by Toril Moi in her book, *Revolution of the Ordinary.* Though I first encountered Moi's text in a political science department, her text occupies a central position in my thesis because of its preoccupation with ordinary language philosophy's effect on literary studies. Moi's work is one of provocation, and my thesis is, in part, a response to being provoked. I was led to ask questions such as, "What does it mean for an undergraduate student that there might be a turn to the ordinary?" and "Would this challenge previous ideas of what it means to have "read" a piece of literature?" Because Moi desires to move from the theoretical to the ordinary—even claiming that a revolution is underway—her writing is underscored by a sense of immediacy. This immediacy only amplifies concerns surrounding ordinary language philosophy within literary studies, and whether or not this philosophy reconfigured in the wake of the post-critical turn is one that will benefit the undergraduate student.

The post-critical turn names the impatience with the language and methods of theory. Elizabeth Anker and Rita Felski explain: "the "post-" of post-critique denotes a complex temporality: an attempt to explore fresh ways of interpreting literary and cultural texts that acknowledges, nonetheless, its inevitable dependency on the very practices it is questioning."[1] In this era of post-critique, authors such as Toril Moi and Amanda Anderson have turned to ordinary language philosophy, as evidenced by their collaborative project with Rita Felski: *Character: Three Inquiries into Literary Studies,* which was written in 2019. In their text's

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[1] Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski, *Critique and Postcritique* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2017), 1.

introduction, the scholars explain, "Despite [their] different intellectual commitments, [they] share a dissatisfaction with the frameworks that have dominated literary studies over the last few decades."[2] Beyond merely being dissatisfied with traditional frameworks, Anderson, Felski, and Moi also express their reluctance to "lay down requirements for what literary critics must do; [they] wish rather to encourage explorations."[3] They are willing to provide guidelines, but not particular requirements.[4] The scholars' lack of requirements is uniquely ordinary, which we can identify as being so because they will not prescribe a way of reading, interacting with texts, or in this instance, analyzing characters. Whether in their individual or collaborative work, Anderson, Felski, and Moi use Wittgensteinian language as it has been reinterpreted for use within literary studies.[5] It is because of the interest in post-critique and alternative practices of literary studies that ordinary language philosophy is no longer a term relegated to philosophy departments.

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[2] Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski, and Toril Moi, *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 2.

[3] Ibid., 22.

[4] Ibid.

[5] The turn to ordinary language philosophy by literary scholars, however, is not unique to Anderson, Felski, and Moi. In the turn from previous modes of critique, ordinary language philosophy is gaining traction; for example, the American Comparative Literature Association offers a seminar titled "Ordinary Language Philosophy and Literary Studies" because "scholarly interest in Ordinary Language Philosophy […] has been on the rise," and "scholars have been suggesting that [ordinary language philosophy] deserves a more prominent place in literary studies than it has so far received." American Comparative Literature Association, accessed 18 February 2021, https://bit.ly/3k403JD.

In fact, Toril Moi's *Revolution of the Ordinary* is a seminal text for the ordinary language philosophy movement in literary studies, not only translocating it from philosophy departments, but in doing so, also providing the groundwork for how ordinary language philosophy can be used in literary studies. Moi sees the ordinary as means of reinvigorating literary studies, and she advances the ordinary as a radical alternative to traditional methods of reading texts and conducting scholarship within literary studies. She rejects theory in favor of scholarship led by curiosity, and language that is imbued with meaning through use. Moi, however, does not provide new methods or approaches. Instead, she provides her readers with Wittgensteinian ordinary language philosophy, which encourages them to completely reimagine the way they use and understand language. Moi denounces philosophical language that, she argues, cannot really be used at all and is merely relegated to philosophers and their metaphysics. Instead she advocates for language that ties together words and the world. In this new conception of language, it prompts questions like those raised by Anker and Felski: "What critique has made possible, […] and what are their consequences for literary studies and for the humanities more generally?"[6] Literary studies is confronted by a philosophical movement that wants to reimagine the way language is used and understood, and in effect, move away from the discipline's theoretical underpinnings entirely.

Unique to *Revolution of the Ordinary* is Moi's reluctance to advance her own arguments: instead, she reiterates Ludwig Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin, and Stanley Cavell. She echoes these philosophers and imagines how ordinary language philosophy might be practiced within literary studies. Moi acts as a kind of ventriloquist, using her own voice to amplify these other voices. She takes up ordinary language philosophy and, as her title indicates, suggests that it, unto itself,

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[6] Anker and Felski, 2.

would be revolutionary within literary studies. However, this is surprising given that many philosophy departments have otherwise discarded ordinary language philosophy. Lynd Forguson traces the rise and fall of ordinary language philosophy in the 20th century. It had gained traction in the 1930s and, as documented in his article "Oxford and the "Epidemic" of Ordinary Language Philosophy," that, "By the mid-1960s […] this way of doing philosophy was already in decline."[7] Additionally, Forguson regards "[o]rdinary language philosophy [… as a] a historical movement, rather than an active force in contemporary philosophical discussion."[8] Forguson clarifies that "Oxford philosophy," which is often interchanged with ordinary language philosophy, "was indeed considered by many established (and establishment) philosophers to be a kind of disease of philosophy."[9]

Moi resurrects ordinary language philosophy in the name of literary studies. In doing so, she reiterates the philosophy, rather than advancing any particular argument regarding ordinary language philosophy in literary studies, while nonetheless insisting that it is revolutionary. The transition from critique to post-critique, accompanied by the turn to ordinary language philosophy, led me as an undergraduate scholar, to question the legitimacy of whether or not there will be a revolution of the ordinary within literary studies. Furthermore, if there is a turn to the ordinary, what would that mean for the discipline, and particularly literary studies within the confines of the university undergraduate classroom? In what follows, I discuss Moi's text to answer these questions. The essay proceeds in three parts. Firstly, I will look at Moi's claims of

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[7] Lynd Forguson, "Oxford and the "Epidemic" of Ordinary Language Philosophy," *The Monist* 51, no. 3 (July 2001): 325.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 326.

revolution, how it differs from other forms of revolution, and what it means to have a literary revolution. Secondly, I will look at the ordinary as a central component of Moi's argument, and attempt to better clarify what she means by "ordinary." Finally, I will evaluate the politics of the ordinary in undergraduate classrooms and how it compares to other critical approaches within literary studies.

Part I: Revolution

Toril Moi's text *Revolution of the Ordinary* reimagines the way that language is understood and literary studies are conducted. Moi's choice to name her text *Revolution of the Ordinary* thus prompts the question, what does she mean by revolution? Additionally, how is the ordinary in fact revolutionary? This portion of my essay will address conceptualizations of revolution and Moi's own definition of revolution. It will, furthermore, address what Moi's revolution is, in fact, resisting. In asking these questions, I will also attend to how this revolution affects literary studies.

A "revolution of the ordinary" is unlike social and political revolutions; this revolution doesn't involve questions of the state or governmental violence; it does not involve a violent uprising of the oppressed against their oppressors, nor of the citizen against the state. Moi's revolution is one of language, and one that affects literary studies. In this literary revolution, "literature becomes […] a temporary, ludic *resistance* to received modes of explanation—to the disciplinary frameworks, the structures of belief, within which we learned those hard facts in the first place."[10] Moi's metaphor of revolution turns from social and political structures to, instead, the foundations of language that underpin literature and the mechanisms through which literature is understood. Moreover, it is also important to clarify the difference between the terms rebellion and revolution, which, according to Christopher Castiglia, are often understood "as synonymous,

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[10] Sacvan Bercovitch, "The Function of the Literary in a Time of Cultural Studies," in *"Culture" and the Problem of the Disciplines*, ed. John Carlos Rowe (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 70.

both signifying resistance to tyranny undertaken by a downtrodden people."[11] He continues,

proposing that we understand rebellion's "orientation *against*" to fit with the model of resistance,

thereby making space for revolution to "mean differently, to represent not a movement *against*

but *toward* an imagined world that does not yet exist."[12] The difference that exists between

rebellion and revolution, then, is that rebellion resists the current conditions, whereas a

revolution attempts to not only change the conditions but in doing so, envisions an alternative

future. According to this model, revolution both provides a vision of different conditions and

enables movement toward an imagined world—this standard is one that can be used to evaluate

Moi's conditions for revolution.

Ordinary language philosophy is predicated on "use," and this is important because

""Use" is not a common feature shared by all words and utterances. It is rather the condition of

possibility of having words and utterances in the first place. It's because there is use that there is

meaning."[13] Use is of foremost importance because only through understanding the use can one

begin to understand meaning. This approach moves away from a philosophy of meaning

whereby meaning is divorced from use. In this way, Moi insists,

> If we want to fight sexism, racism, or challenge capitalism, we need to understand
> sexism, racism, or capitalism. (If we want to launch a revolution, we need to learn the
> language of revolution.) Ordinary language philosophy […] leaves us free to work on

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[11] Christopher Castiglia, "Revolution Is a Fiction: The Way We Read (Early American

Literature) Now," *Early American Literature* 51, no. 2 (2016): 405.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Toril Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press,

2017), 36.

power in all its manifestations, without falling victim to the philosophical confusions that will arise from conventional theory's craving for generality.[14]

Ordinary language philosophy closes the gap that previously existed in language. Practitioners are no longer critically set apart from their object of study, but they are able to adopt the language and understand its use. By understanding the use, and therein the meaning, one is no longer making critical observations based in generality but they are able to understand the conditions of use, and thus engage with a newfound specificity of language. Ordinary language philosophy is the language of revolution because it is only through the clarity and specificity that any radical change can develop within and move outside of literary studies.

Moi's revolution seeks to uphold Wittgenstein's vision for clarity. Clarity is the foremost value of the revolution. To achieve clarity, one must move away from generality and into specificity, which is accomplished by using ordinary language. Rather than using ordinary language philosophy to revolutionize philosophy, however, Moi turns her attention to literary studies. While clarity is the value of the revolution, literary studies is the site of the revolutionary turn. For Moi, ordinary language philosophy allows literary scholars to reinterpret how reading is conducted. Moi justifies her revolution not as "philosophical therapy in order to offer a new *theory* of anything, but rather to get clear on beliefs and assumptions that hold us captive, that prevent us from moving on. There is no contradiction between such a philosophical project and the wish to change the world."[15] In this way, Moi is opposing the current conditions and providing the grounds for revolution. Her revolution is one that rejects the theoretical and philosophical models of language that divorce meaning from use. She envisions an alternative

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[14] Ibid.,160.

[15] Ibid., 158.

future wherein ordinary language philosophy is used to garner clarity and specificity within literary studies. The revolution began with Wittgenstein in philosophy departments and is furthered by Moi in literary studies. Moreover, Moi is advocating a revolution of language that not only affects literary scholarship but a revolution of language that is also capable of having a radical effect in the world.

Wittgenstein's revolutionary vision of language provides the foundation for Moi's literary revolution. Following Wittgenstein, Moi "tells us not to ask about naming, but to look at the use."[16] This overturns centuries of thought regarding language wherein meaning is established through the process of naming and signification. However, Wittgenstein's "radical point [… is that] there is no meaning "behind" the use […] there is only meaning in use."[17] The idea that there is nothing concealed by language eliminates the ongoing gap between the "name and thing" or name and object that is present within other philosophies of language.[18] While many philosophies of language conceive of and engage with this gap ("theories of "the mark," or the "empty signifier""[19]), such as the "post-Saussurean tradition [and ...] Augustinianism," this rejection of "the gap" distinguishes Wittgensteinian philosophy as something entirely different.[20] To understand ordinary language philosophy, Moi tells us that we must recognize that we "can't understand what work a sentence does, or what work a word does in a sentence, until we understand the work the sentence does in the specific circumstances in which it has been

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[16] Ibid., 29.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 35.

[20] Ibid., 43.

uttered."[21] Wittgensteinian philosophy is revolutionary in its pivot from previous philosophical

understandings of language and the radical implications of understanding meaning through use.

This is a sharp turn from other understandings of language, such as Adamic language and

the Augustinian vision of language. Wittgenstein's philosophy of language re-envisions how

language is understood, and, for Moi, how language is practiced. This revolution, then, desires to

reject and overturn hegemonic understandings of language. While Wittgenstein isolates the

Augustinian vision of language as a starting point, the precedent of naming to create meaning in

language can be traced to Genesis, which was written roughly around 6th Century BC, predating

Augustine:[22]

> So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the
> air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man
> called every living creature, that was its name.[23]

God ostensibly brought the world into being via language, and thus instructed Adam to name

creatures so they might be uniquely identified. This Adamic vision of language claims "language

is so perfect it brings things into being […] that is, without losing any of the qualities of the thing

in the thing's reflection, in the name."[24] It is because of the prelapsarian conditions of the world

that Adamic naming claims language can simultaneously exist apart from the things themselves

but can also bring them into being and perfectly capture them in their entirety. Adamic naming

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[21] Ibid., 34.

[22] R.N. Whybray, "Genesis," in *The Oxford Bible Commentary: The Pentateuch*, eds. John

Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 55.

[23] Gn 2:19 (NRSV).

[24] Alexander Stern, *The Fall of Language*: *Benjamin and Wittgenstein on Meaning* (Cambridge:

Harvard University Press, 2019), 56.

claims that words function as names, which have a given, core meaning. However, the

Wittgensteinian vision of language rejects the idea that words exclusively function as names, that

words have given, core meaning, and instead looks only at words as they are used.[25]

Wittgensteinian language overhauls nearly 3000 years of semantics wherein meaning has been

produced through the act of naming.

Wittgenstein begins *Philosophical Investigations* begins with a passage from Augustine's

Confessions, which Moi repeats at the beginning *Revolution of the Ordinary*, echoing not just the

words of ordinary language practitioners before her, but their citations as well:[26]

> When grown-ups named some object and at the same time turned towards it, I perceived
> this, and I grasped that the thing was signified by the sound they uttered, since they meant
> to point *it* out. This, however, I gathered from their gestures, the natural language of all
> peoples, the language that by means of facial expression and the play of eyes, of the
> movements of the limbs and the tone of voice, indicates the affections of the soul when it
> desires, or clings to, or rejects, or recoils from, something. In this way, little by little, I
> learnt to understand what things the words, which I heard uttered in their respective
> places in various sentences, signified. And once I got my tongue around these signs, I
> used them to express my wishes.[27]

Rather than entering into conversation with Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell, she advances what

they have already articulated through repetition. Moi draws attention to Augustine's explanation

for "words in language name objects, [… and how] every word has a meaning. This meaning is

correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands [*sic*]."[28] Wittgenstein rejects

the idea that words possess inherent meaning and can exist outside of use. Moreover,

Wittgenstein's problem with the Augustinian vision of language is how "words simply have a

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[25] Moi, 40.

[26] Ibid., 23.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

given meaning, and to use a word is to insert that pre-existing meaning in a new context […] this view takes for granted that the meaning is something other than the word."[29] Unlike Augustine, Wittgenstein does not view words as being able to isolate and identify meaning outside of use. Wittgenstein explains how a word only finds meaning through "its use in the language."[30] Moi explains that, "Use is simply what we do. Nothing—no essences, no built in referential power—obliges us to continue using language as we do now. In fact, we don't always continue: language is a constantly changing practice."[31] This concept is best demonstrated by using a number-word, such as "five." Wittgenstein identifies the focus as not being placed on the *meaning* of the word five, but instead "only on how the word "five" is used."[32] To be clear, "use" doesn't mean "context." Use is what we *do* with words. If we do nothing with them, they remain dead."[33][34]

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[29] Ibid., 35.

[30] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §43.

[31] Moi, 29.

[32] Ibid., 24.

[33]Ibid., 37.

[34] Rita Felski's article "Context Stinks!" is a provocation against context. In it, Felski explains that "while suspicion can manifest itself in multiple ways, in the current intellectual climate it often pivots on a fealty to the clarifying power of historical context" and "[w]hat the literary text does not see […] are the larger circumstances that shape and sustain it and that are drawn into the light by the corrective force of the critic's own vigilant gaze." She ends on a uniquely ordinary note, saying that "[t]he context concept is itself an actor, one that has enjoyed a remarkable long and successful run. But if we can put context temporarily in abeyance, […] if we orient ourselves

This is revolutionary because it moves away from the isolated focus on the words and their

correlative meanings brought about through naming structures and instead focuses on how words

are being used within a given language. Moreover, this conceptualization of language is

revolutionary because it is simultaneously effective and in use. While a possible issue of a

revolution might be the cohesion of those revolting, anyone who participates in Wittgenstein's

vision of language is already participating in shared language that is understood only because it

is in use. Strategically, ordinary language philosophy helps bind those together because they are

already using language in the same way.

    To most clearly understand ordinary language philosophy and its revolutionary capacity,

one must first understand Wittgenstein's realism. Cora Diamond explains the "realistic spirit,"

referring to

> Wittgenstein's use of the image, [wherein] the philosopher who takes himself to be
> wearing irremovable glasses does not take these to be *distorting* his view. The 'glasses'
> here are the underlying logical order of all thought […and] the philosopher who takes
> himself to be in [the glasses] misrepresents to himself the significance of what is before
> his eyes, and takes himself to be concerned rather with the real nature of something,
> where that real nature is not open to view. The removal of the glasses is his being able to

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to ask other kinds of questions and to puzzle over other kinds of problems, how might our

thinking change?" In this way, we can see how Moi has taken a cue from Felski by moving away

from critical understandings of context and is, instead, focusing on "use." Ordinary language

philosophy and, therefore, ordinary readings are not reliant on conceptions of context derived

from critical models of literary analysis. Rita Felski, "Context Stinks!," *New Literary History* 42,

no. 4 (2011): 574, 590.

see properly what always was before him; what stood in the way of his removing them was a confused understanding of language.[35]

Diamond uses the glasses as a metaphor, explaining that while philosophers have previously looked through the glasses, Wittgenstein challenges philosophers to take the glasses off altogether and redirect their focus to the glasses themselves. It is because of the distortion of "the glasses" that philosophers are unable to focus on what lies directly before them. Diamond uses this metaphor to draw attention to Wittgenstein's realistic spirit and its interactions with other philosophies of language. Wittgenstein is not simply entering into a preexisting philosophical conversation, but asking that the conversation be reconsidered altogether.

Wittgenstein's realism is informed by three components: language-games, grammar, and forms of life.[36] Firstly, language-games can be understood not as learning "a set of names, but to be trained in—to learn to recognize and participate in—a vast number of human practices."[37] This is different than Adamic naming or Augustinianism because the naming is not fixed to an object or practice, but is only used within a specific and discrete instance among others who use the word in the same way. Furthermore, to participate in a language game, one learns the actions, behaviors, and language associated with the practice. This results in one learning "language and the world together."[38] This learning is informed by ordinary behaviors and is reliant on ordinary language. Wittgenstein explains there are limitless language games, making it impossible to

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[35] Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 43.

[36] Moi, 44.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 45.

create a comprehensive inventory.[39] Moi clarifies use as being "open-ended, in constant

transformation, [and] always responding to new circumstances."[40] Because of the indefinite

amount of discrete language games, and the unfixed quality of use, Moi is clear that there can be

"no *one* theory, no *one* definition, to hold such different practices together."[41] Use and language

games are limitlessly flexible, being able to respond to radically changing circumstances. In this

way, ordinary language philosophy is not theory but highly effective praxis. Stanley Cavell

explains how speaking and writing "is never just to represent something, but to do something."[42]

It is clear, then, that Wittgenstein intends for use, language games, and ordinary language to

underpin how we come to understand language as a practice and as a behavior. Ordinary

language philosophy is an effective basis for revolution because it is not language that idles, but

is rather (quite necessarily) language in practice and use. It is, therefore, not predictive but

demonstrative.

Moi leads her revolution against unclear language that exists within literarature

departments. More specifically, hers is a revolution against the "theory project," which she views

as being mired in needlessly difficult language that merely obscures rather than clarifies. Moi

offers ordinary language philosophy as an alternative, a "revolution in theory."[43] She believes

that

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[39] Ibid., 46.

[40] Ibid., 47.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 42.

[43] Ibid., 89.

> ordinary language philosophy clears the ground for more ways for thinking about things that are more attentive to particulars, to individual experience, more attuned to the ways we actually use language, more open to the questions that arise in actual human lives, than the standard attempts to "do theory."

Rather than theory's attempt to make generalized statements, ordinary language philosophy attends to discrete examples and specific incidents as points of analysis, which stands in isolation to theory's attempts at generalized observations. Moi is frustrated by theory's lack of interest "in the specific circumstances of a particular case, but [instead,] in a general account that can predict all anomalies, mistakes, misunderstandings in advance."[44] Moi is of the opinion, much like Wittgenstein, that specificity is the highest priority as well as how one achieves clarity. Importantly, the revolution against theory within literary studies is not actually intended to do away with theory. Moi is simply making two points: that theory is not having the effect that it claims to be having because of its obscured language, and that ordinary language philosophy should inform the language and precede the theory used in literary studies.

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[44] Ibid., 70.

Part II: The Ordinary

Given that Moi's revolution is one of language, and she is a recruiting practitioner of

ordinary language philosophy, it is thus imperative that we ask: what is the ordinary? To

consider an ordinary position, one must first understand the ordinary as well as "ordinariness."

This is complicated, however, by the fact that "that there can be no approach to the ordinary, for

the very word "approach" implies that one takes up an external position in relation to one's

"object."[45] One can *use* ordinary language and be a practitioner of the ordinary, though one

cannot speak of the ordinary as a critic might because one cannot remain distanced from the

ordinary as object of inquiry. Moi argues "We are always *in* the ordinary. We live our lives in

language and can't get outside it. To think the ordinary, we must give up the craving for

generality and learn to speak from within."[46] In this way, Moi describes the ordinary as being

spatial. One can participate in the ordinary, or violate ordinariness by speaking of it from an

external position. The ordinary, then, becomes a challenging object of inquiry because despite

the ordinary being a central component of Moi's revolution, it cannot be critically investigated

and can only be practiced.

Despite being unable to find any kind of specific definition or—consistent with the

premise of ordinary language philosophy—a general definition in Moi's work, we can identify

some qualities of the ordinary. The ordinary is something that is public and shared; it is not

relegated to any person or group.[47] Moreover, ordinary language philosophy is best at

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[45] Ibid., 115.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 161.

"connecting world and words."[48] Ordinary language philosophy aims to close the estranging gap

that exists between how we act and how we use language. Ordinary language is not

> a simplified or "basic" version of some kind of "standard" language. Ordinary language
> is not a normative notion. It is simply "what we say." And "we" here means every
> speaker of the language, not just a select high-status group […] in short, language as the
> medium in which we live our lives, language as it is used every day in a myriad different
> speech acts. Ordinary language, in short, comprises the full resources of human
> language."

Ordinary language is without pretense and is accessible without exclusion. It is a public way of

understanding language. It aims to be inclusive so that language can be used and understood not

just by some but by all. The ordinary is simply how we approach life and express ourselves in

language. Ordinary language is extensive. It is not just speech, but language writ large—

extended to body language and physical expression. All the while, the ordinary is painted as all

encompassing, but we are still left without specifics. This is ironic, given Moi's insistence that

ordinary language philosophy does away with generalization and clings to specificity. Here we

are left without a clear vision of the ordinary, despite ordinary language philosophy's promise to

bring clarity and reduce confusion.

Moi is unable to use the ordinary with any kind of specificity or place the ordinary in a

discrete example. Instead, she gives criteria for the ordinary, e.g., "The "opposite" of ordinary

language, if we can call it that, does not escape the ordinary."[49] This, however, does not increase

any kind of clarity as to what ordinary language is, much less what its opposite might be. In

trying to clarify the boundaries of ordinary language, Moi states:

> Ordinary language […] teaches us differences. This is why ordinary language does not
> stand in opposition to specialist vocabularies, technical expressions, or to the language of

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[48] Ibid., 160.

[49] Ibid.,162.

chemistry and mathematics. Ordinary language is certainly not the opposite of "literary language" […] Nor is ordinary language the opposite of "extraordinary language." The extraordinary is at home in the ordinary.[50]

Moi runs into a dilemma here: she is unable to generalize about ordinary language, or make predictive claims because of its philosophical underpinnings. Working around this complexity, she provides criteria that do help to give a better perspective as to how ordinary language works. If we take what Moi has said about Wittgenstein's vision of language accompanied by ordinary language's capacity to include specialized vocabularies and what might otherwise be considered extraordinary, we can understand ordinary language as an alternative way of seeing the world and the functions of language. It is not used in the way theory is *used,* whereby certain theoretical lenses are applied to discrete circumstances. Instead, ordinary language philosophy precedes any work with theory or other philosophy. It is an alternative way to conceive of language that fundamentally changes the way words are interacted with and understood. Within the breadth of ordinary language, one is able to use specialized language so long as it is used and exists within a way of life. Furthermore, "specialized languages are ordinary […] [t]hey work just like other words, and hold no mystery for the practitioners of these arts."[51] Ordinary language is the intersection of language and practice: it is language in use. To understand specialized languages, one must learn

the language-games in which such words are normally at home (this usually means: if you are interested in learning to *do* these thing), the practitioners will be able to train you, to teach you their criteria, initiate you into their world. Eventually you will go on, to project these terms in new contexts.[52]

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

This is how ordinary language deviates from the application of theory. It cannot simply be used as a lens in the way "theory" is used because ordinary language cannot be externally understood and applied. Ordinary language operates in such a way that language and practice are learned alongside one another—it cannot simply be applied or used selectively. It is an alternative way of understanding life and language. Ordinary language refuses to divorce language from practice, and instead views it as apart of the practice itself.

Ordinary language prioritizes clarity. By turning to the ordinary, it can aid in clarifying the complexity of discrete instances. It does so by tying language to practice, then allowing for its practitioners to understand not simply ostensive meaning, or names, but to truly understand a way of life and the language it uses. Rather than looking in from the outside and trying to apprehend meaning, one is able to combine meaning and practice as they are initiated into a way of life. There is an intimacy with the ordinary because ""use" intertwines language and the world, and asks about the speakers and their intentions and motivations for saying what they say in highly specific circumstances."[53] There is ostensibly no room for vagueness, obfuscation, or generalities. The ordinary brings discrete instances of life into focus to conduct analysis. This is entirely unlike the role of the critic wherein they engage in "judicious and knowledgeable detachment."[54] Contrarily, the intimacy of ordinary language means that analysis cannot be conducted externally nor conducted by one who does not understand a way of life. Moi assures her readers,

> An ordinary language philosopher has no reason to oppose the science of linguistics, or any other science for that matter. But she will challenge attempts to turn ordinary

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[53] Ibid., 115.

[54] Anker and Felski, 4.

language […] into an object for theory, as if we could ever stand outside the ordinary, outside our own words and actions.[55]

The ordinary cannot be theorized. To do so would be to stand apart from what is ordinary, succumbing to generalizations, and providing ordinary a definition that is otherwise counterintuitive to ordinary language philosophy's vision of language.

Given this vague understanding of the ordinary, we are left wondering how one might do an ordinary reading of literature. Moi explains to her readers, "The first step [to an ordinary reading] is to remember that there is no approach. As with ordinary language itself, we can't grasp the text as a totality from the outside."[56] Ordinary language is not to be used as a methodology for literary studies. Moi invokes her spatial terminology yet again. Just as one is unable to study ordinary language philosophy from the outside, so too one cannot grasp a text from the outside by doing an ordinary reading. Stanley Cavell speaks of reading Wittgenstein's work in a similar way, stating that

> there is no approach to it, anyway I have none. Approach suggests moving nearer, getting closer; hence it suggests that we are not already near or close enough; hence suggests we know some orderly direction to it not already taken within it; that we sense some distance between us and it which useful criticism could close.[57]

Cavell, being formative to Moi's own conceptualization of Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophy, explains that even his own reading of Wittgenstein lacks specific methodology. It is not a matter of physical proximity to the text, nor a matter of methodological proximity (e.g., close reading) that brings him understanding or clarity. In the same way, criticism (or perhaps

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[55] Moi, 115.

[56] Ibid., 210.

[57] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 6.

what Moi would consider theory) does no work here. Ordinary language asks that the reader

become intimate with their text and begin reading with no preconceived expectations of its

contents.

Rather than focusing on approach, methodology, or criticism to understand a text, Moi

suggests an alternative: reading and questioning why it is that a text lingers with her. Moi segues

into the idea of acknowledgment, and in doing so, she explains her own practice of working with

texts:

> I have to try to understand the work's claim on me. But since acknowledgement is
> personal, particular, and specific, I—the reader—now have a double task: to understand
> the work—to acknowledge its concepts and concerns—I also have to figure out where I
> stand in relation to it.[58]

This is unlike the traditional role of the critic, and rejects the idea of critical distance. Instead,

there is heighted focus on not only the text, but also specific focus on the reader's relationship to

the text. This reconfiguration of the relationship between readers and "texts frees us from the old

taboo of the author's intentions and enables us to think of reading as a practice of

acknowledgement […] to give an account of reading is to give an account of an experience, the

experience of an adventure."[59] Ordinary language ushers a certain kind of intimacy between the

reader and a text because of the need to operate within rather than observe. It is no longer solely

focused on the text, but the reader as well. In this way, Moi elaborates on how some objects

promote "response and acknowledgement", and in so doing, invite us to understand their

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[58] Moi, 210.

[59] Ibid., 196.

concepts and concerns.[60] This also prompts the reader to consider why they chose to linger on this particular literary object, and what sparked their curiosity.

Rather than using a prescriptive lens of analysis or applying a specific kind of theory, an ordinary reading allows for questions to be organically raised from within the text. Additionally, "[d]ifferent questions lead to different kinds of investigations. I don't think there is any way of deciding in advance if the reading what the *best* option would be, as if the path was already there, waiting for us. We just have to risk it."[61] An ordinary reading is extemporaneous; there cannot be a premeditated strategy for consuming literature. Ordinary language asks that readers operate from within, necessitating that readers firstly learn the text on its own terms. Just as one must understand a way of life to understand specialized language, so too must a reader understand a book to begin any kind of analysis. An ordinary reading requires that a text raise its own questions, conditioned on the reader's experience with it. Moreover, within an ordinary reading, "To describe, [for Wittgenstein], is to point out connections, do comparisons, pay attention to distinctions, and so on."[62] To conduct analysis on a text requires that a reader pay careful attention to what the text is saying—allowing for the text to prompt what kinds of questions the reader should be asking, rather than bringing questions to a text that has not been opened with sincere curiosity and a lack of presumptions.

Moi, however, does not demonstrate an ordinary reading, or proceed by way of example. It then begs the question, "what does it mean to do an ordinary reading?" To best answer this question, I am now going to attempt an ordinary reading of my own. Since there is no particular

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[60] Ibid., 210.

[61] Ibid., 182.

[62] Ibid., 183.

method or approach when doing an ordinary reading, I moved forward with curiosity to know more about the text when conducting my own ordinary reading. I picked up Umberto Eco's *How to Travel with a Salmon & Other Essays* when I turned to his titular essay: "How to Travel with a Salmon." Firstly, the title sparked my curiosity. Furthermore, the content of the writing prompted me to further engage the text itself. This was not because of a certain method with which I was reading the text, criticism that was guiding me through the text, nor was I reading for the text for its theoretical underpinnings. I simply picked up the text because of my own curiosity and desire to know more about it, and similarly, I continued to read because of Eco's content, charismatic voice, and my own experience with the text itself. Part of how I identify my reading of "How to Travel with a Salmon" to be an ordinary one is because of my consumption of the text paired with my analysis of its effects on me as the reader. Given the intimacy of an ordinary reading, there is no room for purely critical distance that the reader might use to objectively analyze a text. A text must be read with the experience of the reader as a component of their journey towards analysis.

Eco's text is witty, humorous, and captures the pitfalls of language. Because of the text's own preoccupation with language, communication, and miscommunication it seemed uniquely apt for an ordinary reading, especially given the value ordinary language philosophy gives clarity. Within Eco's "How to Travel with a Salmon," he recounts his travels from Stockholm (where he bought a large smoked salmon) to London, where he arrives at a "deluxe hotel" and attempts to store his salmon in his hotel room.[63] There are three primary components to Eco's short story that contribute to the ineffectual storing of the salmon and defamation of his

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[63] Umberto Eco, "How to Travel with a Salmon," in *How to Travel with a Salmon & Other Essays* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994), 5.

character, all of which are thoroughly humorous and the result of miscommunication. Firstly, the hotel staff does not speak English. Secondly, despite the staff not speaking English, all communication must go through the new (and not yet properly functioning) computerized system. Thirdly, Eco clears space in his "minibar", placing the contents inside of a dresser drawer so that the salmon may be refrigerated and keep from going bad—which he needs to communicate to the hotel, inescapably running into a language barrier and faulty computerized system.[64] The short story, then, is humorous because of the many ways in which language fails and things go horribly awry.

While the story is straightforwardly funny, Eco is also making a stand against computerized systems. He does so in the introduction, where he explains, "According to the newspapers, there are two main problems besetting the modern world", with one of them being "the invasion of the computer."[65] This is funny because of Eco's obvious bias for newspapers. He cites newspapers for their commentary about computers, though computers clearly rival newspapers. Furthermore, Eco tells his readers that, "The newspapers are right, and [he] know it."[66] Despite "How to Travel with a Salmon" documenting Eco's travels with his smoked salmon, he is also making an argument against computers. This is not hidden within the text, not is it the byproduct of a close reading. This analysis is simply recognizing one element of the story and identifying it as an important component that might be highlighter with additional thought and consideration.

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[64] Ibid., 6.

[65] Ibid., 5.

[66] Ibid.

It is not only computers that Eco takes issue with, but also the idea of deluxe and

convenience, communicating to his readers that they are not one in the same. Eco's publisher had

selected a deluxe hotel for him, which he indicates as being deluxe in part because of the

minibar.[67] This is ironic, however, because of the hotel's deluxe status affecting the "minibar" in

such a way that it is actually a full size refrigerator

> contain[ing] fifty bottles of whiskey, gun, Drambuie, Courvoisier, eight large Perriers,
> two Vitelloises, and two Evians , three half-bottles of champagne, various cans of
> Guinness, pale ale, Dutch beer, German beer, bottles of white wine both French and
> Italian, and, besides peanuts, also cocktail crackers, almonds, chocolates, and Alka-
> Seltzer. There was no room for [his] salmon.[68]

The problem with this large refrigerator and its vast selection of alcohols, waters, and snacks, is

that despite being large, there is no room for his salmon. While the refrigerator is among the

benefits of a more luxurious room, it fails to provide Eco with the basic amenities he needs. This

is, much like the rest of Eco's misfortunes, quite humorous. But in addition to the humor, it is

also a complaint against the ironic inconvenience of this deluxe amenity. In being so deluxe, the

refrigerator is unusable as a refrigerator and Eco risks the possibility of his salmon going bad. To

remedy the situation, Eco moves some of the contents of the refrigerator into "drawers of the

dresser […] then refrigerate[s] the salmon."[69] In order to return the refrigerator to its usable state

as a refrigerator, Eco must remove its deluxe benefits. Unfortunately, however, Eco returns to his

hotel room to find that the salmon has been removed from the refrigerator to the desk, there are

deluxe goods not only in the drawer where he had left them but also a new surplus in the

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid., 6.

[69] Ibid.

refrigerator, and he is left to inform the hotel of the incident.[70] Not only does the large, deluxe

refrigerator and its contents fail as a refrigerator, but it also places his salmon in a jeopardizing

position of going bad, and causes a moment of miscommunication regarding the contents of the

refrigerator that Eco is left to resolve with the hotel.

  Eco uses this moment to assure his readers of the shortcomings of computerized systems.

Despite calling the front desk, Eco is told by hotel staff that "all such requests [have] to be

entered in the central computer" which is further complicated by the fact that "most of the staff

[speak] no English."[71] Despite the hotel's transition to the computerized system as means of

streamlining and making business more efficient, Eco speaks of the computerized system as only

making things more difficult. Additionally, the computer difficulties only made worse by the

language barrier between Eco and the hotel staff. Since "verbal instructions [are] not accepted:

Everything [has] to be translated into Basic."[72] Eco identifies the computer system as the

villainous culprit in this situation. It fails to make his dealings at the hotel efficient or easy going.

The situation reaches a boiling point when Eco is asked to update the computer system via Basic

(which is not, in fact, basic), and his salmon is "emanating a suspect odor" after being removed

from the refrigerator twice by hotel staff.[73] Furthermore, because of the hotel's reliance on its

new computerized system, Eco has moved additional contents from the refrigerator to the drawer

and the hotel has restocked the refrigerator yet again. In an attempt to reconcile the situation, Eco

calls the front desk only to speak with a man whose dialect he cannot make sense of and "more

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., 7.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

trouble with the computer" that has caused innumerable problems already.[74] Eco fails in his many attempts to save the salmon, explain the relocated contents of the refrigerator, and resolve the situation within the computerized system. Instead, he is charged for each relocated bottle, snack, and other miscellaneous luxury that went into the drawer from the refrigerator to save his (now expired) salmon—all of which is confirmed by "the computer."[75] Altogether, there is miscommunication between Eco and the staff that is only to be expected, given the language barrier (e.g., Eco requesting a lawyer, but the staff bringing him an avocado[76]). The computer, however, is an amenity designed for convenience and efficiency, and Eco assures his readers that it accomplished nothing of the sort. Contrarily, the computer was to blame for his chaotic stay in London.

This ordinary reading was driven by a series of questions provoked by the text and my experience with it. Some of the questions were simply brought about through observations: 'I am laughing and this is funny. What specifically about this text makes it funny, and in turn, makes me chuckle when reading it?' What provoked my laughter? I did not pick up "How to Travel with a Salmon" with these questions. Ordinary language philosophy (and thus, ordinary readings) require that practitioners come from a place of not understanding, wherein the reader must thoughtfully approach the text from a state of unknowing. It is from this place of confusion and coming into clarity that readers are imparted with questions that are raised by the text so that they might *come into* a certain understanding of the text. Ordinary language philosophy holds the position that "nothing is hidden," and in so doing, it also conceives of language as not hiding

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid., 8.

[76] Ibid.

things.[77] Unlike critical approaches that look "deeper" and more "closely," an ordinary reading

asks that readers to sit with a text, act on their curiosity, and ask questions.

Ordinary language philosophy alters the way that readers interact with texts. It does away

with authoritative approaches to texts and instead asks that readers allow the texts to raise their

own questions, concerns, and confusions. Moi believes this to be the revolution needed within

literary studies, because

> [i]n literary criticism we can begin by asking "Why this?" We begin, then, not with a
> method, but with our own sense of confusion […] A reading is an attempt to get clear on
> something. (But this means that we have to see something, notice something in the text.
> To notice something interesting requires learning, knowledge, and insight."[78]

Fundamentally, at the root of ordinary language, there is a sense of being confused and coming

into a place of clarity. In doing an ordinary reading, practitioners are asked to adopt the same

mindset with their text: going in with confusion and allowing the text to bring them into a place

of clarity. In order to accomplish this, readers have to open themselves to a series of questions

and be willing to slow down with the text and allow it to provide its own insights. This is part of

how ordinary language philosophy differs from other modes of critique, such as literary critic

Frederic Jameson's hermeneutics of suspicion. It rejects the theoretical heritage of Marx,

Nietzsche, and Freud as the underpinnings for how literary studies might be conducted. While

Moi believes that ordinary language practitioners can still analyze texts on the basis of class,

genealogy, and psychology, this can only be done secondarily to ordinary language. Critique's

hegemonic influence on literary departments can be seen as the push for students to "close read"

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[77] Wittgenstein, §435.

[78] Moi, 182.

and approach texts with suspicion, that things are not as they seem. Moi views this mode of

critique as aiming to

> expose hidden ideology, uncover the workings of power, encourage resistance, and generally contribute to social and political change. Practitioners of critique must therefore be fundamentally suspicious of anything that appears to be ordinary and commonsensical, and anything that presents itself as an "established fact.[79]

Moi views the hermeneutics of suspicion and ordinary language philosophy as being

irreconcilably different: the mood of one being suspicious, the other curiosity. Moreover, critique

is unlike ordinary language in that it questions the text before giving the text its own opportunity

to raise questions, concerns, and insights. Additionally, even if those facets of the text were

considered, they would be met with critical suspicion.

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[79] Ibid., 175.

Part III: The Politics of the Ordinary in Undergraduate Classrooms

One could say that Moi's revolution of the ordinary within literary studies begins in college classrooms. Classrooms are the site of student learning, wherein students are taught to read, the methodologies of reading, and finally, how to conduct reading that might provide grounds for analysis. Moi's charge to take part in the revolution first and foremost affects students and the politics of the classroom. It thus raises questions about the practice of literature and how literary studies are conducted. Ordinary readings require that one act with curiosity, and that readers do not set themselves apart from their object of inquiry with critical distance. Instead, ordinary readers must be initiated into new forms of life in order to understand the way in which language is used. This requires a certain intimacy and understanding of a literary object to obtain clarity rather than relying on claims based in generality. This is unlike other understandings of and approaches to literature, wherein a text is straightforwardly an object of critical inquiry. A text is read closely. Words invoke a multiplicity of signifiers and texts are rife with ideological underpinnings, leaving ample room for critique. Rita Felski, like Moi, is disenchanted with the role of critique in literary studies, describes this understanding of texts and its myriad of accompanying frameworks as "promis[ing], with the roguish gleam of a salesman's wink, to overcome the limits of the previous ones: to deliver the definitive theory of the subject or concept of power that would nail things down once and for all."[80] Felski is scathing in her opinion that the many theories and frameworks erupting in the 1980s and thereafter left much to be desired. She situates this conversation within her previous experience as a graduate student

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[80] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 19.

and later, an academic and literary critic.[81] Each framework strives to explain the limits and

failings of the previous writer, entering the reader into a corpus of work that struggles with

generality and incompletion. Felski remarks, "To immerse oneself in the last few decades of

literary and cultural theory is thus to be caught up in a dizzying whirlwind of ideas, arguments,

and world pictures."[82] While Felski wishes to move away from the ongoing consumption of

frameworks, each seeming to solve for the next and improve upon the previous author, she also

draws attention to the legacy of theoretical frameworks that underpin literary studies. Before

doing away with this legacy in a move toward ordinary language and the Wittgensteinien vision

of language, it is important to evaluate the significance of theoretical frameworks in the

education of students outside of the confines of career academia and graduate seminars. For the

undergraduate endeavoring to study literature, the question remains: what is the role of ordinary

language philosophy and its practices among students, and furthermore, what is to be done with

theory and the practice of critique? Does it have a place in the undergraduate's study of

literature?

As a student of literature, I question whether ordinary language philosophy and ordinary

readings is an encounter with literature that would positively impact students. Moreover, how it

would alter dynamics within the classroom? I conceptualize the student as having an agreement

with their university. So long as the student performs their obligations—attending class,

maintaining a certain grade point average, abiding by the student code of conduct—the

university will, in turn, provide them a degree. The degree certifies that the student has learned a

specified body of information. Given this, the university system is organized around the

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 20.

predictability of classes and their content. Students are able to browse course offerings to select courses that best fit their interests as they fulfill degree requirements. This process is contingent upon professors selecting materials for their class, guiding conversation, and providing insights and analysis of the materials—all of which must be organized for course offerings. Ordinary language philosophy is problematic for this system. The radical unpredictability of ordinary readings alter not only the way that students interact with literature, but also the way that professors would teach their students. Literary studies would need to be wholly reconfigured if professors and students acted solely on their curiosity. At the time of writing this thesis, professors not only clarify information but also unveil information. In the style of Ricœur and Jameson, professors draw students' attention to information that they would not have known to read for themselves so that they might understand its relevance in light of otherwise unknown context. The assumptions being made are not yet challenged so that students may realize the breadth of other contributing and relevant information needed to effectively analyze the text. Students are instructed to close read, to dutifully study the language of select passages, and in so doing have meaning that is previously unknown to them explained by their professor. While this process might be interpreted as being an initiation into a form of life, within an ordinary language perspective, it is nonetheless the systematic approach to studies that has long been practiced within academia. An ordinary reading necessitates that one reads from a position of holding no certain expectations of a text and allowing the text to raise its own questions. I am unsure how this could be accomplished in undergraduate studies, wherein the students otherwise lack enough specialized knowledge to grasp moments of importance within the text on their own. Furthermore, lacking deliberate instruction and knowledge of frameworks would inhibit students' ability to ask thoughtful (and informed) questions of the text. While Moi suggests that

ordinary language philosophy be prioritized before any kind of theoretical frameworks, undergraduate students in classrooms would suffer from the lack of directed reading of texts.

Theoretical frameworks enhance the classroom and challenge students in a way that the ordinary could not. Put simply: Moi does not ask her readers to question what they already know, whereas theory does.[83] The curiosity of ordinary readings does not aim to challenge readers, but to instead change the way they view and understand language. In fact, Moi identifies change as a byproduct of orienting oneself within ordinary language philosophy, but she is not asking her readers to change themselves or their procedures. This is evident in the closing pages of *Revolution of the Ordinary.* After discussions of philosophy, theory, and literary studies, Moi concludes with a passage speaking about the tragic events of Utøya, in Norway. In recounting the terror that occurred, not only that day but as a lingering trauma for the Norwegian people, Moi points to the ethical implications of how we use language. She remarks how "a society that loses faith in language will also lose its sense of reality."[84] This comes as a sharp pivot from the previous implications of her writing that had otherwise focused on uniting language and life, providing newfound clarity. This, however, is a discrete shift into the ethics of ordinary language philosophy. Moi warns of the divorce between society and language, and the great importance to be responsible for the language that is used—and that the language being used is carefully tethered to reality. The climactic effect of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language—that meaning

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[83] This is in part why critics of critical theory would reject these terms, arguing that the process of questioning "what is already known" is a form of indoctrination. This has potential to threaten the status quo in such a way that those who support the status quo might regard critical theory as adversarial and dangerous.

[84] Moi, 242.

is conceived of through use—is that, "in a world in which so many powerful persons and institutions have a vested interest in making us lose faith in language's power to respond to and reveal reality, precise and attentive use of words is an act of resistance."[85] *Revolution of the Ordinary*, then, is not simply a text to elucidate Wittgenstein's philosophy and its value within literary studies, but to instead, clarify the ethical implications of how language is used and illuminate what purpose "meaningless language" can serve. It is worth noting, however, that the ethical effects of ordinary language philosophy are not in asking practitioners to change their behavior, but only to recognize the language they use as being rooted in reality and having severe implications. It does not challenge or instruct the users, writers, and speakers of the language to different standards of behavior.

Moi's revolutionary quest, then, is that of reestablishing the way in which language is understood and used. Even if her readers choose to operate within a Wittgensteinian vision of language, it does not change their assumptions nor implicate the language they use. Unlike ordinary language philosophy and ordinary readings, theory asks us to interrogate our own assumptions. Part of why Moi's text has such impact on me as a reader is because of my own experience as an undergraduate student and my interactions with theory. Theory challenged my prior assumptions, and furthermore drew my attention to assumptions I may not have known I had, which is particularly evident in the words we use, write, and speak. Part of the challenge of theory is that it is self-reflexive. Students cannot remain unquestioned in their own opinions and perspectives within a critical purview. In "Speaking Truth to Power: The Teaching of Literature and Critical Approaches," Michael Macaluso and P.L. Thomas, argue that theory's benefits are multifaceted and produce students who consume material with the understanding that "all texts,

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[85] Ibid.

textual practices, *and* readers are infused with certain values and beliefs, philosophies and

theories, or worldviews and dispositions."[86] Teaching students to be mindful and aware of these

latent ideologies gives them the opportunity to be critical readers, writers, and consumers. This

mindfulness is otherwise lacking in Moi's writing: as she urges readers to operate within

ordinary language philosophy, she provides no reservations regarding the language being used.

Students instructed with knowledge of critical theory, however, enhance the value of classroom

learning. Rather than simply reading texts, employing a critical lens within literature courses

allows for a

> turn in the subject English: the marriage of critical theories with the teaching of literature. Specifically, they offer methods of literature instruction designed through critical frameworks that combine theory with practice, open up possibilities for interpretation, and address important issues neglected by traditional approaches to literary study: how societal, cultural, and political influences shape texts and readers' responses to those texts.[87]

This turn in English moves away literature as an isolated object of inquiry, and instead teaches

students how to identify other values obscured within the text. These societal, cultural, and

political influences may continue unnoticed until identified and addressed within the classroom.

Teaching critical theory as an accompaniment to literature rectifies the ostensible "divide that

exists between theory and practice" by making the classroom a site of praxis, instructing students

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[86] Michael Macaluso and P.L. Thomas, "Speaking Truth to Power: Trending Bedfellows: The

Teaching of Literature and Critical Approaches," *The English Journal* 104, no. 6 (July 2015): 78.

Macaluso and Thomas focus on the values of theory in high school classrooms that can be

extended to both the undergraduate college classroom and to ordinary life.

[87] Ibid.

as to how they might "act and behave in the world."[88] It provides students an environment to learn and ask questions, and in doing so, also question their own uninterrogated values. Because of critical theory, students are able to understand the process of ""thinking otherwise" […] to de-familiarise present practices and categories […] to open up spaces for invention of new forms of experience."[89] This not only expands students' ability to comprehend complexities of literature outside of their own lived experiences, but it also makes "the ideologies inherent in […] texts visible to […] students."[90] What is observed and analyzed within literature can be extrapolated beyond the confines of the classroom. By learning theory, students are given a toolset. This toolset can be used in a myriad of circumstances throughout the rest of their lives. Students who can make sense of critical theory are better prepared to engage the "cacophony of ideologies […that] can be absolutely overwhelming for young people."[91] Critical theory's benefits extend beyond the limits of college campuses. Critical theory helps "readers to know both what those different perspectives are and how they can interpret the world."[92] Understanding diverse perspectives and underlying ideology is particularly important in a cultural climate preoccupied with narratives of "fake news." Theory, as well as critical thinking, provide students the resources they might need to effectively (and knowledgably) parse through a plethora of (mis)information. Students are taught a language that allows them to communicate with complexity and nuance, "represent[ing] a vision of plurality—a vision that echoes the way the

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[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid., 79.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid., 80.

world works" and ultimately, representing "what English should be about."[93] An understanding

of critical theory, then, allows for thoughtful consideration of literary material that exists beyond

students' own lived experiences and enables them with a critical understanding of materials they

will encounter both inside and outside of the classroom.

While practitioners of ordinary language philosophy must be initiated into new forms of

life to understand the language in use, they nonetheless remain unchallenged. Alternatively,

theory challenges the assumptions that underpin how one comes to understand the world. Theory

does not rely on change as a byproduct like ordinary language philosophy, but instead,

straightforwardly negotiates change with its readers. Consider, for example, selections of Marxist

theory. The underscored value of Marxist theory is that of calling for immediate change, that the

capitalist mode of production may be overturned so that the proletariat is no longer exploited by

the capitalist. Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach", thesis XI states, "The philosophers have only

interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."[94] Marx's thesis is not

preoccupied with language or the mired nuances of philosophy; rather, it is directly calling for

change. Peter Selden and Peter Widdowson introduce their "Marxist theories" chapter of *A

Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* by drawing a comparison between action and

philosophy that was brought about in Marxist writings. They explain how "philosophy has been

merely airy contemplation; it is time that it engaged with the real world [… Moreover, Marx]

argues that all mental (ideological) systems are the products of real social and economic

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[93] Ibid.

[94] Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *Collected Works: Marx and Engels, 1845–1847*
(London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), 5:5.

existence."[95] (In this way, Marxist writings adhere to Wittgenstein's pursuit of language that does not idle, but is used in life even though is it not, in the Wittgensteinian sense, ordinary). Marx does not simply identify the proletariat as being exploited and alienated by their work, but he provides language that can facilitate change so that the proletariat is no longer faced with the same circumstances. Similarly, Marx and Engels conclude *The Communist Manifesto* with a rallying cry for revolution: "WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!"[96] Marx and Engels' revolution is not one of scholarly practice, but one in response to civil injustice. Their audience is furthermore evident of their aspirations for enacting change. They are writing for the average persons of the 1840s who are disadvantaged by a capitalistic economy. Unlike change being a mere byproduct of ordinary language philosophy, Marx and Engels are writing because they want change and are recruiting revolutionaries to manifest that change in society.

In Anthony Giddens' and David Held's collection of Marxist literature, *Classes, Power, and Conflict: Classical and Contemporary Debates*, they begin their introduction by explaining that there are "continuing and involved interpretative debates in which Marx's writings have long been entangled. Such debates often have a scholastic quality to them, but they also raise questions of great importance for class analysis today."[97] Marx's writings do not remain stagnant. The many interpretations do not reflect inaction and a lack of change, but instead an

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[95] Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory, Third Edition* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 70.

[96] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London & New York: Verso, 2012), 77.

[97] Anthony Giddens and David Held, *Classes, Power, and Conflict: Classical and Contemporary Debates* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 3.

attempt to rectify injustices as they are identified in our modern moment. By studying Marxist theory, students learn to identify economic and cultural conditions that contribute to the exploitation of workers. Additionally, because of Marx's focus on historical materialism, change is not relegated to the philosophical or academic, but instead a boots-on-ground revolution in pursuit of ongoing economic change. Students are then able to identify these conditions not only in texts, but also in society writ large. They are also able to question their own underlying assumptions about how society functions and the conditions they might view as simply being "normal" because they have not otherwise been prompted to question why things are a certain way. Marxist theory enables students to practice critique within and outside of the classroom. By providing students with the language of Marxist critique, they are able to not only understand why Marx and Engels were writing, but why they might also become revolutionaries to enact change as well.

The language of change is not unique to Marx and Engels, but is also present within later examples of Marxist critique, notably the Frankfurt School. Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer were leading figures at the "Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt practice[ing] what it called 'Critical Theory', which was a wide-ranging form of social analysis grounded in Hegelian Marxism and including Freudian elements."[98] When Moi speaks of "theory," she is necessarily including the Frankfurt School though she fails to specify any clear dimensions of what "theory" means in her text. As she makes claims that theory stagnates and is far too general to have effect, the reader is nonetheless left confused as to what theory falls into this categorization and what, if any, escapes it. Furthermore, in her introduction to *Revolution of the Ordinary,* Moi explains, "I make no attempt to impose new, stringent definitions of "theory" and

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[98] Selden and Widdowson, 81.

"philosophy." I simply fall in with current usage. The current fluidity of these terms hasn't been a problem for me in writing this book and I hope it won't be for the reader either." [99] Despite Moi's unwillingness to specify the theory she is responding to in any clear or direct way, we are left to assume that the Frankfurt School and its production of critical theory is certainly included in her commentary. However, we run into the same issue as before: Moi's social change is merely a byproduct of ordinary language philosophy. Examples within the Frankfurt School and their body of critical theory, much like Marx and Engels' writing, is not simply philosophizing for the sake of philosophizing, but striving to identify a social ailment and provide a solution.

I turn to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's essay "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in which they identify the culture industry as pacifying the working class and perpetuating the harms of capitalism. Adorno and Horkheimer explain,

> Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system [… and] no longer need to present themselves as art. The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce. They call themselves industries, and the public figures for their directors' incomes quell any doubts about the social necessity of their finished products.[100]

In this move from culture as art to culture as business, the consumption of these materials is simply another way of making money for capitalists. Because culture has become a profit-making system contingent on sameness, a true counterculture that might inspire workers' resistance to—or even revolution against—the system becomes impossible. It is all subsumed within the larger cultural industry. Adorno and Horkheimer warn that ideology is latent not only

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[99] Moi, 9.

[100] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94.

in the commodified cultural objects themselves, but also in their production, both of which simultaneously alienate and pacify the working class. The "[t]echnical rationality today is the rationality of domination. It is the compulsive character of a society alienated from itself."[101] Where art might have previously been a site of resistance and change for the working class, the capitalists have since used it as yet another mechanism of control. The working class is provided an illusion of choice and agency that obfuscates their oppression. Adorno and Horkheimer explain how "the mechanically differentiated products are ultimately all the same […, that] the difference […] is fundamentally illusory," and that "[t]he advantages and disadvantages debated by enthusiasts serve only to perpetuate the appearance of competition and choice."[102] When workers feel like they are making a choice by choosing between products, they are in fact only further ensnared by capitalism and its harms. Capitalist ideology endows workers with a false sense of agency, which serves to both encourage the circulation of capital and keep the working class from changing their circumstances.

Culture consumes everything, so it is impossible to see beyond the confines of culture—and thus, in modern capitalism, the culture industry. Adorno and Horkheimer explain that a danger of the culture industry is that "[t]he whole world is passed through the filter of the culture industry," and that the "familiar experience of the moviegoer, who perceives the street outside as a continuation of the film he has just left, because the film seeks strictly to reproduce the works of everyday perception, has become the guideline of production."[103] The effect is that the differences between the culture industry and the world lessen, and they slowly seem to be

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[101] Ibid., 95.

[102] Ibid., 97.

[103] Ibid., 99.

interchangeable. Consumers want the events of movies in their own life because the movie is deliberately made to resemble the real world. As the culture industry provides the explanation that life should be like the movies, the lines between fiction and reality blur: "film denies its audience any dimensions in which they might roam freely in imagination […] thus it trains those exposed to it to identify film directly with reality."[104] The film and its producers influence the mind of their audience in such a way that viewers become fully immersed in the film. Not only does the film aim to replicate reality, but it also has full control over the ideology imparted to its audience. Without the ability for viewers' imaginations to contribute to their media consumption, they are merely passive consumers of both the culture and its harmful ideology. Culture cannot exist apart from ideology:

> Each single manifestation of the culture industry inescapably reproduces human beings as what the whole has made them. And all its agents, from the producer to the women's organizations, are on the alert to ensure that the simple reproduction of mind does not lead on to the expansion of the mind.[105]

A highly artificial idea of individuality is used to sell uniqueness and difference, making consumers feel special without actually threatening the structures of capitalism. Underneath the surface of people each buying their favorite brands of laundry detergent, wearing their favorite brands of clothes, or watching their favorite television shows, there exists an indistinguishable mass of consumers. Furthermore, by providing access to such "choices" and "freedoms" within capitalism, it ensures that consumers will not push back against their own confines. In this way, the culture industry protects itself against working-class rebellion—so long as they are

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[104] Ibid., 100.

[105] Ibid.

conditioned to be content, then there is little reason that they might try to change their circumstances in a way that would jeopardize capitalists.

Adorno and Horkheimer draw attention to the importance of language within the culture industry. The culture industry remains robust because of the essential role language plays in advertising; the culture industry's "product ceaselessly reduces the pleasure it promises as a commodity to that mere promise, [and] it finally coincides with the advertisement it needs on account of its own inability to please."[106] There is no longer a need to conceal the advertising of products: advertising has become art.[107] In modern capitalism, what exists is "advertising for advertising's sake, the pure representation of social power."[108] In the expression of social power, Adorno and Horkheimer observe a turn to slogans. Just as the product experiences mechanical repetition, so too exists the "propaganda slogan," which is infinitely repeatable.[109] Slogans are ordinary, unobtrusive, and, in their simplicity, persuasive.

> Through the language they speak, the customers make their own contribution to culture as advertising. For the more completely language coincides with communication, the more words change from substantial carriers of meaning to signs devoid of qualities; the more purely and transparently they communicate what they designate, the more impenetrable they become. The demythologizing of language, as an element of the total process of enlightenment, reverts to magic.[110]

The working class inadvertently worsens their lot by participating in and thus perpetuating the language that makes changing the mode of production an insurmountable task. With the lack of

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[106] Ibid., 131.

[107] Ibid., 132.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid., 133.

[110] Ibid.

nuance and obscurity in the language of capitalism, there is no buffer between the way a worker

communicates and the advertisements bombarding them. Adorno and Horkheimer call "the gap"

between language and object "magic." It is "[i]n magic word and content were at once different

from each other and indissolubly linked."[111] In removing this gap in pursuit of clarity, "a given

sequence of letters which goes beyond the correlation to the event designated is banished as

unclear and as verbal metaphysics."[112] This is similar to Moi's complaint against alternative

visions of language for obscuring meaning in a way that divorces words from the world.

However, Adorno and Horkheimer speak of the relentless pursuit of clarity as being harmful for

workers. It is in this "ordinary" state of language that advertising most easily infiltrates the

everyday life of the working class. Clarity in language can be used as a vehicle for capitalist

ideology. It is when a "word becomes so fixated on the object that it hardens into a formula. This

affects language and subject matter equally."[113] This clarity in language does not aid the working

class in challenging capitalism, but instead fixes reality and language in such a way that both can

be subsumed by the culture industry. While language was once a site of resistance, in its new

clarified, "rationalized form it has become a straightjacket more for longing than for lies."[114] It is

the language of the working that that capitalists have seized through advertising, which becomes

increasingly more harmful as the "blind and rapidly spreading repetition of designated words

links advertising to the totalitarian slogan."[115] Advertisements—whether political or

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[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid., 135.

commercial—are indiscernible from the tongue of the working class. This assimilation ushers in

a new moment wherein "language has become universal, totalitarian. The violence done to words

in no longer audible in them."[116] Because of this indiscernibility, listeners are less likely to hear

the underpinning ideology that oppresses and exploits them. It is only because of the gap

between word and object that workers could previously identity more clearly the trap of capitalist

ideology.

Adorno and Horkheimer's Marxist critique not only illuminates the presence of

capitalism in 1940s society, but also cautions their readers about the effects of the culture

industry on everyday life. I put forth this example because it underlines just how important it is

for undergraduate students to be taught theoretical frameworks, so that they might also read

authors like Adorno and Horkheimer and, in turn, understand the need to critically interrogate

their own assumptions and consumption of the world around them. Simple curiosity falls short

and cannot communicate the same concerns derived from the practice of critique. While ordinary

language philosophy prioritizes clarity and presents clarity as an unquestionable value, it does

not address the ramifications of clarity and the use of ordinary language in society (and

particularly in classrooms). Ordinary language allows one to be initiated into a form of life and

grow intimately acquainted with one's study. It does not, however, question the underpinning

assumptions of the scholar. Theory unpacks and illuminates, two qualities that are necessary for

an undergraduate's education. It is imperative that undergraduate literary students be presented

with frameworks and theory that challenge them in how they come to understand the world

around them.

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[116] Ibid.

Conclusion

Contrary to Moi's claim and the title of her text, ordinary language philosophy is not the revolution of literary studies. In the move from critique to post-critique, and later the entrance of ordinary language philosophy into 21st century literary studies, students are left with much to be desired. Moi assures her readers that ordinary language philosophy ties together words and the world and, in so doing, brings about clarity. Moi is preoccupied with clarity, but, ironically, there are many facets of her argument—such as the lacking definition for "ordinary"—that obfuscate rather than clarify. This is due in part to the confines of ordinary language philosophy. It cannot provide general definitions, and therefore cannot clarify central concepts that its practitioners use. Furthermore, within ordinary language philosophy's attempt to move from generality to specificity, it lacks the ability to provide clear instruction for how one might conduct an ordinary reading. Apart from the claim that *Revolution of the Ordinary* is conducted through ordinary language, and is informed by Moi's ordinary reading of Wittgenstein, there is no other example as to how one might do an ordinary reading or even what might constitute an ordinary reading. Beyond this, Moi's argument is that readers might "look and see," and be led by curiosity through a text. In this way, they might also be inspired to ask questions of a text without imposition of a theoretical framework, and therefore allow the text to raise its own questions that would inspire an ordinary reading.

This vision of language and of reading falls flat for the undergraduate student in 2021. Without an unveiling of literature conducted by professors and shared with students, undergraduates would lack the context and ability to understand questions being raised by the text—even if they were led by curiosity and attempted an ordinary reading. A unique benefit to undergraduate learning is having one's assumptions challenged and their perspective broadened.

Ordinary language philosophy does not raise the same challenge, and it does not question one's assumptions. It reorients the way language is used, understood, and imbued with meaning. It does not, however, question the conditions within which language is used. Moi ends her text with a nod to the ethics of ordinary language philosophy, explaining that only through making a direct connection between words and the world can one escape the dangers of meaningless language. However, this is at best a byproduct of ordinary language philosophy: it is not a change directly sought by ordinary language philosophy. There is, in fact, no change sought by ordinary language philosophy. Apart from the reorientation to language, and the alleged ethical value of words being tied to meaning, there is no concern as to how language is used. This lack of concern is the greatest problem of Moi's argument for ordinary language philosophy. Her reorientation to language relies on a certain intimacy between the reader and their text. In prioritizing intimacy, however, ordinary language practitioners fail to recognize that distance also does operative work for the reader. Distance and a lack of intimacy produce something too. There is no real possibility of change through ordinary language philosophy because it requires that the reader hold their object of inquiry close, rather than a willingness to evaluate it at a critical distance. But distance is an instrumental part of the university experience. Students are instructed to stand apart and analyze, and, only after doing this, integrate their experience back into the world. Without critical frameworks in undergraduate classes, students are not taught to question their underlying assumptions and practices. Critical self-reflexivity brought about by theoretical frameworks is not solely learned and practiced within the confines of literary studies; undergraduate students can translate that knowledge outside of the classroom and into their lives.

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