

Honors Reading List

- *To My Daughter With Love* (Susan Polis Schutz) This is a book of poems that I received as a high school graduation gift from my parents. It marks the beginning of my journey from a high school graduate to, now, a college graduate. The poems are explanations of love and life. The message my parents conveyed through this gift is how proud they are of me. This may not be an academic work or be the poetry of Emily Dickenson, but it embodies our relationship and has been my motivation these last four years. This book symbolizes my belief in myself and my parents' belief in me to achieve all my goals and to be successful. They were part of the reason I joined the Honors College and have encouraged me to challenge myself and work hard.

There are a couple of poems I often return to. When I need some encouragement after a bad day or need a push to keep working through an all-nighter I read one poem titled *Princess* and another one that does not have a title. The first one, as my mom annotated on the page, says a lot about me. It acknowledges accomplishments of intelligence, creativity, and hard work. Schutz notes that it is also important to be in touch with emotions, which is something I tend to struggle with. It is something I have worked towards over the past four years, which has been a part of my development and it has improved my critical thinking and analysis.

The second poem is a good reminder for me. It begins with the phrase, "sometimes you think that you need to be perfect, that you cannot make mistakes." I always know, at the back of my mind that I cannot be perfect, but it is easy to forget. I want to work hard and do my best, but sometimes I want to do better than my best. It certainly helps keep me motivated, but other times it is rather discouraging. Maybe this is a little cheesy, but I think many students face this pressure in their academic careers, and I know it does not end in college. I am sure it is something that follows someone wherever they go. Maybe perfection is part of human nature? Where does this idea that we need to be perfect come from? I think there are many origins of it and I also think that we explored these origins in the Civilizations sequence.

- *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley) One of the most memorable Honors texts for me is *Frankenstein*. Although it is considered to be science fiction, this text opened my eyes to the question of what a monster truly is. Society creates its own monsters. Frankenstein's isolation moved him to create the creature, but then society's rejection of the creature pushed it to destruction. The blame does not solely lie with Frankenstein, the creature or society. It is a chain reaction, in a sense; one instigates the other.

I had read *Frankenstein* before coming to college, but reading it again and being able to discuss it with my Honors preceptorial created a whole new experience for me. Through the discussion of this text I came to a realization that although this book may be considered fiction, it has a strong sense of reality. Isolation and rejection can be dangerous, especially in today's world where it is crucial for many to feel accepted. Destruction seems to occur when an outcast is provoked.

- *If Not Winter* (Sappho) A collection of poetry, mostly fragmented written shortly after 630 BC that I read in Honors with Melissa Ladenheim. Even though most of it is incomplete, this text really opened my eyes to poetry and imagery. Because the poetry is fragmented it was up to me to put the pieces together and complete each poem. I also think it is the fragmented aspect of this poetry that makes the imagery strong. With few words on each page I found myself paying more attention to each word. I stopped on each page to picture the images or hear the sweet songs described. As a slow reader I usually struggle to get through all the material, but with Sappho I was able to take my time and enjoy it.

I have always been able to appreciate poetry, but I never wrote or read poetry in my free time until I read Sappho and then participated in a class exercise of Black Out Poetry. I fell in love with Black Out Poetry. At the end of that semester I used it for my final project where I picked several works we had read in Honors and created a poem about each of them. I did my best to portray each text through the poem, and by doing so I was able to come to a greater understanding of the texts. This exercise reinforced my understanding of each text because I had to contemplate which words to use from the news paper article. Instead of having to come up with the words on my own, they were there in front me; however, I had to use them to tell a different story. Because of this class exercise, I was able to attend and present at the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference in the fall of 2009; a validating and empowering experience.

- *The Republic* (Plato) I think it took at least a year after I read this for some Plato's ideas to finally make sense to me, and I know I could recapture every part of this text, but what I find interesting is the comparison of poetry and philosophy. Plato believed the performing arts imitated shadows of realities that formed on walls of the cave of ignorance. Therefore, for Plato, the performing arts were even more removed from reality. He also thought theatre appealed more to emotions rather than reason, and so he distrusted it and banned it from his Republic.

If I could sit down with Plato, I would like to dispute this idea. I began college as a history major with a theatre minor. However, in the fall of my second year I decided on a whim to double major. I had enjoyed my theatre classes and figured it was not that many more classes to make it a second major. That spring I ended up in a course on stage management, now, one of the career options I am considering. However, it was not until the fall of my third year that I began to discover the importance of theatre. When I took the class Characterization I learned more about myself than I had in the past nineteen years of my life. Why? Well, because I was forced to use myself and my life to create characters. I had to understand what was going on in the play and then find a way to identify with it. Therefore, Plato is wrong. Theatre is not an imitation. Theatre is real people completely baring themselves on a stage in front of an audience. It is certainly something that very few people can do at all, let alone do well. Plato may be right when he says that theatre appeals to emotions rather than reason, but how can someone have reason without any emotion? Yes, emotions can get out of hand and can get in the way of reason, but is that not part of being human?

I am not using the whole text of *The Republic* here. I am looking at one very small argument that Plato makes and I am using it to depict my experience in my undergrad. I have learned more than I ever thought I would from my theatre experiences, and without Plato's text I do not think I would sit here now and understand how important theatre and the arts are. When I first read this text I never thought I would reference it again, but it has followed me ever since.

- *The Second Sex* (Simone De Beauvoir) In this 1952 text Beauvoir examines what is to be a woman, and her analysis discovers women may not be as liberated as they would like to believe. As I read parts of this text for the course Modern Intellectual History with Professor Lang, I was surprised to read Beauvoir's thoughts on women. The section that stood out the most to me was the chapter titled Social Life. It made me question my role and actions as a woman. In this chapter on a woman's social life Beauvoir states that, "woman, on the contrary [to man] is even required by society to make herself an erotic object. The purpose of the fashions to which she is enslaved is not to reveal her as an independent individual, but rather to cut her off from her transcendence in order to offer her as pretty to male desires; thus society is not seeking to further her projects but to thwart them." (529) Just this quote alone irks me. Do I really get dressed in the morning to please men? Am I limited in my "projects?" I would like to think society does not have this kind of influence on me, but sometimes I think it does. However, I think a similarity between Beauvoir and myself is that we both have the ability to notice the subtleties of culture that are hard to distinguish because they have become part of the normative. I am not comparing my intelligence to Beauvoir's, but I would like to think that my journey through college has given me the tools to question and challenge the issues discussed in texts such as this.
- *The Counterrevolution of Slavery* (Manisha Sinha) This text focuses on South Carolina's political history between the years of 1828 and 1860 through four main events including: the Nullification Crisis of 1828-1834, the first secession crisis over the Compromise of 1850, the movement to reopen the African slave trade in the 1850s, and South Carolina's secession in 1860. I don't remember the specifics of this text, but it represents part of my belief in the discipline of History. History is not just one view or interpretation; it is an amalgamation of many different perspectives. The History of the American South course I took with David Turpie, solidified this idea for me. Growing up in the North I had only been exposed to very little southern history. Because of this class I became more sympathetic with the Southern perspective.

In high school history was mostly about learning facts, it is important to have a sense of the facts, but part of my journey as a history major includes the understanding that all of the facts are based on an opinionated and biased point of view. World War II started at a different time for Germany than it did for the United States. The Civil War started at a different time for the North than for the South. History is not just facts; history is interpretation and the search for understanding. It is an important part of every discipline. Every professor has his/her own perspectives, as well as every great philosopher, artist, and scholar. They are all influenced by the world differently and without the differences we would not have history majors, and we certainly would have no need for theatre.

What does this have to do with the history of South Carolina? Well, South Carolina had its own perspective and that is where my thought process on perspective began. Therefore, it is not the context of this book that makes it essential, but the idea behind it.

- *Dr. Seuss & Co. Go To War* (André Schiffrin) This work is a collection of editorial cartoons from World War II. I came across this book last semester in the class Early Twentieth Century America with Professor Godfried. Not a typical history text, this book explores World War II through the eyes of leftist cartoonists. I've always looked at political cartoons in class, but until I had to use several of these cartoons to construct a short paper I did not understand how crucial they are. I never realized how much thought goes into political cartoons. Every detail is included. I was thoroughly impressed with these cartoons and even now when I look back through them I find new details within them. By flipping through this book it is easy to understand what the major issues of the war were. But more importantly the cartoons are an example of culture, art, and the importance of the everyday. These cartoons came out of publications that were printed weekly. It is easy to browse over a mundane item such as a political cartoon, but it is often those mundane items that allow for a better understanding of any society.
- *Dutch Genre Paintings* I studied these paintings as part of Honors. Many of my classmates did not see the point of these paintings. They seemed "boring." I did not notice all the technical details that were pointed out in the lecture and by my classmates, but what I did notice was the importance of such work. These paintings emphasize the everyday, and although it is not the most exciting exhibit of paintings, all the paintings allow the viewer to enter Dutch daily life of the 17th century. It is the everyday that makes history. It is the everyday people of a society that adapt the create change over time. When I study history I am always drawn to topics that deal with the everyday and society. I see the everyday as a link to the bigger events. Whether we realize it or not it is the everyday that we live. We need the everyday of the past and present in order to understand the society in which we live today.
- *Doubt* (John Patrick Shanley) In one of my favorite plays, Shanley explores the relationships between a priest, two nuns, and one boy who appears to be targeted by the priest. The priest, Father Flynn, is accused by Sister Aloysius of giving the boy special attention, but without a witness or a complaint from the boy there is doubt as to whether Father Flynn is guilty or the Sister is out to get him. Shanley makes a point in the preface that confronts us, "doubt requires more courage than conviction does, and more energy; because conviction is a resting place and doubt is infinite—it is a passionate exercise. You may come out of my play uncertain . . . we've got to learn to live with a full measure of uncertainty. There is no last word. That's the silence under the chatter of our time" (x). It is okay to doubt. I think there is a perpetual fear of being wrong and somehow I think doubt is linked to that. To be uncertain can be a sign of weakness, but uncertainty is a demand for a better understanding. What is wrong with that? Why do we have to be certain? The world is not black and white; in fact, I would argue that the world is completely gray. No matter what, someone will always have a different perspective.

By the end of Shanley's play the reader/viewer is left to decide whether Father Flynn is guilty. More often than not, Father Flynn is convicted by readers and viewers, but I think they might be quick to judge. Interestingly enough, when I watched the movie version of the play several years ago I was convinced Father Flynn was guilty. When I read the play for the first time this past year I had doubt. I was not convinced that he was guilty nor was I convinced that he was not. Does that make me weak? I certainly hope not. Does that come from my tendency to be indecisive? Maybe. But in the end I return to Shanley's challenge and consider both outcomes.

- *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* (Edward Albee) A play about bestiality? I don't think so. Albee has created a character, Martin, who makes us question love and relationships. Martin may think he is in love with a goat, and it may tear apart his "normal, successful life," but what Albee really gets at is prejudice. As Sandra Hardy put it when this play was discussed in her Script Analysis class, "isn't it what you are used to that you tolerate?" We might think we are accepting or liberal, but we may be limited by what we are "used to." Once again, I come back to the idea of society and its influence. It is unacceptable for a man to fall in love with a goat, right? Albee didn't think so and I would like to say I do not think so either, but something holds me back. I would like to think that I would not judge someone for having a relationship with a goat, but I think I would. Am I a terrible person for judging? Why do I have a problem with it? Because society tells me I should, but then why is it okay for society to constrain my thoughts and opinions? It's not okay, but can I stop it from happening? I think what Albee was trying to do with this play is provoke his audience and he did just that.
- *Bodymind* (Ken Dytchwald) In this text Dytchwald connects the body and its physical well-being to the mind and its psychological well-being. The body and mind, everything, is all connected and he explains a holistic way to understand this connection and maintain a healthy "bodymind" and life. This book was required reading for my Movement for the Actor class with Marcia Douglas. I am pretty sure I was the only student in the class to read the whole book, and in my opinion my classmates missed out. Many of the theatre classes I have taken have led to a better understanding of me. This book allowed me to understand my own body language as well as others. And after reading this text I would argue that a better understanding of myself made me be a better student and helped me succeed academically.
- *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (Richard Schechner) This text is required for a new theatre class that was offered for the first time this semester. Performance Studies taught by Tom Mikotowicz is a different approach to theatre and performance in general. Everything is a performance and this book dissects every aspect of it. By analyzing something as a performance I have a better understanding of the activity or action and the motivation behind it. This book is filled with theories on how to study performance and sheds new light on the everyday. By examining my morning routine I find ritualized behavior that I perform on a daily basis. I may not be on a stage performing for an audience, but I am performing a pattern of known behavior that consists of action, and action is performance. Why is this important? Performance studies allows for a better understanding of our changing world. With new technology the world has become less of

a book that needs to be read and understood and more of a performance that needs to be participated in.

- *Avenue Q* (Book by Jeff Whitty, Music and Lyrics by Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx) A musical that I have seen Off Broadway, and have now had a chance to work on. Simply stated, *Avenue Q* is a show about life. The soundtrack and storyline speak to me, and always have ever since I was first introduced to it several years ago.

A young college graduate sets out to find not only a job and a place to live in New York City, but his purpose in life. In the opening song, Princeton, the college graduate, asks, “what do you do with a BA in English?” Although I may not be working for my BA in English, I have found myself at the end of my undergraduate journey asking myself a similar question. What is my purpose in life and what do I do with a BA in History and Theatre? I have worked hard and survived many late nights of cramming for exams and writing papers. I have challenged myself by taking difficult courses and pushing myself to think outside of my comfort zone. I have grown intellectually and socially I have matured, but now what? I am not sure. I think, like Princeton, I will have to take some time and consider all of my options. This show uses exaggerated comedy to put life in perspective. Life is not perfect and it has many ups and downs, and I think it is important to remember that. I had a tough start to this last semester and although it is easy to, I could not use it as an excuse to slack off. I needed to push forward and I did just that. This is the message of the final song. Entitled “For Now” the characters all come together to remind the audience that no matter how tough life may seem “except for death and paying taxes, everything in life is only for now.”

Avenue Q provided me with my own theatre experience as both an audience member and a crew member. Going to New York and seeing live theatre was an unforgettable experience in my undergraduate career. Nevertheless, to be able to see the performance and then in the following year participate in a production of it was just as unforgettable. I worked as an assistant stage manager on this production and although it was challenging at times I would not trade that experience for anything. I was able to become a better stage manager by working on this production because I watched how someone else worked as a stage manager and then I found what worked and what did not and used it to improve my own work as a stage manager.

- *Equus* (Peter Shaffer) When I first read this play I was not really sure what it was about. I understood the basic story line, which is a seventeen year old boy, Alan, blinds six horses with a hoof pick and is sent to a psychiatrist, Martin Dysart. Dysart spends the play talking to Alan, his parents, and the stable owner to figure out what made him do such a horrible thing. It was not until the third read through in rehearsal (I just finished stage managing this production) that I finally started to understand that this play is not really about Alan, but about Dysart and his journey. Dysart discovers that horses are a part of Alan’s worship and questions his ability and right to take that worship away. Alan is a free soul, as far as Dysart is concerned. He is not trapped by society as Dysart claims himself to be. Because of Alan Dysart begins to question his work and his personal life. He agrees to help Alan in the end, but knows he will never return to a “normal” life.

Equus will always haunt him and now, will haunt Dysart. His journey is “more than just professional menopause.”

Once again, the theme of society and its restraints on individuals comes up. I think I am drawn to this idea and the challenges it presents. I always seem to question the “norm” and what or who regulates it. However, this play is not just another work that makes me think or question my own thoughts and beliefs. When I sat down at a character discussion for the actors of the Maine Masque production of this show I realized how much my critical thinking skills have developed over the last four years. We, the director, cast, and I, sat down one night at the beginning of the process to talk about each character. The actors had to present their character’s background and then his/her relationship with the other characters. We were talking about Dysart when I asked, “why does Dysart only work with children? He doesn’t have any children of his own; what does that say about him?” The actor had not even considered that question previously. Nor had the director even thought about it. Later on, when the discussion reached Alan, I asked if the actor had considered whether or not Alan might be autistic. He had, but it led to a whole discussion on the character’s behavior. I asked questions that I would never have asked my first year in college. With this experience I was able to witness my own growth over the past four years.