

Personal Statement

In Iris Murdoch's *The Black Prince*, the protagonist, Bradley Pearson, falls desperately in love with his best friend's teenage daughter. As a direct result of this relationship, outlandish situations occur: kidnapping, murder, and public shaming all ensue. Knowing Murdoch's Neo-platonic leanings, I questioned why this literary convention – the unrealistic situations – appears in the fiction of a philosopher who argues for literature's unique ability to connect the reader to a reality beyond the phenomenal world. I began to notice how the external situations – what scholars have categorized as "Murdoch happenings" – focus the reader's attention on the development and presentation of the characters' psychology. While Murdoch is not a realist author in the sense that her writing is not an attempt to display life as is, she creates a realistic inner life for her characters – a space where the mind can be seen deliberating over questions of individual morality. This discovery led me to explore the development of psychological realism in the novel genre since its formal conception in the 18th century. My master's thesis, my participation in academic conversations (particularly around aesthetics and psychological realism in the novel), and my teaching and Writing Center experience, all inform my work as a graduate student of literature. In the doctoral program in literature at Temple, I want to continue exploring interpretations of the novel as well as the development and evolution of psychological realism.

My thesis, "The Inner Life of the Artist: A Development of Form," focuses on the history and development of psychological realism in the *Künstlerroman* genre, and in my Ph.D. work, I want to analyze this development in the broader context of how the novel influences the presentation of morality in relation to the individual and society. The psychological realism novel is a combination of aesthetics and life: the novel itself is a carefully crafted work of literary art and it attempts to understand a certain perspective of the world. In my thesis, I trace the development of the psychological life of artists through the *Künstlerroman* novels of Samuel Richardson, Henry James, and Iris Murdoch. I suggest that the *Künstlerroman* genre is a key sub-genre in the development of literary realism because of the writers' presentation of the moral inner life in conjunction with depictions of psychological realism; I frame this discussion using theories of the development and function of the novel by scholars such as Watt, McKeon, Bakhtin, and Armstrong. The study of literary realism and the genre of artistic development are important because, by studying this synthesis of art and application in the novel, I believe one can better understand an individual's relationship to larger social and cultural frameworks. As scholars such as Armstrong argue, the creation of the novel genre is innately tied to the rise of the modern conception of individuality. The novel, since its formal conception in the eighteenth century, has grappled with issues of identity, individuality, and their expression in narrative. My future work will explore questions around psychological realism as its techniques and narrative forms evolve alongside the development of the field of psychology and the modern conception of self. In the literature department at Temple, with the program's varied critical perspectives on aesthetics and modernity, my research will expand to understand and incorporate the numerous exterior influences on the modern novel.

My participation in academic conversations about aesthetics and literature in both graduate seminars and academic conferences gave me the opportunity to discuss, and appropriately refine, my research with other scholars in the field. At the German Graduate Studies Conference at the University of Virginia, I explored German author Hermann Hesse's *Narcissus and Goldmund* and his understanding of art's relationship to the artist and to the audience. Contextualizing Hesse in relation

Comment [1]: Rather than starting with a personal anecdote in the **hook** that is unrelated (and therefore unnecessary) to the student's academic field and future research, this student chose to start with the inception of his interest. Because this student is applying to a PhD program in literature, it makes sense to begin the essay by establishing a **theme** that focuses on his particular field and future research interests.

Comment [2]: Notice here how the student provides a **forecast statement** for the remainder of the essay. Based on this statement, the reader knows that he will discuss:

1. His Thesis
2. Academic Conversations
3. Teaching & Writing Center Experience
4. Future Research and Goals at the institution to which he is applying.

Comment [3]: The student develops his **claim** and **situation** simultaneously here (the C and S of C.S.A.R.R.) and establishes (via a clear topic sentence) that in this paragraph he will be discussing his thesis in relationship to his future research in his PhD. Notice that the statement clearly presents a guide for how to read the rest of the paragraph in terms of what it proves.

Comment [4]: In the body of the paragraph, the student establishes what he has done in terms of research in this field, which is the A (**action**) of C.S.A.R.R. Notice that he isn't talking in generalities; instead, he evokes specific examples and provides evidence of how much work and experience he has researching in this field.

Comment [5]: Next, for the **result-global**, the student expands on how this experience will develop and expand in his future studies as well as how the specific program will help him to accomplish his goals. This is an indirect application of C.S.A.R.R. that is common in personal statements. This pattern of C.S.A.R.R. is replicated in other body paragraphs below.

to post-war European novelists, I argued that Hesse's discussion of art in the novel makes evident art's dual purpose: the expression of beauty as a concept and the externalization of that concept in a physical vehicle that can interact with its audience. I demonstrated, by focusing on the conversations of the two protagonists and Hesse's descriptions of works of art, such as trees and pulpits, that art is both an expression and externalization of beauty. My presentation at The Southwest Conference on Christianity and Literature discussed philosopher-novelist Iris Murdoch's rewriting of Hamlet in her novel *The Black Prince* and her desire to connect the inner, intellectual life with the outer, experiential life. Murdoch, as a moral philosopher, strikes this balance through writing about the existence of the moral inner life in her philosophical treatises and writing novels – external works of art – in which she demonstrates the existence of the inner moral life. I argued that Murdoch's interpretation of the famous play focuses on how art is a unique medium through which to express the moral state of selflessness. This focus happens, I suggested, through her deliberate discussion of the differences between high literary culture and low popular culture embodied by the two main characters, both writers. This perspective on literature and aesthetics led me to begin in-depth research on the novel genre and its unique ability to communicate and foreground the inner moral life. I plan to extend this work into projects focused on postmodern novelists' presentation of psychological realism and the morality of the individual.

For the past two years I have successfully balanced my academic pursuits in my graduate courses, independently teaching composition classes, and working twenty hours a week at the Writing Center. My pedagogy is informed by Trimbur's notion of dissensus and by theories based in dialogue and conversation (Delpit, Bruffee, Flower) in order to create an environment for academic ideas that are furthered dialectically through discussion, disagreement, and genuine curiosity. I construct assignments for my composition classroom that connect aesthetics, technology, and critical engagement to my students' academic pursuits. In my Extended Arguments class, for instance, I teach my students how to effectively use Prezi to create a presentation of their research that is both professionally and aesthetically effective. Presenting their arguments using Prezi allows the students to explore modes of visual rhetoric – such as constructing relationships through transitions and spacing – while at the same time fostering dialectical discussion in the classroom. The presentations, then, function as a visual representation from which they can examine and conceptualize their written arguments. I also teach in a one-on-one setting in the Writing Center as a Professional Writing Consultant. From leading with a collaborative agenda to working on higher order writing concerns, the Writing Center offers me an environment in which I can adapt my pedagogical approach to individual student needs. This focus on dialogue and adaptability pervades my work with students in the Writing Center as well as in the composition classroom.

The doctoral program in literature at Temple will provide me with the knowledge and opportunity to continue my exploration of the novel genre and the theories of literary realism. It is only through the level of critical engagement in both literary studies and teaching demanded by Temple that I will successfully achieve my goals of participation in the intellectual life of the academy and of finding useful and practical applications for scholarship.

Comment [6]: Note again how the student brings in direct and specific examples that provide in-depth information about his research. Providing such detail enables application committees to see that the student has completed a lot of leg work in preparation for his future research goals. The readers can actually see the experience the student has rather than just assuming that general statements about abilities or experience are true.

Comment [7]: Note here how the student clearly illustrates what the **result-local** was as well as what the **result-global** is. The reader knows both what he gained as well as what he will do with this in the future.

Comment [8]: This first sentence again establishes both the C and the S of **C.S.A.R.R.** Based on this sentence, the reader knows that this paragraph will discuss his experience teaching composition and working in the Writing Center.

Comment [9]: The middle section of this paragraph (the **action**, or A, of **C.S.A.R.R.**) indicates in detail what the writer has done to teach composition. He provides specific details on how he teaches in a way to connect to students.

Comment [10]: Because teaching is often a part of funding packages offered by PhD programs, this student has taken the time here to establish his teaching background. This sentence also further establishes the **result-local R** of **C.S.A.R.R.** while indicating how his teaching pedagogy informs his instruction. This enables the reader to fully understand his teaching abilities as related to his future potential in the classroom.

Comment [11]: In this **conclusion**, the student brings all his past experience together in a way that indicates a path or future that will combine all of his previous work. The student doesn't specifically discuss career goals here; however, it is implied that he will pursue professorships and other academic or teaching careers. He further takes the opportunity to briefly (but not too obviously) compliment the program in a way that indicates his interest and focus.