

Using literature to explore interpersonal theory: Representation of rhetorical objectification and oppression

Carol Thompson, Michael Kleine

Abstract: This essay explains pedagogical experiment at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock using a piece of literature as a case study to examine interpersonal-communication concepts and to emphasize a course theme of objectification of other human beings. The course, entitled Rhetoric and Communication, has two co-instructors. One instructor is from Rhetoric and Writing, the other is from Communication. This essay reviews the course they teach, along with the readings they require, and it selects *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka, to illustrate how interpersonal themes play out in a literary text and how objectification thwarts deeply personal values. Initially, the essay summarizes key interpersonal concepts (schema theory, coordinated management of meaning, the work of Martin Buber, and Knapp's work on relationship stages). It then considers students' work as they produce a "filtered" summary, a summary that endeavors to apply the interpersonal concepts being studied to Kafka's work. Finally, it explains how summaries work, the "passage hunt" exercise, and how text-based class discussions can lead to lively discussion, robust student writing and a richer understanding of interpersonal concepts as well as the part objectification plays in damaging relationships. Thus, the paper illustrates several pedagogical strategies as it explores how *The Metamorphosis* becomes a literary case study that answers the question: how did this fictional family create communication that resulted in such communicative tragedy?

Key words: communication, pedagogy, literature, objectification, interpersonal communication, case study.

Using Literature Outside of the English Department: Representation of Rhetorical Objectification and Oppression

This essay describes an experiment with pedagogy undertaken by two professors who co-teach a course called Rhetoric and Communication in the Donaghey Scholars Program at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. In this program most required core courses have been replaced by interdisciplinary co-taught courses, driven not by lecture, but by reading, oral communication, and writing. Michael Kleine and Carol Thompson have co-taught this course for over twenty years bringing their respective disciplines together under the umbrella of rhetoric. In Rhetoric and Communication we consider, along with our students, both objectifying and oppressive rhetorics, and also relational and dialogical rhetorics. This paper focuses on the pedagogical initiatives we developed to demonstrate interpersonal concepts, to engender reflective and robust writing through filtered summaries and text-based discussions, and to confront powerful objectifying rhetoric.

For some years now, we have developed a theme for our course to focus on the rhetorical binaries hinted at above: objectification/inter-subjective dialog and oppression/resistance of oppression. A theme provides coherence and structure to the planning and execution of a course; it assists in gathering course materials and deciding upon texts to be used. As we pondered the theme for this course, it occurred to us that what we saw as salient issues in the world involved objectification/oppression of other human beings. Further, as we reviewed the theme, we tried to determine what “Thou shalt” seemed indispensable and each of us maintained that “Thou shalt not objectify” is one universal principle to which we could both subscribe.

As we investigated this theme further, we recognized that objectification of other human beings occurs virtually all over the globe as one group tries to objectify or subdue another based on religion, class, ethnic affiliation, gender, or sexual orientation. We knew we could not address all forms of objectification—e.g., class, gender, religion-- in a single assignment, so we worked to focus the concept narrowly in each unit. Thus, in our first unit, we focused on objectification as it might occur in individuals and their families. We would begin with objectification of an individual human being and examine how that objectification could be internalized.

Such focus has led us to reading, with our students, a scaffolded series of four extended texts, two fictional and two non-fictional. As we read the

texts in community with our students, we consider and apply important concepts from the fields of interpersonal communication, of rhetoric, and philosophy through reflective journaling, inclusive classroom discussion, i.e., authentic dialog (Thompson & Kleine, 2015), formal oral presentations, and scholarly writing. In brief, here is a list of the texts we read that semester:

1. Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1972). This is an early twentieth-century fictional work we read in relationship to interpersonal communication theories and concepts. We ask students to examine the novella through speaking and writing as a representation of depersonalizing rhetoric and the consequences of the absence of authentic dialog.
2. Eric Hoffer's *The True Believer* (1951) This is a mid-century text we teach in relationship to a heuristic list of possibilities for response, based largely on rhetorical and literary theory (Thompson & Kleine, 2016). Hoffer's book explains mass movements and emphasizes the problem of believing something so strongly that oppressive practices result. Instead of a single writing assignment, we offer our students a menu of assignments and encourage them to add their own assignment ideas. This section also involves asking students to develop a teaching project focused on this book where students can apply the book to current or historical contexts.
3. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) This is a mid-twentieth century text we read in conjunction with selected works by Martin Buber. We read *Pedagogy* with the hope that its examination of the resistance of oppressive practices in both educational and economically stratified societies might contribute to our collective understanding of how human dialog, and love in the best sense, can improve the quality of both our classroom and external worlds of being and communicating. We encourage students to develop their own writing assignments. After we collect these written assignments we compile them into menu of possibilities for writing.
4. Imre Kertész's *Fatelessness* (2004), This is a late twentieth century Holocaust novel read in relationship to our other texts (Kertész himself was a Hungarian Holocaust survivor). By this point in the class, students realize that objectification/oppression is a theme that might be examined in interpersonal and family contexts, national contexts, and international contexts. A Nobel Prize-winning novel, *Fatelessness* serves to examine a context of oppression that is punctuated by moments of dialog and human love. We invite students to write a kind of synthetic final piece, bringing together the novel with the other books we have

read together and reaching reflective closure on the course's themes of oppression and dialog.

As suggested earlier, the Donaghey Scholars Program charges us with incorporating rhetoric and communication into our course, with a twin focus on speaking and writing. We have chosen to do this in a variety of ways. In the assignment related to Eric Hoffer, for example, we use a heuristic list of multiple rhetorical approaches and ask students to select one of these to build a teaching presentation that elucidates Hoffer's philosophy (Thompson & Kleine, 2016). In one section on the history of rhetoric we ask students to pick a rhetorician from the past and come to class *as* that rhetorician to explain his or her rhetorical philosophy. Charged also with including interpersonal communication into our course we determined to explore these concepts through fiction.

A precedent exists for examining a work of fiction in terms of communication. One of the first literary critics to see it this way was Wayne C. Booth in his groundbreaking work, *A Rhetoric of Fiction* (Booth, 1985). This text illuminated fiction in multiple ways. Essentially Booth argued that narratives can be viewed through a rhetorical lens and he saw the connection between the reader and the author as complex and deeply communicative. Booth "made rhetoric into a way to deal with so many of the problems of the modern world," explained James Phelan, Professor of English at Ohio State University, in a telephone interview, "really about the ways in which authors communicate to readers, and began to think more broadly about the ways in which people on different sides of ideological divides can communicate which each other" (Fox, 2005).

Building on Booth's notion of seeing literature as communication, and using literature to elucidate many of issues in the world today, it made sense to explore interpersonal communication concepts through literature itself. As we considered which piece of literature to use as a vehicle to explore interpersonal communication we chose a literary work where the characters were rich and complex enough to invite further analysis and application. In Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* we found carefully defined characters so we could engage in speculation, and critical analysis of our overarching interpersonal themes. Within this work we also find areas of mystery, things that remain unsaid, things that are implied in terms of the characters, and areas to be imagined by the reader. Additionally, we discovered that the story itself leads to analysis, synthesis, critical thinking, and even creativity for our students.

Metamorphosis seemed perfect for this analysis for several reasons. 1) the novella is gripping, the story unique. We had searched for a story that might prompt students to read literature hoping they would become familiar with world classics and possibly would encourage them to read more. 2) Most literature focuses on the lives of human beings. Literature, then, can elucidate communication in spectacular ways. Rather than the instructors writing their own case studies (which we have done in the past), we decided to use this as a case study because of the complexity of interpersonal issues we saw within the text. 3) The language and themes of this particular literary piece compel students to think deeply and critically about the communication issues we were inspecting in the course. 4) We wanted to go beyond examining the work as a piece of aesthetic brilliance or rhetorical excellence; we wanted to demonstrate that the piece is seething with relationships, interpersonal connections, conflicts and diverse personalities.

Finally, in *Metamorphosis*, we focus on interpersonal communication. This text provides insights into theoretical insights from the Communication field, and it is through the lens of interpersonal communication, not literary history, rhetoric or philosophy, that we read Kafka.

A Filtered Summary of *Metamorphosis*

For all of the writing our students submit about the books they read, we ask them to begin with what we call a “filtered summary.” A filtered summary is not merely a random mini-narrative; rather, it is a summary that endeavors to apply theoretical concepts we are studying to the text at hand. In terms of *Metamorphosis*, student summaries vary according to an interpersonal concept of interest as it is represented by the novella. In the following section, we provide a four-part taxonomic breakdown of the interpersonal concepts we studied, but first, here is a filtered summary of the novella.

Metamorphosis begins when the main character, Gregor Samsa, awakens to discover that he has been transformed into a “monstrous insect.” At first the awakening does not seem to interrupt the Samsa family’s schematized existence: Gregor struggles to get up so he can fulfill his role as the family bread-winner; his father and mother become concerned, but their roles in the family economy are pretty much the same; his sister at first strives to help Gregor deal with his changed physical situation; the chief clerk arrives when Gregor fails to report to work on time. But it quickly becomes clear that the Samsa family’s so-

cial world had long been devoid of positive communication, even before Gregor's physical transformation. For the most part, the novella goes on to trace the further deterioration of the Samsa family's relationship with Gregor: the father and mother quickly separate themselves physically from Gregor, underscoring the ongoing communicative dysfunction, and even Gregor's sister, who at first seems sympathetic to his plight, becomes party to the family's avoidance of his physical form and termination of its relationship to him, and even to the termination of Gregor himself. At its core, the novella seems to focus on the horrible consequences of human **objectification**: in the end, all family members see Gregor as an "it" rather than a "thou," though it is implicit that such objectification began even before Gregor's metamorphosis into a literal dung beetle.

The Communication Concepts

We reviewed an array of interpersonal concepts to include in our reading of Kafka. At one time or another during our interpersonal communication section of the course, we discussed schema theory; perception theory, including selective attention, exposure and retention, as well as closure, creativity, and habituation; the development of self, including the Pygmalion effect and the looking-glass self; coordinated management of meaning, or CMM; Knapp's relational stages of coming together and moving apart; and Martin Buber's notion of "I-it: and "I-Thou."

We discussed the chosen concepts thoroughly during the three weeks assigned to this unit and asked students to read essays, and excerpts from various texts that would illustrate the core principles surrounding these interpersonal concepts. Students participated in class discussions through what we call "text-based" discussions. Before contributing to the discussion about, say, Martin Buber, a student would be required to find a direct quote from Buber from the assigned reading selections from his text to begin his or her contribution to the class. For example, a student might say, "In the fifth paragraph on page 11 of the reading we had from Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, I found the phrase, 'all real life is meeting.' I'd like to examine idea in terms of our discussion. . . ." At this point the student contributes to the decision with his or her ideas, and another student might build on that comment or offer another quotation for our consideration. Rooting our comments in the text meant that we would honor our readings, but that we would apply and connect those readings to the discussion and to the class as a whole.

While we reviewed each of the concepts and applied them to the story, students chose which theory made sense for them, which theory would prompt a deeper look at how objectification operated on an interpersonal level. We also explored which theory would allow a deeper understanding of interpersonal communication itself.

From the list of communication concepts we mentioned, above, below we review four concepts and further detail how students applied these ideas to *Metamorphosis* and how our students' critical awareness of the concepts unfolded. The four concepts we will address here include schema theory, CMM, Knapp's relational stages, and Martin Buber's notion of "I-it" and "I-Thou."

Schema theory

Frederic Barlett, a British psychologist (1932), first defined schema theory. He theorized that we form our understanding of the world through internalizing a web of abstract structures. These webs form through our daily living, with inputs from our families, peers, cultures, religions, the media, etc. Piaget (1936), however, first proposed the term, "schema." A schema represents an abstract concept, internal structures, or frameworks that we create in our brains representing ways of looking at the world. For example, we have schemas that tell us what a friend should be like, perhaps loyal, honest, funny, and kind, at least to us. This could be the schema by which we judge our friends. If one of our friends does not have these characteristics, it jars our image, our schema, of what a friend should be. When we were traveling during a conference in Great Britain, we came upon a fight between three people; two were pummeling another man who fell to the ground. As we arrived, the two attackers fled. When we asked the man on the ground what happened, he said, "They were my mates. Mates don't do this to other mates." His schema for friendship did not involve getting into a fistfight, and we imagined his schema was damaged, and needed to be readjusted, or his relationship with the other two was damaged because they no longer met his schema, or internal structure, for what a friend should be like.

We have schemata for everything in our world, what characteristics a man should have, those characteristics a woman should have, what marriage should be like, or even the characteristics of the family itself. In short, all of the information we have received about the world floods into our brains where it is classified into some sort of schema that ultimately represents the way things should be.

The Samsa family in Kafka's *Metamorphosis* demonstrated the family had formed a schema, a way of looking at what a family should be, with Gregor the wage earner, and the rest of the family dependent upon him. The family structure was tightly in place and all parties followed schematized guidelines--from Gregor and Grete, Gregor's sister, to his mother and father.

Coordinated management of meaning (CMM)

Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronin developed CMM in the 1980's. This is a theory of social construction that posits we create our relationships and even the world itself through communication. The theory is complex and includes such ideas as coherence and mystery. With coherence, we focus on those messages that help us determine what our world is like, and mystery suggests that the "world is far bigger and subtler than any possible stories we might develop," (Pearce & Cronin, 1980, p.50). The theory also addresses hierarchy of meanings, and coordination of meanings. Essentially, for the purposes of class, we saw the theory as based on the flow of messages, information, data shared between two people. Analyzing this data flow, CMM posits that we can construct positive social worlds by what we do and say. Essentially it asks the question, "What are we making together?" It also asks, "What do we want to make?" And "What kind of communication will get us there?" (Pearce, 2004, p. 43).

A simple example of how our communication creates a social reality might be simply saying "Hello." Saying "Hello" warmly to someone we greet typically invokes a similarly warm response. A growling "Hello" might engender a growling response back, or a quizzical look that asks, "Well now, what did I do to deserve that?" In the first case, we are opening the door to creating a more positive social relationship. In the second one, we are off to a poor start. CMM suggests that "what we say is important," because what we say creates our social world.

In terms of the Samsa family, we ask ourselves "What were they making together?" and "How were they making it?" Finally, "What communication could family members do to reshape this family system?"

Knapp's developmental stage model

Knapp's relational model of coming together explains how people develop relationships, i.e., how they develop over time (Knapp, 1983). The model of coming apart details the stages people encounter as relationships break

apart. While some relationships might follow Knapp's stages precisely, others go backward and forward, and may even skip stages and pick them up later. In a practical sense, then, the model may or may not be a stage model, since the stages can be variable. The model is most useful because it provides a vocabulary, a way of looking at what is happening inside a relationship.

According to Mark Knapp, parties usually *Initiate* a relationship, introduce themselves, and make an impression on the other person. Next, during *Experimentation*, participants want to know about each other and begin to explore what the other person likes or dislikes as a way to determine if all parties want the relationship to last. In the next stage, *Intensifying*, parties find themselves deepening in the relationship. This stage is characterized by feeling comfortable and familiar with friends, co-workers, or partners. In *Integration*, parties move even closer, and find themselves labeled as something like "best friends." Finally, in *Bonding*, parties become legitimately connected. There might be a formal commitment such as a binding contract, or a marriage if the stages are applied to a relational partner.

In Knapp's idea of "coming apart" the relationship begins a slow decline. After bonding, parties almost immediately move to *Differentiating*, starting to separate, moving away. In *Circumscribing*, parties limit communication and define boundaries separating themselves from the other person. *Stagnation* implies just going through the motions; the relationship seems dull, repetitive, and boring. With *Avoidance*, parties intentionally move away from each other and restrict communication. Finally, we come to *Terminating*, where the relationship ends.

Of Knapp's stages, the ones pertaining to coming apart seem to make the most sense for the purposes of analysis in our course. Gregor is thoroughly differentiated already when he wakes up as a dung beetle, and slowly the family moves away from him stage by stage until the end, and final termination results. Several of our students, however, have suggested that as the family moves *apart* from Gregor, it is also moving *together* as a unit without Gregor. Thus, it is possible to see evidence of all of Knapp's stages inside the novella.

Martin Buber

Philosopher Martin Buber provides some insights into relationship patterns that seem useful for our exploration of objectification. Buber asserts

that “In the beginning is the relation... the cradle of actual human life” (Buber, 1970, pp.60-69). Further, human beings become fully human in relation to someone else. These relationships develop through dialogue as one person opens him or herself to another in a morally appropriate act. This, Buber suggests, is a way to discover what is true and ethical in a relationship. Opening hearts also requires self-disclosure, taking into account the very risk involved, the vulnerability implied in the confirmation of another human being. Without this opening of selves, this willing mutuality, people do not become fully realized as human beings.

Buber saw two kinds of basic relationships, the “I-it” relationship and the “I-thou” relationship. In the I-it relationship, the perceiver treats the other person as a thing, an object, something to be used and manipulated, something that can be used as a means to an end. In this pattern we dissolve our human connection with other humans, and our ability to create positive social environments diminishes.

On the other hand, in the I-thou mode, people see themselves as deeply connected to other people. They see the other as created in their own image and as a valued human being. In the I-thou model no one wears a mask, and he or she becomes open to trusting the other person.

In this section students read several selected excerpts from *I and Thou* (1970) by Martin Buber. We further discuss the concepts over several class periods and students work through applying his ideas to various situations and contexts.

Another way to view Kafka’s novella is through the lens of Martin Buber. One could argue that Gregor was objectified, treated as an “it” even preceding the transformation. The transformation itself was a verification of how the family and Gregor himself had already viewed himself, as an “it.” Much evidence exists to verify this claim, and students have done outstanding work showing these connections.

Earlier in this paper we introduced our course, our texts, and a few of the interpersonal theories we used, what follows are examples of how we, the faculty, and our students have used the text, or “case study,” of *Metamorphosis* to explicate theories of communication. This process of explaining the theories, but then applying them to another, more complicated process deepens our understanding of both the theories themselves and facilitates our understanding of human relationships. Working this way, then, ena-

bles and fosters a richer knowledge of how we, as individual human beings, flourish within the particular context of our lives.

Application of Communication Theories to a Literary Text

Our taxonomic effort to group interpersonal concepts into four categories provides a way for our students to achieve a kind of macro-level and focused understanding of the communication theories at hand. After we explicate the theoretical categories in class through discussion, and we finish reading *Metamorphosis*, we ask students first to write and share their own “filtered summaries,” which prompt them to begin to apply the categories to the text. When students share their summaries aloud (we also share our own summaries as we write with the students), we experience a kind of community-based “reading” of the text. Our students always agree that by listening to the summaries that others write, their understanding of both the theoretical concepts AND the novella deepens considerably. Then students are asked to join us in a “passage hunt.” This hunt involves foregrounding one of the four concepts and then searching for passages from the text that seem to resonate with the concept at hand. This search not only leads to close reading of the text, but also what we want to call “selective reading” or “synthetic reading,” reading in which communication theory illuminates the text and in which the text illuminates the theory.

Below we provide block quotes of passages from *Metamorphosis* that our students have noticed and shared in the past. We have highlighted student selections in our own copies of the novella, but often the passages we notice correspond with passages our students notice, leading to what we want to call here “double-underlining.” When double-underlining occurs, both of us often share our delight that “we are on the same page.”

Schema theory

The passage below, double-underlined in a copy of the novella, seems to demonstrate the rigidity of Gregor’s schemata regarding his role as a “tool” and the probable consequences of reporting in “sick”:

He was a mere tool of the chief, spineless and stupid. Well, suppose he reported sick? But that would be very awkward and look suspicious, for Gregor hadn’t gone sick once during the five years of his employ-

ment. The chief would be sure to come along with the doctor from the health-insurance, would reproach his parents for the idleness of their son, and would cut short all excuses by the insurance doctor, for whom of course the world was composed exclusively of perfectly healthy but work-shy individuals. (Kafka, p. 78)

Many other passages reveal Gregor's schema regarding his role as a kind of working automaton in the family economy, but the above passage seems especially illustrative of schema theory; for in it, we can find the presence of "meta-schemata," or schemata about the schemata of others. Gregor's schema regarding the schema of the insurance doctor (regarding company workers) serves to reinforce Gregor's personal schema that his role as a worker is to work even when sick (or transformed). Needless to say, when our students also notice this passage it leads to a robust discussion of not only schema theory, but also the theory of other minds.

Coordinated management of meaning

For both of us, *Metamorphosis* provides an edifying representation of dysfunctional communication and also representation of a dysfunctional family system. As we explain earlier, Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) helps us all to understand the existential and ethical imperative that we, as humans, must choose to "manage meaning" in such a way that a positive social climate is constructed. Michael would not have known about CMM without co-teaching with Carol, whose home department stresses this theory, but now we both see clearly the epistemic and social/communicative value of the theory. When teaching CMM, we ask students to read and apply some of the academic work of Pearce and Cronin (1980) to the novella. So CMM, like schema theory, becomes the focal point for yet another passage search.

Our students mostly agree that the novella illustrates perfectly the absence of a positive social world and also the blocked and asymmetric meaning-management system that plagues both Gregor and his family. As the following double-underlined passage shows, Gregor's access to CMM is blocked as his family members talk--not to him, but around him; and even the communication between his mother and his sister, Grete, is separated, metaphorically and in fact, by walls:

"Oh heavens," cried his mother, already in tears, "perhaps he's seriously ill, and here we are tormenting him. Grete! Grete!" she then cried. "Mother?" called his sister from the other side. They were communi-

cating through Gregor's room. "You must get the doctor this minute. Gregor is ill. Run for the doctor, quick. Did you hear how Gregor was speaking just then?" (Kafka, p. 85)

Some of our students go on to medical school, and the passage provides us all with a great example of diagnostic objectification—in which patients are sometimes silent and talked "over" by physicians, who consider symptoms but do not manage the meaning of those symptoms with patients. Too, we endeavor to discuss just how the blocked communication system might be resolved with positive CMM. Students usually agree: "All of them need to be in the same room and talking with (not to) one another."

Knapp's developmental stage model

As we mentioned earlier in this paper, Knapp's stage model for human relationships is bi-directional. It explains how positive human relationships progress over time, and it also shows how relationships disintegrate over time. Kafka gives us a view of relational disintegration that includes all characters, but especially troubling (and violent) is the disintegration of Gregor's relationship with his father, who eventually throws an apple at Gregor that lodges in his carapace and that seems to be the principal cause of his death. Gregor's relationships with his employer, mother, sister, etc. also deteriorate, and do so along the lines suggested by Knapp's model, but his relationship with his father deteriorates at a later phase and at a faster pace. Nevertheless, Knapp's model can still be applied to the father-son "relationship." We can infer that Gregor's relationship with his father had begun to deteriorate before his metamorphosis (and the beginning of the novella), that in fact the stages of differentiation, circumscription, and stagnation had perhaps already occurred following Gregor's service as a military officer. So our students tend to notice both avoidance and termination, mainly, as the father violently separates himself from his son, but they also learn to make inferences about the time before the text. In the first part of the novella, avoidance and termination seem to merge as the chief clerk flees:

Now unfortunately Gregor's father, who had kept relatively cool so far, seemed to be totally confused by this flight of the chief clerk, for instead of running after him himself, or at least not hindering Gregor in his pursuit of him, he seized with his right hand the chief clerk's walking stick, which he had left behind on a chair together with his hat and overcoat, grabbed a large newspaper from the table with his left hand, and to the accompaniment of much stamping of the feet set

about driving Gregor back into his room by flourishing the stick and the newspaper. (Kafka, p. 90)

It would be tempting to move into the realm of literary analysis with this passage, noticing the biographical details of Kafka's life and the Freudian (and phallic) aspects of the father-son relationship, but both of us resolutely steer clear of such analysis, choosing instead to see the text as a kind of case study of relational deterioration.

In the dynamic of studying Knapp with the novella, our students nudged us into seeing something fascinating which we had not at first noticed by ourselves. As Gregor's relationship with his family deteriorates, and following his death, we can see the other relational direction described by Knapp: relational bonding and even fruition. Here is the concluding passage from the novella, which our students used to support such a position:

While they were thus conversing, it struck the Samsa parents almost at the same moment, as they observed their daughter's increasing liveliness, that despite all the labours which had turned her cheeks pale she had recently blossomed into a pretty and shapely girl. Growing quieter now, and coming almost unconsciously to agreement by an exchange of glances, they reflected that the time was also ripe to find her a good husband. And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and good intentions when at the end of the journey their daughter was the first to rise to her feet and stretch her young body.

For each of us, especially exciting about our students' passage find regarding Knapp and the novella was that they had become our teachers. In the relational development of our classroom community, we enjoyed a deeper relational bond with our "students."

Martin Buber

It may be obvious by now that, by considering each of the four theoretical concepts presented in relationship to *Metamorphosis*, the systemic relationship of the concepts began to appear. In the end, we all began to see the concepts not as discrete taxonomic categories, but as theories that, to put it simply, "had to do with one another." This became especially clear to us when we moved to reading and applying excerpts which students had read from the work of Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (1970). In many ways, then, the class we teach endeavors to confront issues of human objectification and

oppression. And Buber's admonition that we need to see **others** not as "its" (objects) but as "thous" (subjects) elegantly and powerfully addresses the problem of objectification. After considering Buber, our students quickly saw that rigid schemas often relied on objectification, that positive CMM was impeded by objectification, and that objectification (in opposition to communication) was at the heart of relational deterioration. We were delighted by a neologism that emerged among our students during discussion of Buber and what happened to poor Gregor: "itification." Morphologically, the word led to "itifying," "itness," "deitification" and other catchy neologisms. The pronoun "it" was on our minds when we collectively began the fourth passage search. We had all agreed that Gregor's sister had at first resisted the objectifying impulses of his father, but nearly all of us double-underlined the following passage, in which Grete moves into the later stages of relational deterioration:

"Dear parents," said his sister, slapping her hand on the table by way of introduction, "things can't go on like this. Perhaps you don't realize that but I do. I refuse to utter my brother's name in the presence of this monster, and so all I say is: we must try and get rid of it. We've done everything humanly possible to look after it and put up with it, I don't believe anyone can reproach us in the slightest". (Kafka, p. 119)

From Reading, Speaking, and Listening to Writing

We have developed several iterations of the formal writing assignment having to do with interpersonal communication theory applied to Kafka's novella. Below we provide our most recent version.

Examining The Metamorphosis Through the Lens of Interpersonal/Perceptual Theory

*In writing this paper, please try to examine The Metamorphosis through the lens of Interpersonal/Perceptual theory. In order to do this, you must first selectively **summarize** the text in an effort to establish a communicative or family dysfunction that you see represented in the novella. Then you need to make a **claim** in which you endeavor to apply a particularly interpersonal or perceptual theory in an effort to explain why the dysfunction exists or develops as it does. Following your claim, you need to provide what we are calling a filtered summary of the theory you are applying. You need, then, to provide textual evidence from the novella to show why you think the theory might account for the dysfunction.*

tion. In concluding, try to apply your thinking reflectively to an interpersonal dysfunction you experienced yourself—and suggest a way of remedying the dysfunction.

Here is a structural model you might employ when writing the paper:

- 1. Selectively summarize the text by focusing on the dysfunction that you find particularly problematical or vexing. A summary cannot possibly capture the entirety of the text; instead, it needs to focus on your personal reading of a problem or dysfunction.*
- 2. Make a claim (a “thesis statement”) that uses a particular interpersonal or perceptual theory to shed light on the problem your summary has highlighted.*
- 3. After making the claim, try to define or explain the theory you are attempting to apply. Do some research to provide at least one additional source for this theory outside of our discussion in class.*
- 4. The body of the paper should focus on aggregating textual examples of the dysfunction and how the theory you chose sheds light on the passages at hand. You can use paraphrase or quotations to present textual examples. If you use direct quotation, you need to indicate, in parentheses, the page (or pages) in which the quote appears.*
- 5. The conclusion should reflect upon your personal experience with the dysfunction that interests you and endeavor to explain how the the dysfunction might be resolved or ameliorated.*

This assignment, as well as the text-based discussions and the passage hunt described earlier, prompt both students and instructors to view literature and interpersonal theory in diverse ways, to see in the tangle of concepts related to literature something marvelously unique and intriguing. Moreover, when interpersonal theory and fiction collide, we often see an explosion of creativity. Students submit writing that is intelligent, analytic, and lively.

The interpersonal theories we introduce are intriguing and new for most students. Most of our students have mainly experienced looking at literature in traditional ways through formal, historical, biographical, and artistic lenses. Bringing interpersonal theories and literature together opens many new avenues for analysis. We find students making deeper claims; their writing becomes at once more pointed and more nuanced. In short, the process examined above gives students something “novel” to say in writing. Here are a few examples of the kinds of original claims our students make:

- In Kafka's novella, we can see how the rhetoric of objectification reduces not only Gregor, but also his family members, to "its" instead of "thous."
- Throughout *Metamorphosis*, Knapp's model of relational deterioration can be observed; ironically, though, following Gregor's death, we can see the genesis of the early stages of relational renewal among the remaining members of the Samsa family. We are left wondering whether this renewal can endure if family communication norms remain the same.
- Perhaps because they are locked into rigid schemas for family roles and communication patterns, the Samsa family seems incapable of engaging in the kind of Coordinated Management of Meaning that just might lead to the creation of a positive social world.

After our students complete rough drafts of their papers, they meet in small groups to conference one another toward effective revision. Before these groups meet, we encourage our students to engage in the kind of genuine, inclusive, and constructive dialog that is decidedly missing in the novella, which becomes, in the end, a kind of case study of communicative failure. In other words, it is our hope that in their own interpersonal interactions in the class and in the writing groups, our students will transcend objectifying impulses and, through inter-subjective dialog, create a positive classroom world.

Final Reflections

In this essay we described how one piece of literature fits into our pedagogical plan as one assignment in our course in Rhetoric and Communication. We see this piece of literature here as a case study, with multiple scenes for analysis, as a vehicle for examining vital interpersonal concepts that shape how human beings view each other and co-construct their worlds and how objectification/oppression shape interpersonal outcomes. Specifically, we have described four of the interpersonal concepts we cover in class--including Schema Theory, Coordinated Management of Meaning, Knapp's Relational Stages, and the philosophy of Martin Buber. Further, we have described both the "text-based discussion" and the "passage hunt" in which both instructors and students look for passages within the text to illustrate the interpersonal concepts encountered in class.

As our students deepen their understanding of interpersonal communication, and the utterly damaging role objectification and oppression play in human relationships, the concepts begin to vibrate through literature and in our students' own lives. At the same time they also are treated to the ex-

perience of great literature. As writer C.S. Lewis explained, “Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become” (2015). Not only does our course show how powerfully interpersonal communication affects how we construct our social worlds, as C.S. Lewis suggests, it also provides a vista into the always illuminating world of literature.

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Authors:

Carol L. Thompson, Professor
University of Arkansas at Little Rock
Department of Communication
2801 S. University Avenue
Little Rock
AR 72204
USA
E-mail: clthompson@ualr.edu

Michael Kleine, Professor
University of Arkansas at Little Rock
Department of Rhetoric and Writing
2801 S. University Avenue
Little Rock
AR 72204
USA
E-mail: mwkleine@ualr.edu