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## **Writing in the Capstone Experience: Psychology Encounters Literature**

*Henry E. Vittum and Robert S. Miller*

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### **In Four Parts:**

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Courses that satisfy the integrative component of Plymouth's General Education program invite, if not necessitate, the use of frequent and varied writing assignments. A supporting document presented to the faculty in 1985 in favor the then-new General Education program described an integrative course this way: "The course should be a capstone or culminating experience for the student.... A significant level of analysis and synthesis is expected as opposed to simple presentation of facts and theories." The present *General Education Handbook* adds, "To the extent possible, the process of integrating material is achieved through extensive discussion and collaborative learning experiences rather than lecture, as well as through frequent writing assignments as practiced in WAC pedagogy."

Psychology and Literature, which has the distinction of being the first course at Plymouth given the integrative label, was

offered for the first time in the Spring 1988 semester with an enrollment of just nine students. We, the two instructors, had spent close to a year preparing and planning. We had decided the course would compare three important theoretical approaches to psychology. The basis for comparison would be to ask which of the approaches was most useful in analyzing literature and to ask which approach seemed best supported, if the content of literature were examined as a sort of “behavioral sample.”

That first time, we studied the theories of three psychoanalysts: Freud, Jung, and Erikson; one radical behaviorist, B.F. Skinner; and three humanists: Rogers, Maslow, and Horney. After the class spent a week reading and discussing each approach, we spent several weeks reading works of literature that might be interpreted in that theoretical context.

For the psychoanalytic unit the choices were Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” Shaffer’s *Equus*, Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. For the behavioristic unit we chose Skinner’s *Walden Two*, Orwell’s *1984*, Dostoevsky’s *The Possessed*, and Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*. For the humanistic unit, we decided to read Chopin’s *The Awakening*, Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, Bolt’s *A Man for All Seasons*, and Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*.

We used a variety of writing assignments to facilitate learning. Most classes began with a five-minute quiz on the day’s reading assignment. These quizzes served to motivate timely completion of these assignments and to stimulate discussion. The students wrote a research paper designed to deepen their appreciation of one of the psychological theories and a critical essay designed to allow them to practice applying psychology to literary criticism. (In later years we added a journal. That first time we were not so WAC literate as we are now!)

The most successful writing assignment, however, the one that clearly necessitated synthesis, was given in place of a final exam. Each student and each instructor was to write an imaginative paper describing one of the psychologists we had studied engaged in conversation with one of the literary characters we had encountered. We were to place these individuals in a particular setting and write a dialogue that might occur between them.

Everyone brought these papers to the final exam meeting. That session was spent reading them to one another. Since most of us made liberal use of humor in these creations, the meeting was a most enjoyable ending for the course. More importantly, the papers took us in new directions and gave us new insights. They provided, we thought, clear evidence that the kind of synthesis that is supposed to occur in an integrative course had happened.

In the first publication of this article (Volume 4 of this journal) we included four examples of the papers, those written by the two instructors and by two of the students. Here we reprint one of each type. The student, Donald Hundgen, received a BA from Plymouth in 1992 with a major in English and a minor in psychology. He presently runs a successful graphics design business here in Plymouth, New Hampshire.

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### **New Roses for Jude Fawley**

*by Donald Hundgen*

Jude Fawley had gone off on another of his self-mortifying drinking binges. It was like the lines from a poem by A.E. Housman:

Ale, man, ale's the stuff to drink  
For fellows whom it hurts to think:  
Look into the pewter pot

To see the world as the world's not.  
And faith, 'tis pleasant till 'tis past:  
The mischief is that 'twill not last.

And poor, wretched Jude did not so readily awake from his perfidious potations. Rather for a while did he linger in the quagmire of his inebriated subconscious, finding himself ensnared within the grasp of a most singular dream.

His eyelids, all sticky and sore, did pry themselves open to yet another darkness from the one they had hoped to escape by opening. He was in a dark, strange room reclined upon a sofa, the structure and material of which he had never encountered in a sober state. The chamber had an odd aroma to it, of clean metal and wood and other substances he could not begin to name. After some interval of bleary scrutiny, he observed, sitting in crepuscular shadows at a very ponderous desk, just barely revealed in the light of a single, small lamp, the shape of a middle-aged woman who was apparently busy at writing something. Being not a little disoriented, Jude contrived a scheme whereby he might attract the attention of this nocturnal apparition. He groaned miserably.

The woman looked up and was indeed startled to behold so disheveled and unhappy a sight as Jude Fawley upon her couch. It was not simply Jude's identity that surprised her, for she could not clearly perceive this in the darkness, but the fact that anyone at all should be sprawled upon the sofa.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed, She had a slight accent that her visitor could not immediately place. "Now, who may you be?" she inquired. "We are after hours here, and I don't recall hearing you enter. If something is troubling you, it may be that we can set up an intake appointment for you. As it stands, I am not seeing many people at this time. You see, I am writing a book."

Jude, who has always had a weakness for books, picked himself up into an erect position on the sofa. "What-what kind of book?" he slurred.

“*Neurosis in Our Time* it will be called. It’s really a very serious problem.”

“New Roses? New Roses, you say? In our time? Ah a romance! That sounds very nice,” confessed Jude. “Yes, we do need more new roses. Can never have enough of them.”

“You don’t exactly get my meaning,” said the woman patiently.

“What time is it anyway?” Jude asked.

“It’s late. After hours!” The woman looked just the smallest bit disturbed. Unable to see her company very clearly, she adjusted the lamp so that it cast greater illumination on the setting of their conversation. “Good heavens!” she cried. “You look as though you stepped out of a book yourself! Some dusty Victorian novel!”

“Victorian?” mused Jude. “Now that’s a name that rings a faint bell, though I cannot say why.”

“What is your name?” the woman asked finally.

“Jude. Jude Fawley.”

The woman was silent for a moment. “This is very peculiar,” she muttered to herself. “Your name—is—familiar.” She observed the curly black hair and the wan, desperate look of a character from literature. The clothes were certainly not up-to-date, but then some people fancied antique clothing. “I suppose,” she said, “you are the Jude Fawley of Christminster, and in the acquaintance of—”

“Two very troublesome ladies!” cried Jude, leaping to his feet but almost falling. “How is it you know me and I don’t know you? Who are you?”

“I am a doctor. Dr. Horney, Karen Horney, a psychoanalyst. I know you because I’m afraid you have a rather broad reputation.”

“Is that so!” said Jude, collapsing again onto the sofa. “Now what have you heard?”

“I think it would be more appropriate if you tell me about yourself, because I may have heard incorrectly.”

“That may be true. But you are a doctor, you say? A lady doctor? Ha!” Jude looked amazed.

“I am.”

“And what was that other word? Sicko—sicko—”

“Psychoanalyst.”

“Is that some new approach? It is Christian or more the model of Aristotle?”

“Neither, exactly. Have you heard of Freud?”

“I can’t say that I have,” admitted Jude, scratching his head. “Sounds German. The Germans are so esoteric. Well, what are you writing about new roses for?”

“NEUROSIS!” corrected the doctor. “It’s quite a serious problem, you know. Actually, you should know very well, Jude, from what I have heard.”

“What have you heard? Has Arabella been to see you?” Jude suddenly looked frightened.

“Ha ha ha, no, no, nothing like that.”

“Where am I anyway?”

“The Horney Institute in New York City. It’s summer and the year is 19—”

“19—! New York City! I seem to have misplaced myself worse than ever!”

“That would appear to be the case, Jude.”

“Damn demon alcohol!”

“No doubt it has played a part. Tell me, Jude, have you made any progress with resolving that—uh—conflict in your life? The two women; and that other matter?”

Jude groaned. “Ah, that is hopeless! Sue has returned to that crotchety old twit Phillotson and Arabella—she’ll sleep with anyone who will marry her and help her pay the bills! Things are as hopeless as ever.”

“It doesn’t sound as if you are very happy.”

“Would you be?” cried Jude. “As to the women, well, they both have their qualities. If only God could work a miracle and

combine 'em together! As they are they are no good to themselves and no good to me. But why am I telling you all this?"

"It is natural, Jude, to want to resolve such problems and talk them out. I am perhaps the best person to tell your problems to. That's what psychoanalysts are for, to help people sort out their inner conflicts."

"Inner conflicts! There is nothing inner about Arabella and Sue! It's all as plain as day to me!"

"And you have no conflicts inside of you?"

I have a bit of gas and a headache coming on. I believe it's not quite respectable for me to be here with you—spilling my woes to a strange lady doctor. Lady doctor! I've never heard of such a thing! It's almost as preposterous as that quack we have in our town. Vilbert's his name. At least he's got cures to sell. What have you got? Still, I could trust him about as far as I could throw a fit!"

"You are insightful in that, I suspect," said Dr. Horney.

"Ah flattery means nothing to me. But yes, I'm not the half-wit it would seem. I've read a good many books on difficult subjects. I thought I'd be a learned man, once upon a time, but providence has had other things in mind."

"Are you dissatisfied with yourself?" asked the doctor with a sincere tone.

"With myself? Never! You always bring it back to me! That's rather unfair of you, just as life has been unfair to me. I was ready to go to Christminster! I would have gone and made a fine scholar! The old churls in their mortarboards wouldn't have it. Just because I was a poor bloke and had a skill! Why, I built the very roofs over their heads so they could fall asleep reading their fine books!"

"You sound as if you have something to be proud about, but instead you are very bitter, Jude."

"It's not what I wanted. I was capable of more. I still am! But no one will have it."

“Could it be that you are angry because you could not live out your ideal self?”

“Posh! I would have if I could have! Imagine locking someone out of a future course because of a silly prejudice! Jude the stone mason! And you! A lady doctor! That comes close to straightening my curls! These must be different times indeed. I must admit that you sound fairly learned for a woman. Arabella—now she’s got a figure to bring the troops home, but a brain like an empty barrel. If only there were a way to put some of her flesh on Sue, and maybe a dash of her practical sense, then Sue would be an angel! Well, she already is an angel, but—”

“Is she really?”

“Why yes, but—but—what is all this anyway?”

“Sue would be ideal then, wouldn’t she? And it would have been ideal, if only they’d said: ‘Jude Fawley, come to Christminster! You set your aspirations pretty high, and they were disappointed time and time again.’”

“Well, shouldn’t one have high hopes?” cried Jude indignantly.

“It is good to have goals, so long as they are realistic, Jude. One must be in touch with reality as much as one’s dreams and ideals. Reality is a very complex thing.”

“Reality, you say! Reality is insufferable, Miss—Miss—”

“Horney. Yes, reality can be difficult. Living in society can be difficult. Sometimes we have conflicting needs, and reality does not make it easy for us. We might settle for a good fantasy. Or go drinking.”

“Fantasy! Fantasy, you say! My life has been more than a fantasy!”

“It most certainly has, Jude. You have touched many people in very real ways, and yet you torture yourself because you can’t seem to make up your mind over these two women, and because you couldn’t go to college. You have a lot going for you just as you are, except that maybe you need to take a shower, stay away from liquor, and talk to someone about your inner conflicts. Did



you know that liquor kills brain cells?"

By this time, Jude was fuming. "Brain cells!" he screamed in anguish.

"You seem to be suffering from a serious neurosis."

"New roses again!" snarled the man writhing on the couch. "I am going to lose my mind talking to you!" New roses indeed! You are quite the romantic. Sue would like you."

"Not new roses! Neurosis! That's a disease suffered by people who are out of touch with their real selves."

"Real selves!"

"Yes."

"What's a real self? How can a self be anything but real?"

"Jude, have you ever felt you were not being yourself?"

"There have been times when I'd have liked to plead that, but it's always been far too real."

"Exactly. You are always real, or you always have that potential; but you think otherwise, and you make yourself jump through hoops. You torture yourself with impossible—"

"There you go again with this torture business. It's not me who is doing the torturing! It's them! It's you!"

"Yes, it often does seem like someone else is doing the torturing. That is called psychological projection, a kind of disowning of the self. But you are the one who is doing it."

"How is it that you know so much about me?"

"I have read your chart, Jude."

"My chart, where is it? I must see it!"

"It is in every good bookstore and library. You are indeed well known."

"Oh, my God!" Jude gripped his skull and made a horrifying grimace. "The whole world knows about me?"

"It's generally not our procedure to be so indiscreet, Mr. Fawley, but I'm afraid that you have come to us a little late. Society has been bold, to say nothing of art and literature. It is mostly the fault of a man named Thomas Hardy."

"Hardy, you say?"

“I wouldn’t be angry at him. He was just trying to be his real self, but I understand it puts you in an awkward predicament. He’s written quite an insightful account of your life, by the way. I would try to get a copy if I were you. It might inspire you to come back and see me for further conversation. I’ll give you a special rate, because this would be a rather special case.” Dr. Horney paused and watched her unexpected client watching her across the darkness. “I’m afraid our fifty minutes is up. Do you have a place to stay, Jude?”

“Oh, it does not matter,” moaned the wretched figure as he stood up. “If I am as well known as you say, someone is bound to take me in.”

“Indeed, many people have, Jude,” she said warmly. “I dare say you have many sympathetic fans. And there are many people in the world just like you, even today. That’s why I am writing my book.” She rose from her desk and fetched something out of the shadows. It was a book.

“Here is another volume I have written.”

Jude looked at the title. “*Our Inner Conflicts*. Is this about new roses also?”

“It will tell you all you really need to know, Jude. But do come again. It’s been—it’s been very real.”

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## **Psychology and Literature Final Exam**

by Robert S. Miller

“There will be another joining us in a while. Meantime why don’t each of you three begin by telling the others how you come to be here,” Dr. Horney said and turned to the woman seated on her immediate left.

“I really do not know,” Edna began. “I was swimming. I was feeling at peace. I was feeling a part of the sea. I remembered my father and a man I used to know and then I could smell flowers—

the flowers that bloomed in June by the doorstep when I was a girl. Then somehow I was traveling. A strange woman was my companion and seemed to be taking me somewhere. I was clothed and dry and felt I was soaring through space. The old woman explained I was, and through time too. She said we were going to New York City to the year 1950 to see a doctor. I thought it very odd.”

Nora interrupted, “Why that must have been the same old woman who brought me here. I had just walked out of my house. I stood for a moment outside the door. I was wondering where to go next and whatever to do when she appeared out of the shadows. “Just follow me,” she said. She said a doctor wanted to see me. I thought she meant my friend Dr. Rank, that he must have changed his mind. I hesitated because she was so strange. But then she offered me a macaroon, so I followed her. What a strange old woman she was; I wondered who she could have been.”

“That must have been Mistress Hibbins,” Hester stated. “She has special powers and brought us here also. She seemed to realize I was thinking of taking little Pearl away for a while. The child is now an heiress and needs to learn something more of the world. Mistress Hibbins approached me and said she had just become Boston’s first travel agent and volunteered to make all the arrangements.”

“Oh, was that your little girl I saw on my way in?” Nora inquired.

“Yes,” Hester replied.

“Oh, how I love children,” Nora said. “I have three of my own. We play and play. I’ll miss playing with them. Maybe I could play with little Pearl.”

“As I recall, I have two children,” Edna said apparently to herself. “I think they’re boys.”

“I usually don’t entrust little Pearl to strangers, but she took kindly to that woman at the desk—they’re going to the park. Pearl likes trees.”

“Your Pearl will be just fine,” Dr. Horney assured Hester.

“I’ve made such progress helping Madame Stavrogin develop her repressed maternal tendencies. And she’s a wonderful receptionist—so social. Mistress Hibbins found her for me in Russia—apparently she was leading quite a meaningless life.”

“So Mistress Hibbins works for you,” Hester said.

“Yes,” Dr. Horney admitted. “She showed up here one day and claimed she could travel around time and literature and find interesting people for me to study. I figured she was a harmless narcissist and I’d humor her. So I said, ‘Okay, lady, find me someone who’ll make me take seriously what Freud said about the Oedipus complex.’” The next day in she walks with this guy, Paul Morel. Good grief, such a mother complex! We’ve been at it ever since, Mistress Hibbins and I. It was only sometime later that it occurred to me she could also find me cheap help. Do you realize what a New York employment agency would have charged to find a receptionist like Varvara?”

“Maybe you should explain just why you’ve brought the three of us here together,” Hester said with just a hint of impatience in her voice.

“The four of you, actually—there’s one still to arrive. I’m in the process of refining my feminist psychoanalysis. I’ve broken with Freud in part because of his utterly incorrect ideas about the psychology of women. Why the bias that man himself displayed in comparing male and female development is practically by itself sufficient proof of the existence of womb envy. Penis envy indeed!”

Edna felt faint. Hester stared at Dr. Horney. Nora spoke. “Why, Dr. Horney, what on Earth is womb envy?”

“Nora, you of all people should know, having been married for a number of years to a veritable personification of the concept.” Dr. Horney went on to explain the meaning of the term and presented a convincing argument that Torvald Helmer indeed provided a vivid example. “It seems to me far more likely, Nora,” Dr. Horney concluded, “that Torvald envies you your anatomy than that you envy him his.”

Nora for once seemed lost in thought. Edna fanned herself with a handy medical journal. Hester attempted to redirect the conversation. “Dr. Horney, you still have not explained why you would want to meet the three of us.”

“To study self-realization, of course. The realization of self, one’s own true inner identity, is, I believe, the ultimate goal of human life both for women and for men. It is the central concept in my theory. As I build my feminist psychology, then, I must study examples of women who have achieved this state or are on the way to doing so. Such are hard to find in American society of 1950. Present day American culture is male-dominated. To compensate for their inadequate biological state, womb-envying men make women feel inferior. They establish obstacles to keep them out of the workplace and out of the creative professions.”

Nora again appeared thoughtful, and Edna inquired of Dr. Horney whether a vague sense of *deja vu* was often a side effect of time travel. Only Hester seemed unsurprised by what Dr. Horney had to say.

“The result of all this,” Dr. Horney continued, “is that many modern American women develop neurotic patterns of feeling and behaving. I want to study you, because each of you have overcome obstacles not unlike those facing modern women and have achieved or are on the way to achieving self-realization.

“You, Nora, will be interesting to study because you have just taken the first step necessary in overcoming what for you was a long-standing neurotic pattern of the compliant type. You managed when your neurosis was no longer working to make a sudden break from it. I will be anxious to see where you go from there. You, Edna, much more gradually overcame your own neurotic pattern, the resignation type. I believe it was the influence of your friends Robert and especially Mademoiselle Reisz that brought this about.”

“Mademoiselle Reisz?” Edna asked quietly.

“Yes, my dear,” Dr. Horney said. “She was the very first to provide you with the kind of unconditional regard so often associ-

ated with growth.”

“And as for you, Hester. You interest me precisely because I do not yet know where you got your incredible sense of self-realization. I know only that it is so strongly established that it has withstood remarkable threats to its existence. I’ll be especially interested in comparing you, Hester, to the fourth member of this group, who is like you in many ways. She too seems to have always known exactly who she is and how to maintain self in the face of any adversity. The comparison will be fascinating, however, because each of you has such a different sense of self.”

Before anything else could be said, the door burst open and in rushed little Pearl.

“Oh, Mother,” little Pearl cried. “Madame Stavrogin has just introduced me to the most interesting woman. She is out there at this very moment, and, Mother, you must watch what she has taught me to do. Look, Mother, she has taught me to make dimples.”



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## Afterword

by Henry E. Vittum and Robert S. Miller

Despite the success of this assignment, we never used it again. That first semester there were only nine students enrolled in the course. Since then there has always been 25 to 30, too large a number to accomplish the oral part of this assignment in the final exam period. Therefore, for practical reasons, we replaced the assignment with an essay exam, albeit one that always included one or more questions inviting the kind of creative writing of this first assignment.

Revisiting this article in Spring 1997 made us regret our

practical decision, and we resolved to find a way to adapt the original assignment to a larger enrollment. We considered several possible mechanisms for doing so, and decided finally to have all participants, students and faculty, write assignments in anticipation of the final exam meeting. This time we decided each person would write a short short story and a critical essay analyzing the story in terms of literary and psychological considerations.

The 26 students have been working in four groups of six or seven all semester. At the final exam meeting, members of each will read their stories and essays to the group, and the group will choose the best to share with the rest of the class. The meeting will end with the four chosen students and the two instructors reading their works to the entire class. We are hopeful this new assignment will recapture the excitement of that first one.