Intergenerational Dialogue in Humanities Education: Integrating Age Perspectives in Undergraduate Pedagogy

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This pedagogical essay addresses college students' lack of engagement with aging—a challenge rooted in institutional unpreparedness to embrace age perspectives that has become increasingly urgent amid growing calls for intergenerational solidarity. Using a 100-level English course, "Intergenerational Dialogue: Modernism and Contemporary Literature," as a case study, I propose a new pedagogy of "intergenerational dialogue" for integrating age perspectives into general-education humanities courses. The course stages figurative dialogues between twentieth and twenty-first-century texts. Unlike traditional approaches that focus on intergenerational relations among real people or those depicted in texts, this method explores how a dialogic relationship between texts from different generations can inform real-world intergenerational exchange. The essay first argues for the significance of this pedagogy beyond age studies by suggesting the rich potential of an intergenerational lens for rethinking literary history. It then demonstrates how this pedagogy was put into classroom practice: pre-class questions that direct students' critical attention to age-related depictions, intergenerational comparisons of paired texts, and assignments that practice the method. I also explain how this approach, while borrowing from comparative practices common in classroom settings, advances scholarly efforts to move beyond the traditional mode of "compare and contrast" toward a fluid, relational model. The paper concludes with reflections on areas for improvement for future critical inquiry into this pedagogy.

To incorporate age perspectives in undergraduate humanities courses, I designed two undergraduate course syllabi that explore the intersection of age studies with modernist and affect studies, with a special focus on the age lens.[1] However, my mentor cautioned me that these syllabi would not attract enough enrollment for the class to run. Considering her over thirty years of college teaching experience in the English department, I trusted her familiarity with students' preferences. Given her expertise in disability studies and inclusive pedagogy, I witnessed her dedication to engaging students in serious ethical conversations, which often need extra but less visible work. I realized the need to find more creative, approachable, and even indirect ways of integrating age perspectives into undergraduate pedagogy.

The concern about students' lack of interest in age-related courses is valid and common across disciplines. As Erin Gentry Lamb suggests, bringing critical age perspectives into the traditional undergraduate classroom is challenging because students often lack self-motivated interest or critical awareness of their ageist biases. Identifying as "young" and as the next generation, they view aging as relevant only to older adults—unless they have personal experiences caring for older people. The question remains, "How might these students become willingly invested in age studies?" (Lamb 2014: 223). Similarly, Jill M. Chonody, in her systematic review of pedagogical interventions addressing student ageism, finds that even in fields like nursing, medicine, and social work, students' lack of investment in aging leads to low participation in gerontological practice—despite its growing professional demand. Chonody therefore contends that, given the growing population of older people, it is increasingly important to improve students' attitudes toward older people, regardless of discipline.

[1] One course focuses on "aging anxiety" and its socio-cultural construction. The other, "aging modernism," views modernism through an "age lens," examining how aging is widely represented in modernist works and how "aging modernism" sparks dialogues on modernism's relationship with "the old," thereby decentering "strong modernism" that often marginalizes subjects such as women, disabled individuals, and older adults, as informed by Paul K. Saint-Amour's "Weak Theory, Weak Modernism."

A perceived lack of engagement with aging among college students reflects—and suggests the need to counteract—institutional unpreparedness to embrace age perspectives. This includes failing to acknowledge that aging is a lifelong process relevant to everyone, not just older adults,[2] and perpetuating age segregation by isolating young and older groups into distinct, rigid categories.[3] As Steven Mintz notes in his 2023 *Inside Higher Ed* article titled "Age Consciousness, Age Segregation and Age Denigration," such segmentation "fosters distrust, stereotypic thinking and cross-generational misunderstanding." Mintz calls for new ways to promote generational equity and bridge divides across age groups. This article, therefore, proposes a new pedagogy of "intergenerational dialogue" for integrating age perspectives into general-education humanities courses, drawing on a general humanities course I taught as a case study.

In Spring 2024, I designed a 100-level English course titled "Intergenerational Dialogue: Modernism and Contemporary Literature," which stages a figurative dialogue that brings together texts of different times: the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Adapted from its official name, "World Literature: Modern and Contemporary," this course adheres to the formal catalog description, which offers a study of divergent global literary traditions spanning the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The class was designed to raise students' awareness of the significance of intergenerational dialogue/collaboration in the global landscape. My course draws upon a 2023 article in *UN Today* that champions "intergenerational dialogue," which means "a meeting that brings together individuals of different age groups." On the first day of the class, I presented the article and encouraged students to consider: How can a figurative intergenerational dialogue—comparing texts and media from different historical times—change our perceptions of real-

[2] Aging is commonly understood to be synonymous with gerontology and apply only to older people. Yet, to suspend the conflation of aging as older age, Devoney Looser suggests that we (age studies practitioners and humanities scholars) need to distinguish aging as a dynamic process "from cradle to grave" from aging as a synonym for "old."

[3] Toni Calasanti et al. place age relations at the center of analysis: challenging the privilege of the "not-old" at the expense of "the old," they clarify the harm in keeping "old and young groups in their respective places" (15) and stress that "age categories are subjective, and all stages are constructions" (16).

world intergenerational relationships? The question was raised to address the growing intergenerational tension-based ageism intensified by the pandemic.[4] As socialist feminist Lynne Segal acknowledges, intergenerational tensions are not new but have taken different forms throughout history. Today, younger generations are encouraged to view older adults as monopolizing increasingly scarce resources, with media often inciting anger between generations. Therefore, Segal advocates for intergenerational understanding and cooperation by challenging the view of age groups as fixed, homogeneous categories. I was inspired by literary scholar Jessica Berman's advocacy for the transformative power of the imaginary to mobilize imagination to address these given situations. As Berman writes, "The imaginary domain takes us beyond the given, beyond the situation of our political being-in-common and its demands, and toward a realm of 'as if' that can move towards greater freedom and justice" (23). In this spirit, students were guided to explore how "imaginary" intergenerational dialogues can help enrich real-life intergenerational conversations.

In what follows, I first situate my pedagogy within scholarship on intergenerational approaches in age studies and literary studies. I then outline the course design and teaching practices, and I conclude with reflections and recommendations for future applications.

WHY INTERGENERATIONAL APPROACHES

Combating ageism through an intergenerational framework is not new. Christopher J. Alfano and Suzanne L. Cook recommend intergenerational education that facilitates regular interactions between "young" and "old" to reduce age prejudice. Likewise, Chonody suggests creating more opportunities to work with older people, such as service learning. As arts- and humanities-based aging research and practices increase, Intergenerational Storytelling5 has

[4] Social psychologists Michael S. North and Susan T. Fiske notes how intergenerational tension-based ageism, which portrays older populations as a burden on younger generations, remains a research gap. The COVID-19 pandemic has both intensified ageism (Laurinda Reynolds; Margaret Morganroth Gullette) and highlighted the need for intergenerational conversations.

[5] Andrea Charise et al. define it as "an arts- and humanities-based activity that involves sharing personal and/or collective memories of living experience between distinct generations, using various

gained momentum, where different generations share lived experiences through various storytelling methods. Julie L. Masters et al. suggest that the pandemic offered an opportunity for college students to engage in conversations with older adults about dying and mortality by using books such as Mitch Albom's memoir *Tuesdays with Morrie* (1997) as a conversational guide. They highlight the pedagogical benefits for both generations and advocate for bringing generations together more often in educational practice. Despite the success of this initiative, I worry that characters like Grandpa Morrie—warm, wise, and articulate—could inadvertently reinforce an idealized image of older men and impose unrealistic expectations for how older adults should behave to earn respect. That's why Jade Elizabeth French et al.'s recent work is important: they show how fictional narratives can offer a more nuanced understanding of intergenerational relationships (2023). By analyzing reader responses to Tove Jansson's *The Summer Book* (1972) from reading groups composed of different age cohorts, they demonstrate how novels can inspire new, often utopian, imaginings of aging and intergenerational relationships (2024). One limitation of these methods is that the majority of participants are white women, which risks marginalizing racialized and historically underrepresented voices.

Unlike traditional approaches that focus on intergenerational relations among real people or those depicted in texts, my intergenerational pedagogy explores how a dialogic relationship between texts from different generations can inform real-world intergenerational dynamics. The "dialogic relationships" take on a personalized quality, as literary texts are imagined as interlocutors engaged in conversation. In other words, I use this framework to explore how the dialogic relationships among literary texts across generations—texts from different centuries "speaking" to each other—can illuminate the importance of real-world intergenerational conversations and help foster them. This conception resonates with Mikhail Bakhtin's view that "dialogic relationships are a much broader phenomenon than mere rejoinders in a dialogue, laid out compositionally in the text; they are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human

established and emerging storytelling methods and more spontaneous oral, written, performance, or digital media storytelling formats" (617).

life" (40). Yet, as opposed to intertextual connections, I am drawn to how the interrelations among texts across different generations can help us reflect on and reform our normative accounts of real-world intergenerational relationships. Old Chinese sayings offer examples of contradictory views on intergenerational relationships, such as, "As in the Yangtze River the waves behind drive on those before, so the younger generation excels," and "Ginger gets spicier as it gets older" (The older, the wiser). Do such cultural narratives creep into the treatment of "older" texts in the same polarized ways: either dismissed as outdated or glorified as artifacts of eternal truth? While literary historians have long explored the interaction between past texts and present lives, they haven't connected this inquiry to our everyday understandings of generational relationships.

I fill that gap by proposing a new methodology of "intergenerational dialogue" for reimagining literary networks, aiming to provide a dynamic alternative to static or stereotypical understandings of real-world intergenerational relationships. My dissertation stages dialogues that compare Anglophone modernist texts and contemporary Chinese and American media to highlight the enduring kinship between literary texts and popular media, while also inviting a critical rethinking of portrayals of the generational gap, including Gen Z as "digital natives" versus older generations. In this article, I share a "less audacious" pedagogical application of this method: an intergenerational comparison, while borrowing from comparative practices common in classroom settings, advances scholarly efforts to challenge the traditional mode of "compare and contrast." Before elaborating on this in the following section, I clarify how "intergenerational dialogue" emerges as a necessary lens for literary history. This explains why my pedagogy matters both within and beyond age studies and suggests the rich potential of an intergenerational lens in shaping literary studies.

I see many opportunities for an intergenerational perspective to engage with the discussion on literary history. For example, it explores cross-temporal networks through "intergenerational resonance" to offer alternatives to the traditional model of "literary influence," which is framed around the dominant

patriarchal metaphor of fathers and sons (e.g., Harold Bloom). Literary critic Wai Chee Dimock similarly leverages the potential of Bakhtin's theory of dialogue to rethink the relationships between texts and their future readers. Dimock's emphasis on a text's "timeful unwieldiness" —its persistent unraveling in endless interpretive contexts—illustrates her theory of resonance that inverts Harold Bloom's defense of the Western canon. Whereas Bloom holds that a text's immortality comes from its strength and time-proof integrity, Dimock argues that a text "endures by being read differently" (1997: 1064), always engaging in new relations and "potentially developing significant dialogues" (1997: 1065). Doesn't it sound like a call for a dynamic and reciprocal model of literary history to challenge the paternal and hierarchical metaphor of literary influence?

Just as Dimock argues for the collective and connected nature of literary history against Bloom's model of competitive battles between strong equals (fathers and sons), women writers have sought to open this direct lineage of paternal heritage to create a space for nuanced, reciprocal relationships of influence. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote in an 1845 letter, "I look everywhere for Grandmothers and see none. It is not in the filial spirit I am deficient, I do assure you – witness my reverent love of the grandfathers*!" In A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf advocates women's search into the past for connections through female ancestors by stating, "We think back through our mothers if we are women" (64). Susan Stanford Friedman revisits how Woolf explains the close tie between "Mary Carmichael's novel *Life's Adventure* and her literary mothers, 'books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately'" (qtd. in Friedman 1986: 209). These claims certainly foreground the image of female literary precursors who provided nurturing rather than inducing a Bloomian anxiety. Devoney Looser, however, exposes the errors both Barrett Browning and Woolf made in their recognition of female-author predecessors.[6] She reveals how a lack of attention to old age

[6] In the introduction to *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750-1850*, Looser notes that Woolf, like many other literary historians, overlooks the fact that several of Jane Austen's female contemporaries lived longer than she did and continued writing into old age. In "Age and Aging," Looser points out how Barrett Browning's claim exemplifies the problem of *not seeing* elderly female writers of that time.

in literary history led these errors to go unnoticed by later scholars. While literary history widely adopts metaphors of kinship,[7] its focus on the ties of blood kinship renders relations beyond the immediate family invisible, especially those that cross temporal, gender, racial, cultural, and human-nature boundaries.[8] How might the imaginary of "intergenerational dialogue" enrich the discussion over literary history? Although "intergenerational" broadly includes people of different generations or age groups, its connotations are often limited to a familial system. To make "kinship" outside of traditional family structures more visible, we must harness the potential of the "intergenerational" to illuminate relations that exceed conventional frameworks.

My intergenerational framework also aligns with recent efforts in literary studies to challenge traditional chronological boundaries. Building upon Dimock's critique of "synchronic historicism," literary theorist Rita Felski questions the claim of New Historicism to "speak with the dead," an approach she argues ossifies "the sense of an unbridgeable distance between past texts and present lives, between 'then' and 'now'" (577). Rather than imputing static historical meanings to texts, Felski highlights their mobility—their ability to travel into new semantic networks and accrue new meanings. Doesn't scholarship that challenges fixed generational categories and fosters intergenerational conversations align with Felski's call to reject rigid temporal boundaries and examine how texts forge living connections? My "intergenerational dialogue" approach seeks to stage dialogic bridges among texts from different generations, showing how contemporary concerns can prompt new readings of earlier works and how those works, in turn, resonate in the present. Here, readers act as active mediators, assembling living, cross-temporal connections. Modernist studies provide a useful touchstone, as the

[7] See Dimock, "Introduction: Genres as Fileds of Knowledge," page 1381-84.

[8] See how Dimock suggests placing emphasis on kinships between past, present, and future, rather than the division of knowledge in her essay titled "Introduction: Genres as Field of Knowledge." Meg Jensen sheds new light on literary daughters, examining the dynamics of literary influence on women writers beyond Bloom's model. Jessica Berman, drawing on Frederic Jameson, argues that modernism's cross-cultural kinships with its neighbors are often obscured (17). Similarly, Pheng Cheah highlights how an imagination grounded in blood ties restricts our ability to recognize relations with nature.

field has already begun to question its own periodization.

Modernism, as a cultural and aesthetic movement, is typically periodized from the late nineteenth century through the post-WWII era. Yet, periodizing modernism, especially its implicit Eurocentric assumptions, has been a subject of controversy in recent scholarship.[9] Friedman[10] and Felski advocate for cross-temporal networks to transcend periodizing schemes[11] and national boundaries, discovering texts' unexpected echoes in new places. Therefore, I propose viewing "modernist predecessors" as akin to older generations to explore their contemporary relevance. The imaginary intergenerational connections I suggest are a form of Dimock's "weak networks," which negotiate "a weakly experimental alternative" to "a strongly institutionalized norm" (588). Such networks have a discernible agenda to reclaim the value of intergenerational interactions, often obscured by progress narratives that privilege the new over the old. This is drawn from a cultural imagination that embraces "older things" to actively counter the displacement of older generations. Certain cultural works, rather than fetishizing older objects, challenge linear progress narratives that devalue who and what is "old."[12] This approach resonates with Benjamin Gillespie and Bess Rowen's intergenerational approaches to teaching queer theatre and performance histories. They similarly scaffold cross-temporal connections into course design, putting multigenerational artists in figurative conversation to critique chrononormativity—the linear literary chronology that

[9] Susan Stanford Friedman critiques the spatial biases in the traditional periodization of modernism, tethering the notion of modernity as a distinct historical moment to Europe. Rather than rejecting periodization, Friedman favors cross-temporal networks connecting past and present. In her later work, she focuses on modernism's relevance to the present, seeking to extend its life into contemporary times and emphasizing its relational nature.

[10] Friedman's 2022 article, "The Afters and Nows of Modernism," drew upon LeAnne Howe's concept of Native tribalography to decolonize the conventional linear periodization of Eurocentric modernism.

[11] Felski, in "Context Stinks," similarly advocates for cross-temporal networks to transcend periodizing schemes and national boundaries. She argues that linear models of historicizing literature confine texts to their original contexts and limit their resonance across time and space. Felski calls for transtemporal dialogue between past texts and present lives, discovering texts' unexpected echoes in new places.

[12] For example, with 21.5 million YouTube subscribers, Ziqi Li's videos weave together her closeness to her grandmother and her traditional culinary and artistic skills. In the 2024 Japanese TV show *Danchi no Futari*, middle-aged to older residents of a housing complex embrace old pop music and sell second-hand goods online. David Lynch's *The Straight Story* (1999) portrays an older veteran who hitches a trailer to his thirty-year-old lawn tractor for a 240-mile journey from Iowa to Wisconsin.

displaces "old" works.[13] This methodology, influenced by age studies,[14] counters "the temporal privileging of the present over the past" and the misconception of older artists as less progressive. My course engages with this activist intervention by highlighting the relevance of "older" texts to contemporary concerns, as demonstrated in the next section.

INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE IN PEDAGOGY

As a general education humanities course, our class consisted of nine English majors and fifteen students from science majors. This sixteen-week, three-credit course met twice a week for eighty minutes and was structured into three parts: 1) Modernist generation: We began by exploring the main characteristics of modernism and iconic modernists such as Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett. 2) Intergenerational dialogues across genres—poetry, short stories, and plays: My course did not limit connections to only contemporary writers who explicitly acknowledge their allegiances to modernists (e.g., Jon Fosse to Beckett); it also grouped works based on shared thematic concerns, following a pedagogical trend.[15] Interesting pairings include Joyce's "Eveline" (1904) and Alice Munro's "Runaway" (2004), both of which depict women facing the dilemma of whether to stay with their families or run away. Students wrote discussion posts reflecting on the film *The Hours* (2012), which depicts the parallel life stories of three generations of women affected by Woolf's 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. They appreciated how the film continues Woolf's project of exploring women's inner lives and demonstrates the resonance of her literary legacy across generations. 3) Intergenerational

[13] They question chronology as a common practice to map out events through a linear progression of history. As they suggest, "chronology creates a false linear-progress narrative that does not value or underscore the dynamic exchange of aesthetic ideas, activist values, and alternative communities embedded in queer history that offer the potential for new perspectives and critiques of the present" (69).

[14] They are inspired by age studies, which has been complicating the notion of progress that reinforces the youth/older age binary – displacing "the old" in favor of "the young." Also, they emphasize inherent connections between queerness and aging, as argued by Cynthia Port.

[15] Scholar Seo Hee Im also connects contemporary artists to canonical modernists (such as Sally Rooney with Woolf and Lee Chang-dong with William Faulkner) to spark students' interest. She gave a speech at the Plenary Roundtable, the Third International Conference of the Modernist Studies in Asia Network on June 1, 2024. She said that this approach was unnecessary a decade ago when modernism was a trendy subject of study.

dialogues on generational encounters: Finally, we discussed intergenerational interactions depicted in paired works. For instance, we analyzed the complicated aunt-niece dynamics in Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915) and Eileen Chang's "Aloeswood Incense" (1943), both debut works. Students were deeply touched by Yiyun Li's *Where Reasons End* (2019), which takes the form of an imaginary dialogue between a grieving writer and her son after his suicide.

In addition to structuring the course and selecting texts, I guided students' attention to the prevalent but under-examined age-related depictions in modernist literature by providing pre-class questions that included contextual information and highlighted specific moments in the text.[16] For example, I assigned Woolf's 1924 essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," which critiques conventional writers' disinterest in writing about older women. Its pre-class questions asked why conventional writing fails to accommodate characters like Mrs. Brown and what kind of writing could better capture their presence. Students recognized that Woolf criticizes conventional novels for overshadowing the complexity of ordinary women like Mrs. Brown. To deepen their critical thinking about stereotypes of older women, I introduced a discussion on Woolf's portrayal: "Is Woolf empathetic in highlighting older women like Mrs. Brown, or condescending by victimizing a lady she briefly encounters? Is her idea of capturing the infinite potential of Mrs. Brown unrealistic, as they might face real-world challenges like economic hardships and family responsibilities?" Students examined the assumption that Mrs. Brown is seemingly "uninteresting" due to her age. They questioned this reductive thinking and explored how such characters reveal the complexities of human existence and social issues. One student's post illustrates this point: "Mrs. Brown is unlike the majority of traditional protagonists, presenting a very interesting path for authors to take, turning a seemingly uninteresting elderly woman into something that could captivate the minds of millions. This literature, although presenting itself as fiction, could be a key step in tackling

[16] Pre-class questions, which count as one part of the assessment, are provided to guide students' reading and note-taking. This activity, adapted from Patricia Dunn's "Heads-Up Discussion Questions," ensures students come to class prepared to discuss the material rather than requiring perfect answers.

real-world issues that many elderly women face in society."[17] Similar discussions on aging were applied to Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915) and "The Portrait of a Lady" (1915), as well as W. B. Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium" (1928). Students were drawn to Prufrock's thinning hair and aging body, which fuels his feelings of inferiority and insecurity about confessing love, as reflected in one student's midterm paper and another's final essay; Eliot's focus on a middle-aged woman's interiority as she longs for a more intimate relationship with the young man, rather than depicting women's physical characteristics; and Yeats' use of images of physical decay and aging to meditate on the tension between fleeting life and eternal art or soul.

With the pairing of Beckett and Fosse, I demonstrated one approach to "intergenerational dialogue": comparing modernist and contemporary texts. I first lectured on how to justify pairing texts through identifying resonances between authors and their works. A compelling example is Jon Fosse, who, upon receiving the Nobel Prize in 2023, acknowledged Beckett's influences on his playwriting. Both playwrights portray character duos without clear identities in bleak, deserted settings, contemplating death and other universal themes. The title of Fosse's *Someone is Going to Come* (1992) directly echoes Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953). Its storyline—a couple escaping the world to a remote place—resonates strongly with Beckett's short story "The End" (1946), where the narrator seeks isolation, stripping away "the world" to feel nonexistent. The thematic parallels extend to their characters' despair: much like Gogo and Didi, who consider suicide in *Godot*, Fosse's *I Am the Wind* (2007) features two men, simply named "The One" and "The Other," traveling by boat until The One drowns himself. While Beckett's influence on Fosse is evident in many aspects, the tragic and futile codependent dynamics within *Endgame* (1957) offer a more resonant point of comparison with *I Am the Wind* than the absurdist, comic tone of *Godot*.

Hence, I asked students to compare *Endgame* and *I Am the Wind* in two groups. Group A explored questions like: Can you observe Beckett's influence on Fosse? If so, point out moments where you see similarities between their

[17] The student agreed to let me cite his comment for this paper.

works. How does the relationship between "The One" and "The Other" in Fosse's work differ from Beckett's codependent relationship between Hamm and Clov in *Endgame*? Group B's tasks were: Analyze how each work responds to its specific context. How do Fosse's characters who escape the world and reject companionship shed light on human relationships in contemporary times, when compared to Beckett's plays? Through this class activity, students discovered that both plays centered on themes of isolation and learned to compare them in terms of specific aspects like character portrayal (They were more invested in the interpersonal dynamics that caused the characters' loneliness, rather than essentializing a single cause like old age or disability). Students also recognized how historical contexts shaped textual differences: Beckett's texts often reflect the backdrop of wars, while Fosse's works may reflect the challenges to find alone time in today's world, where constant distractions disrupt solitude.

Compared to tracing direct influences, students were more engaged with texts placed in dialogue through shared thematic concern—for example, Joyce and Munro's short stories on women leaving their families, or the war-related themes connecting Wilfred Owen and Ilya Kaminsky. This cross-temporal dialogue, especially with authors from diverse cultural and historical backgrounds, helped students understand how texts address certain issues in specific ways, while simultaneously illuminating contemporary concerns with insights from the past. I did adopt the traditional "compare and contrast" approach by having students first identify the grounds for comparison before exploring similarities and differences—a transferable skill they can apply elsewhere. Yet my method still distinguishes itself by encouraging research and teaching across multiple periods, which is often discouraged by institutions, as Felski reminds us.[18] Moreover, it responds to the questions Felski and Friedman pose in their introduction to Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses (2015): "How do the new spatial modes of analysis based on interrelations, conjunctures, networks, linkages, and modes of circulation draw on or enrich comparative thinking? … What are the contributions of different disciplines

[18] In English departments, period identification remains the defining marker of professional expertise.

and interdisciplinary fields to the archive of comparative scholarship?" (1) Grounded in the interdisciplinary field of age studies, my pedagogy structures comparative analysis as an intergenerational network that moves beyond static comparison toward a fluid, relational model.

Now, I explain how my "intergenerational comparison" method both draws upon and enriches the debates on comparison. Felski and Friedman advocate for a relational mode of comparison—one that departs from the hierarchical relations often tied to a traditional mode of "compare and contrast." My intergenerational comparison connects texts within multiple "intergenerational networks," providing alternatives to the dominant "father-son" model discussed earlier. Literary critic R. Radhakrishnan calls attention to "a mobile space of the 'between' that is nonsovereign—space that cannot be owned and administered as property" (21). He emphasizes that the real motivation behind a comparatist project is the desire for new knowledge born in this mobile "in-between" space. The intergenerational comparison is similarly aimed toward a fluid space across different generations, inspiring a dynamic new understanding of intergenerational relations. This agenda is further supported by Shu-mei Shih's proposition of "doing comparative literature as relational studies" (79). As Shih argues for a new theory of relational comparison, "Comparison as relation means setting into motion historical relationalities between entities brought together for comparison, and bringing into relation terms that have traditionally been pushed apart from each other due to certain interests, such as the European exceptionalism that undergirds Eurocentrism" (ibid.). In this spirit, my method facilitates horizontal, relational comparisons among texts as movements across the often insular boundaries of literary periods and nations.

The final assignment was designed to offer students a platform to practice and demonstrate their understanding of intergenerational dialogue. Building on existing comparative methodologies, this assignment offered a choice between two approaches: process-oriented or nexus-oriented. The first option was conducting a comparative analysis between a paired modernist text and a contemporary work of their choice. The outline could be: 1) clarifying the rationale for pairing these works together (why compare); 2) analyzing the

similarities and differences in terms of specific traits based on the rationale (compare and contrast); 3) summarizing the findings (summary). The second used one particular theme/terminology as a nexus, or a meeting point, to bring two texts into discussion. Its structure could be: 1) discussing why the nexus matters and how the selected texts might contribute to its debates (why this dialogue between A and B); 2) exploring how and why both modernist and contemporary works uniquely address the concerns (how A and B address the nexus similarly/differently); 3) summarizing the discoveries (summary). Students were encouraged to select a contemporary text beyond the course readings for either option. I left the definition of "intergenerational dialogues" open for students to explore and asked them to reflect on its meaning in their conclusions.

Eleven students chose comparative analysis, while thirteen submitted nexus-oriented essays. The major subjects they focused on were isolation, women's choices, alienation, love, and war. Four students compared Joyce's "Eveline" and Munro's "Runaway," which proves the comparability of these texts and suggests how women's struggle with societal expectations remains a concern today. It's worth noting that five students examined war-themed works, likely due to the class's timing during the Russo-Ukrainian war.[19] Students were inspired to engage with non-English texts like Japanese novels. A bilingual student translated lines from a Russian story. Four students experimented with intermedia comparisons by juxtaposing modernist poetry with contemporary films and popular music, discussing how the unique features of each genre affect the way a shared theme is presented. One student's passionate comparison of E. E. Cummings and Taylor Swift made me think about the potential of this approach to bridge the divide between high and popular culture.

Students' summaries of "intergenerational dialogue" demonstrated their understanding of the relevance of modernist literature to both contemporary

[19] We read Ukrainian American poet Ilya Kaminsky's *Deaf Poetry* (2019). One Ukrainian student came to my office hour and expressed her interest to incorporate a contemporary Ukrainian woman writer into her project. Yet, she eventually gave up on the idea due to the additional effort required for translation and contextualization.

works and their daily lives.[20] They recognized the importance of understanding "older generations" and learning from the past to avoid repeating mistakes or find better solutions. One student wrote, "Modernist texts continue to be relevant. The problems that existed then continue to exist in the present." Another student described that this method led him to see that what Joyce and the Soviet author Sergei Dovlatov (writing in the 1970s) convey is "*eerily* similar." He justifies this by pointing to their similar experiences of living abroad and navigating censorship, while still expressing concerns about their homeland in their works. On that basis, he put their works in dialogue along specific dimensions—such as the portrayal of emotional numbness as a response to political conditions and each writer's relationship to cultural traditions. Although his conclusion leaned on an unsurprising claim (that modernist predecessors touch upon eternal human struggle against "the system"), he insightfully emphasized the reader's active role in conducting cross-temporal comparisons, which enable two otherwise unrelated authors to illuminate one another and generate fresh insights into recurring issues.

Regarding gender issues, a few students used intergenerational comparison to examine both the progress made and the problems that remain unaddressed or have newly emerged within specific contexts. Rather than merely comparing women writers across periods, they organized dialogues around a shared motif: the dilemma women face in leaving patriarchal families. It is worth mentioning that four students paired Joyce's "Eveline" with Munro's "Runaway." One student provided a terrific close analysis of how the narrative act of running away unearths the complex interplay of historical contexts and material realities that shape individual autonomy. She drew heavily on secondary sources to picture what life looked like for young women in early 20th-century Dublin; She similarly used published essays to illustrate how Irish colonial history factored into Eveline's decision. This exemplifies how students learned to use secondary resources (as they were encouraged to consult online resources) to contextualize paired texts and compare different works on specific aspects.[21]

[20] I appreciate that students granted me permissions to analyze their assignments in this paragraph and the one after.

[21] Students gained historical awareness, understanding how texts address shared issues differently

Turning to Carla in "Runaway," the student analyzed how her financial insecurity complicated her escape. While she acknowledged the importance of the interpersonal relationship between Carla and Sylvia, she didn't go further to analyze its intergenerational dimensions (Sylvia's age and experience serve a contrast to Carla's youth and naivete). Another student, by contrast, suggested how Eveline is affected by the nostalgia felt for her loving father and influenced by her mother's model of a devoted wife and mother. She also attended to the psychology of the abusive relationship in Carla's story, from which escape was not easy.

In responses to a course questionnaire,[22] three students expressed excitement about their intergenerational comparisons. One student commented, "The more research I do, the more the intergenerational dialogue [connection between texts] becomes obvious to me." They appreciated how we compared diverse works from different eras and countries, addressing key issues such as gender and war atrocities. Twenty-one students reported a heightened awareness of the significance of intergenerational dialogues after the course. As they explored the influences of modernist writers on contemporary authors, students gained a deeper understanding of the interconnected course of literary history. One student said, "A lot of the works we looked at spoke to each other despite being a century apart." This approach drew their attention to social issues, as one remarked, "Reading about different perspectives, narratives, and experiences offers valuable insights into society and how it is always changing. I would recommend the intergenerational comparison method to others in my circle because it is important to address intergenerational issues and to be as understanding as possible."

Based on students' assignments and feedback, it's safe to say that the intergenerational dialogue framework guided students to connect modernist works to what they read, listen to, or view today. They demonstrated the

across particular settings. As one student responded to the course questionnaire, "The class taught me a lot regarding intergenerational dialogues and how literary works are tightly interconnected to the historical periods."

[22] Drawing inspiration from my teaching practicum in the WGSS program at Stony Brook University, I used mid- and end-of-semester questionnaires to communicate with students and gather feedback on their after-class work, experiences, and suggestions for the course.

method's capacity to bring together seemingly unrelated works into rich intergenerational networks, recognizing how "older" works resonate with contemporary concerns. However, most essays did not explicitly address intergenerational dynamics within the texts, even though students discussed these during classroom and online discussions. In other words, their assignments mainly showcased students' enhanced humanistic skills—literary analysis, cross-cultural critique, and comparative studies—which met the general-education humanities course goals. These requirements, to some extent, discouraged me from prioritizing an extensive focus on intergenerational relationships in my overall instruction. Perhaps for similar reasons, students did not explicitly demonstrate their growing attention to intergenerational relationships in their final work. Thus, while the intergenerational dialogue method creatively integrates intergenerationality into humanities learning, a more dedicated exploration of real-world intergenerational issues might be more feasible in a pedagogical setting specifically designed for such concerns.

Intergenerational Pedagogy in the Future

It is my hope that this essay will inspire future experimentation with intergenerational pedagogy—a teaching method that fosters interactions, dialogues, and learning experiences across generations. Thus, I provide my reflections here on areas for improvement in future applications of the method:

1) Class structure. As a general education course, the class consisted of nine English majors and fifteen students coming from science majors. I therefore began by informing the majority about the main characteristics of modernism and iconic modernist texts. For better clarity, each session focused on a single writer, with the paired contemporary text brought into comparison through in-class activities. In retrospect, a course organized more around explicit comparisons between paired texts would have allowed students to better explore how an intergenerational dialogue should be facilitated and to what effects it can be put.

2) Literary and real-world intergenerational relationships. This course was focused on an "imaginary" intergenerational dialogue—placing works from

different periods in conversation—to invite reconsideration of real-life intergenerational conversations. We had limited time to discuss representations of intergenerational interactions within the texts themselves, let alone to dive deeper into their interplay with lived experiences. A course centered on analyzing generational bonding or conflict in literary or popular media texts might better help students rethink intergenerational relationships. Furthermore, the word "generation" is a slippery, polysemous word with several competing meanings (age groups, time span, generational cohorts, etc.). As Helen Kingstone and Jennie Bristow suggest, "generation" is "both instantly recognizable and open to numerous interpretations" (1). It's hard to tell whether students were drawn more to the metaphorical meanings of the intergenerational framework, rather than viewing their close relation to real-world conceptions of intergenerational dynamics. Even so, this course offers one way to join broader efforts to treat generation as an analytic lens, rather than a fixed empirical category (Kingstone and Bristow 2).

3) Cross-cultural comparisons. Students appreciated exploring a wide range of cultural works, though it could feel overwhelming for a 100-level course, especially for students who may not have received training in academic writing. Although many enjoyed selecting their own texts or media, some struggled to form strong, coherent comparisons. More structured scaffolding would help—for example, guidance on genre conventions, crafting smooth, logical transitions, and *showing* rather than merely *telling* how texts enter into dialogue. Most students in my class were engaged in translating and bringing texts from less-represented backgrounds into conversation with canonical works, despite the extra labor needed. Future attempts like this deserve due credit and support.

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