

# Culture and Anarchy on the Coast of Bohemia

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## Abstract

The paper describes the experience of teaching the early English literature survey at Louisiana State University during and immediately after the "Katrina Semester" of Fall 2005. It describes the critical roles Louisiana State University faculty and students played — working with the medical centers for New Orleans evacuees and hosting parents and relatives in their apartments and dorms — and then the reactions of students as LSU re-opened as a teaching institution in the following weeks. In general, although they were relieved to be back in class, students were highly reluctant to discuss the disaster directly in connection with literature, even with obvious connections such as *King Lear*. *Lear*, however, brought to the surface family conflicts nearly all were undergoing, although these were not discussed in conjunction with the storm's aftermath. However, they were more engaged than usual with *The Canterbury Tales*, possibly because of its sense of societal failures, of people who neglect responsibilities to others, and of a society on the edge of collapse, all presented with Chaucer's distance and irony. In general, the classroom served as a stabilizing influence in their lives, and although they were intellectually disengaged, the presence of the familiar classroom structure was important therapy in itself.

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Shakespeare's notorious setting of a transitional scene in *The Winter's Tale* on the non-existent "coast of Bohemia" may seem like a far-fetched hook to start an essay on teaching literature in south Louisiana during the Hurricane Katrina semester of Fall 2005, and to be sure, his geographically-challenged site in old, cold Europe has only superficial connections to torpid, semi-tropical New Orleans. (The even more notorious stage direction ending the scene, "Exit, pursued by a bear," is, however, all too apt for residents of the entire Gulf Coast.) But while I was not in New Orleans during the storm, I'm reflecting here on my own nearby city, Baton Rouge, and my own university, Louisiana State University, where we truly found ourselves suddenly on the Coast of Bohemia, if, as Shakespeare might have done, we take this coast as a staging place between worlds — worlds geographic, cultural, and temporal. In *The Winter's Tale*, the coast marks the physical location where the old world begins the slow and tortured process of changing to a new, wiser, and redeemed world; in our south Louisiana tale, we've not had the luxury of the sixteen years Shakespeare gives

his audience to see these changes play out, so the following observations hail metaphorically from not very far inland, standing in a grove of scrub pines.

First, a disclaimer: I've struggled here to say something bracing, original, and profound about the Katrina experience. This effort has failed, so for an essay of that quality you'll have to look elsewhere in this essay cluster. I'm still unable to get my mind around the Katrina experience — my apologies to my readers. Since Fall 2005 I've been mainly absorbed with bafflement and some pleasure watching Baton Rouge be transformed. The city reminds me somewhat of fifteenth-century Italy at the arrival of the evacuating Byzantines; in this case by the influx of a more vigorous and sophisticated New Orleans professional class (the poor were mainly evacuated elsewhere), perplexing and displacing the old Country Club families perfectly satisfied with watching downtown decay, spending their incomes from unimproved properties bought by Grandpa Herbert during McKinley's administration, going to Holiday on Ice annually for culture, and summoning the strength of their collective minds chiefly about the vagaries of LSU football. About the Katrina/Rita month, I've still not connected the dots much more adroitly than I'd done six months after the storms. Practically all the now-familiar points of public argument — technical, social, cultural, and political — were established within days of the storm, and while we've added numbing mountains of detail since then, most of them depressing, the frame of discussion remains the same — the government response or lack of it, the social and racial injustices revealed, the numbing array of technical problems of keeping water out of an underwater city, the lack of a population to stimulate what was already a declining economy, and of course, New Orleans's iron determination to shoot itself in the foot, sometimes literally, at every opportunity. Need I continue? If what follows has a theme, then, it's "distance," distances both too far and especially distances too close.

During and after the Katrina semester, I taught, as I have for twenty-two years, at Louisiana State University at its main campus in Baton Rouge, a city about an hour's drive northwest from New Orleans. Baton Rouge was largely spared from the northeasterly-traveling hurricane, but it was the first point of evacuation for perhaps two hundred thousand or more fleeing New Orleanians. At the time it was universally said that Baton Rouge had doubled its population in three days, and this seems about right. In this short essay/memoir, I'll discuss my experience teaching Shakespeare and literature during the Katrina semester. I'll concentrate mainly on what I observed of my students' relationship to the literature and the classroom during this period, and from this limited data, I'll venture some further reflections about teaching literature in times of crisis, footnotes to a natural disaster that will still be kicking around the national memory long after I'm gone.

The essay is in three parts: the first describes LSU and Baton Rouge immediately after the hurricane, the second discusses my experiences teaching Shakespeare and literature when classes reopened, and the last consists of some observations about the teaching experience and the role of higher education during a major disaster.

### The Swelling Scene

A few short hours after Katrina's winds calmed, the ceaseless whirl of helicopters commenced and broke the unnatural silence — there was no hum of air conditioners, no noise from televisions or most electrical devices (because there was no electricity), no cell phone reception, and only intermittent land-line connection. Temperatures and humidity levels inside our homes hung in the mid-80s. These helicopters flew directly over my house in the southeast part of Baton Rouge into the campus, bringing endless loads of the rescued, the damaged, and the dead. For the first couple of days, the helicopters seemed like our only confirmation that anything was functioning on an official level. Battery-powered and car radios yielded nothing but rumors from empty-headed local DJs and sportscasters trying unsuccessfully to measure up to the unexpected challenge of being real news-people. For two days after the storm, all the reliable news derived from our east, along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Those of us who could catch the occasional TV news saw only the wiped-clean coasts and heard nothing much about New Orleans. After a couple of days, I contacted by our fragile land-line my cousin in Atlanta, who relayed the news emerging from New Orleans on national television. Still, the helicopters gave us an initial grim sense of what was going on down there. The destinations of the helicopters, the LSU Assembly Center and other large facilities, were transformed overnight into make-shift hospitals, morgues, and animal shelters. Classes were closed, no one knew for how long. Faculty, staff, and the remaining students in the dorms appeared at the help centers and worked tirelessly, despite an almost complete lack of organization and leadership. Either everyone was in charge, or no one was in charge (we could never discover which, and the results were the same), so volunteers simply showed up at the centers, looked around, and did what needed to be done. One English professor started his day by waiting, to no avail, in the Assembly Center bleachers for someone to tell him what to do, then grabbed a broom, then changed a few drip stands, then had some ER-like experiences for which his Ph.D. in modern drama was little preparation, and ended his twelve-hour day simply listening to the battered, bloody, and bed-ridden tell stories of ten feet of dirty water in their homes and evacuation from blistering rooftops. Stranded north Louisiana girls wandered from Sorority Row to the nearby animal shelter in a huge Ag exhibition arena and cared for evacuated pets, bringing much-needed, bubbly affection to disoriented retrievers and terriers rescued from the water after three days. The animal shelter

experience, incidentally, proved conclusively that Shakespeare and most of his contemporaries were wrong about dogs. When I mentioned to an animal shelter supervisor that I'd rather be working in the hospital than taking care of dogs, she snapped back, "When you work with pets you're working directly with people in a very important way." She was dead right. Some newly-homeless people spent half their days in the sweltering and smelly shelter with their newly-homeless pets. There was nothing left but Rover, who still loved them and didn't care a thing about Katrina as long as the family was around. It's OK to weep in front of your dog, too. The all-encompassing soul of Shakespeare did not encompass one true area of consolation in crisis, namely the companionship of other species.

LSU was one of the few fully-functioning local institutions of any kind. My residence is only minutes from the campus, and I was back on campus as soon as the storm passed. This was less out of dedication than because the air conditioning, telephones, and internet connections at LSU came back almost immediately, while most areas of town, including mine, got no power for a week or more. Faculty members gratefully camped with their families in the cramped LSU offices they'd disdained the week before, some with their more fragile pets caged and hidden away. Rumors came from nearby downtown: evacuees were rioting in the Civic Center shelter; displaced New Orleans gangs were cruising the streets with AK-47s and outgunning our home-grown but wimpier gangs, not to mention the police; Walmart was being looted, and thugs were shooting it out in the parking lot. These rumors were wholly fabricated; the evacuees were actually coping stoically, but the real, prosaic situation became clear only after our nervous Chancellor had locked down LSU buildings for a day. For days after the storm, the view on campus in the main quad and library became weirdly middle-aged. Parents, now crammed into apartments and dorms with their children, hung out at the library to find internet connections and to remember how to use pay phones. When cell phone use was somewhat restored, the main quad was occupied by well-dressed, stocky, middle-aged men in shorts and penny loafers pacing impatiently up and down, barking into their phones. Prominent New Orleanians, at the campus hotel for an alumni meeting when the storm struck, were unexpectedly joined by their fleeing families, packed eight to a room, and, after a week or so, indignant to find themselves forced to have their credit cards swiped nightly at the front desk.

The campus was nevertheless an orderly theme park compared to what was going on outside. Half the people in town seem suspended in time, the other half frantic and dashing around. Most people in Baton Rouge — those not sheltering refugees, staffing food kitchens, sorting donated clothes, or engaged in the vast medical operations, at least — hunkered down in their pressure-cooker homes waiting for the electricity to return. There were not many places to go, anyway, or ways to get there. Driving was like on an LSU football day, when much of the town is grid-

locked, except that now the grid-lock wouldn't go away. Even a month later, humdrum places like McDonald's or Burger King were full of middle aged, middle-class couples sitting placidly drinking coffee, dressed as if they were going somewhere but weren't, sometimes talking absent-mindedly on their cell phones. On the surface, a fair number of evacuees appeared to be settling in for good, but everywhere the question was the same: "When can I go home?"

By September 13, the Assembly Center and Field House hospitals closed and the animal shelter somewhat later.<sup>1</sup> Classes were to resume, and we were curious see what, and who, would turn up, if anyone.

### Going the Distance

First a word about our student body: we now have a student body of about 30,000 and, like most other state flagship campuses, it's generally middle class and unused to serious life-style disruptions — parental divorce excepted, of course. These students are unlike their sturdier predecessors who were prevalent when I arrived in 1986, those who, still riding on Huey P. Long's populist vision from the 30s, came to our open-admissions campus off shrimp boats, cattle ranches, and the oil fields. Most of our current students come from New Orleans and Louisiana's other larger metropolitan areas, especially Shreveport and Lake Charles. Notwithstanding their comparatively privileged status, even the wealthiest students from south Louisiana cities were familiar from childhood with packing up suddenly during hurricane season in case an on-coming storm proved to be "The Big One." The practice, though, was to bring three days' change of clothing and leave three days of food for the pets — then you'd be home, pick up the tree debris in the yard, and get back to normal.

So teaching resumed on September 13. When the storm had hit, classes had been in session only for a week. I was teaching the standard Brit Lit I, *Beowulf*-to-Boswell course, and after touching on some shorter Anglo-Saxon poems, we had been cranking up *Beowulf* as Katrina moved up the Gulf. Our groggy faculty expected near-empty classrooms, but found them near-full. There they were, the same thirty-odd students I'd been teaching two weeks before the worst natural disaster in American history had struck them, and I had to make something of *Beowulf* and then *The Canterbury Tales*, and on to *King Lear* and beyond. How different would the experience of literature be to these stressed-out students, and how different would this class be compared to the umpteen sections I've taught over the last quarter century?

The answer is — not much. Or more accurately not much that I could see, or not much that the students would allow me to see. I warily left openings in class to discuss the storm but by and large, they didn't take them. Assuredly, there were lots of hollow eyes and slumping shoulders

out there, but they were sitting in class and participating in a general sort of way. The students came to class, answered questions, joked and laughed some, and took notes. Sometimes students came around to my office and apologized for missing class — "we're spending every weekend gutting my parents' house in Lakeview," or "we took in eleven feet of water and my dad's deciding what to do with the house" — but they had a determination to fulfill the basic requirements of the course, if not much more. So there we were. This is the kind of moment that obnoxiously up-beat faculty call "a teaching opportunity." As things played out, it was the teacher who had the most opportunity for learning.

My predictions about which texts would resonate were, on the whole, flat-out wrong, or right for reasons I didn't predict. My opening for them to reflect about their Katrina experiences through *Beowulf* was a journal question (one of five or six) asking if they saw any connections between the storm and the terror caught so vividly and grimly in the old poem. A number of students responded to the question, but the responses were flat: yes, Katrina was like Grendel, coming out of the night and bringing destruction and death. End of analysis. None of them chose to write anything except commonplaces about the cyclical nature of life suggested in the poem, the rise and fall of great cultures, the failure of authorities to perform their duties in a crisis, the felt need for a mythic redeemer. Most chose another discussion question entirely. There was a similar reaction to the Norton Malory selections: I discussed in class how the Middle Ages (in the Norton, anyway) began and ended with tales showing the pattern of the rise and fall of civilizations, leaving only an unorganized mass of humanity in a bleak landscape. Again, not many students wanted to make local comparisons in their journals. The Lancelot-Guinevere affair seemed much more compelling, or the villainy of Mordred, or comparisons with *A Knight's Tale*, a film they'd all seen in high school.

The Norton text that I thought would have the most impact was *King Lear*, with its storm scenes, its themes of displacement, homelessness, willful blindness, and unwillingness to face obvious truths. We got to *Lear* about a month after returning to classes. Although I again approached the topic of Katrina from the greatest distance, I got very little reaction on what seemed the most applicable, even unavoidable parallels with the Katrina experience. The most vivid performance photos, paintings, and DVD productions would not move them to discuss or write directly about Katrina itself. Still, *Lear* opened them up to discuss and write about two Katrina-related issues. First, parents. Many students had parents whose lives were wholly disrupted, and all had close friends with displaced parents. Some returned to their cramped apartments and dorms each evening to find their stressed-out and directionless parents watching the news and tying up the internet. Others had parents now in Houston or Atlanta and considering permanently re-locating, a hitherto unthinkable concept for a New Orleanian. But families were divided in other

ways perhaps more upsetting to kids. Husbands and wives were (and are still) frequently divided bitterly over *the* critical question: do we move back? (Or now: why did you make us move back?) This played out in many ways in that first month, especially in the hugely symbolic question of whether to enroll younger children in Baton Rouge schools. A second issue *Lear* dragged to the surface was parent-child relations. This is one part of *Lear* that perpetually causes problems for teachers since many students secretly sympathize with Lear's nasty daughters and enjoy seeing the unreasonable old man get the boot. After Katrina, these issues were more than literary questions. Perspectives and roles suddenly shifted. With befuddled parents living in hotels and apartments in god-knows-where, the students suddenly became the stable family members, going off to class and continuing their part-time jobs at the pizza joint or Psychology Department. In the *Lear* discussions and journal entries, anger and frustration with parents came to the surface, along with pity and a new understanding. While this is all too complex to analyze here, even if I were qualified, *Lear* became a way of talking, at a distance, about their most personal family relations.

While to this point the class may sound like a largely dreary experience for all concerned, the students were strangely engaged in a kind of dream-like and intermittent fashion, and several texts caught their attention fully. Looking back at their journals, I see much more lively entries for Marie de France's *Lanval* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Most of our students come from traditional Christian backgrounds, with many French and Irish Catholics among the group, so aside from the escapist aspect of the two poems, student journal entries were focused especially on the spiritual questioning of *SGGK*. Surprisingly, the reading in which I saw a different and stronger connection was *The Canterbury Tales*, especially the *General Prologue*. In a normal class, sophomores are engaged by the more salacious characters, or at least what they read about them from *Spark Notes*, but this time there was both a willingness to linger over details of language and a concentration on Chaucer's larger societal concerns, concerns that appeared in later journal entries and papers. At first I thought that Chaucer was merely providing some needed comic relief in the month following the hurricane, but reflecting back over the period, I can see that something more complex was going on.

My guesses for Chaucer's appeal — they are nothing more — might start with his often-cited distancing irony and humor. *Beowulf* and *Lear* especially were simply too in-your-face, too visceral for students, like reading psychologists' books about bereavement immediately after the funeral of a loved one. *The Canterbury Tales* is literally a study in contrasts, nowhere more so than the *General Prologue*. The narrator seems to be observing his characters on the fly, picking up on some of their aspects and ignoring others, a justly celebrated illusion of reality. The satire can be biting, but the narrator moves along and urges us to take what we like and "turn the leaf" to something

else if we don't like it. The pressure is apparently off the reader. Students don't feel duty-bound to stare a topic like "Fate in *The Seafarer*" in the face. Another reason for Chaucer's sudden popularity that semester might be the frame story of the *General Prologue*: setting out on a long journey with dubious companions and authority figures. The pilgrimage motif resonated much more strongly since no student in the class needed to be reminded that "we're not in Kansas anymore"; many of life's sign-posts that they'd live with for their whole lives were gone with the wind. For similar reasons, discussions were lively about the meaning of Chaucer's apparent decision not to bring his pilgrims back home again. Effective closure was equated with having everyone back in their own beds, and a couple of students were especially indignant that Chaucer, too, failed in his "Road Home" program.

Two other reasons for the interest in *The Canterbury Tales* might include first, the sense one gets from the *General Prologue* that we're dealing with characters who are not quite up to the job assigned them by virtue of their positions. Normally, students show little interest in Chaucer's focus on the pilgrims' social and professional roles. They dutifully take notes on my lecture about the thoroughly un-modern idea that one's profession largely defines one's psychological make-up or personality (or vice-versa), but they don't believe it. They're much more comfortable treating the nine-and-twenty pilgrims like characters in a novel. It's often a struggle to get past the idea that the goal of Chaucer the Poet is to heroically free his characters from medieval social stereotypes and make them into psychologically "rounded" characters (some critics have this problem, too). In the crisis brought on by Katrina, finding people who soberly performed their social and political duties well had new importance in a state that has repeatedly elected jail-birds and open reprobates. Suddenly in September 2005, the firm social commitment of the Knight and the Parson meant something important in an environment in which others were failing the people they were expected to serve. Students could suddenly see that the Friar and Monk were not just likeable rascals of the kind Louisianians like to vote for, but providers of social services who are harming real people in need.

Finally, the students had a queasy sense that they were living in an "obsolescent" society, a society in which the familiar rituals of life were moving into the past very quickly and in which this passing was being speeded up not just by time and events, but by the individuals who were supposed to maintain those rituals. This is the world Donald Howard identified thirty years ago as Chaucer's world.<sup>2</sup> Similar fears were felt by all students, not just those in the direct path of the hurricane. To some extent, those of us who live in places like Baton Rouge quickly grow accustomed to becoming a part of New Orleans surreptitiously after only a short drive (and conversely, accustomed to being



able to escape back home from its crime, dirtiness, and shambling incompetence). Faculty who spend their entire LSU careers waiting for that phone call summoning them back to New Haven have been comforted by the presence of one of the world's great cities only an hour or so away. Like New Yorkers, New Orleanians generally won't even consider living anywhere else, and also like New Yorkers, think of the rest of the world as a drab hinterland where people just don't get it. The students quickly saw past the immediate physical mess into a more profound cultural problem. The question of whether or not the culture of New Orleans can be re-imported was asked immediately and, of course, is still a source of international speculation. We all lost a part of our identity. So while the befuddled Lear on his blasted heath was too powerful an image for the students at that moment, the medieval society of England, ambling carelessly toward its end and willfully ignoring the clear warnings signs, became a living metaphor.

You don't need an advanced degree in psychology or a shelf of twelve-step books to see my point: after people have a traumatic experience, they don't need art to recreate their experience for them, and they don't need experts to interpret their experiences through art. 9/11 survivors didn't need CUNY professors to interpret their experience through lectures on Picasso's *Guernica* or Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5*, and Katrina victims didn't need me to send them over the deep end with depressing reiterations about the bleakness of *Lear*.<sup>3</sup> I'm reminded of the post-World War II cartoon by Bill Mauldin showing a hardened veteran demanding his money back at a movie theater featuring a war film, saying "Yer dern tootin' it was realistic. Gimme my money back!"

To conclude this section, let me run through a few commonplaces about literature and suffering that I was forced to confront first-hand. Most of these are commonplaces that up-to-date professors find hopelessly Edwardian, but like atheists in the foxholes, there are few of us who don't sometimes return to these ideas in some form or another when the going gets tough. One commonplace, for example, is the idea of literature as a form of consolation or, in contemporary terms, therapy. This I found not true in the case of my Katrina students, or only in a highly qualified sense (see my conclusion). I hope that a few of them will sometime see *Lear* performed, be moved at some unrecognized emotional level, and find the human sympathy that is about all *Lear* has to offer us. But not yet, in Fall 2005. A similar commonplace is to welcome literature as a way to express emotions we are incapable of articulating on our own, but need to. This, again in the short-term, I found not to be the case. Or perhaps the words were capable of expressing the students' feelings, but they were burying the words in some ante-chamber of their minds, some de-contamination center where the words were re-processed safely into the academic subject of "English," something to be remembered for later retrieval on a quiz. A third commonplace sees literature as a way of

talking about issues in a way that is both indirect and, because of its indirection, more intense. As I suggested about *The Canterbury Tales*, this I found to be somewhat true. No other survey class has found the Pardoner's speech-acts (as opposed to his gender confusion) so compelling, or the Friar's scolding of the poor, not to mention the Doctor's profiteering in times of "pestilence."

### Deliverance

So far, then, this is a not encouraging picture of literature as a bulwark against catastrophe. Poetry changed nothing, and Humanities professors who thought that their hour to lead the masses had come at last very quickly found themselves taking a distant back seat to anyone who could tie a tourniquet, organize a triage space, or even sort children's clothing accurately. We were the bed-pan carriers. Most of my own time was spent at the vast, hot, and dirty LSU Animal Shelter. As General Patton, in the person of George C. Scott, says to his Europe-bound troops, "years later when your little son looks at you and says, 'what did you do in the great war, daddy?' at least you won't have to say 'I shoveled shit in Louisiana.'" Well.

We performed one surprisingly critical service, however, one for which we got some student appreciation — we were there. That's it, just there in the classrooms in our own bumbling persons. We were replicating their most common life experiences outside the home for their last fifteen years or so. My classroom was open, and our class met regularly at 10:30 am on Tuesday and Thursday, just as always. The air conditioning worked, the computers were reliable, the place was clean and well-lighted. In my classroom and nearly all others, I suspect, the discussion was fixed firmly on the course content. For most of them, the LSU classroom was the only place in which conversation did not drift inexorably toward Katrina and "when are we going back?" or "what's in the future?" Our professorial conviction that Vaughan's versification should be the focus of rapt attention, normally a conversation-stopper when dealing with students, suddenly became a vital asset. In us, they found people who were utterly focused on something that happened a long time ago and to other people.

So Woody Allen's famous observation that eighty percent of success in life is just showing up took on a new meaning entirely.<sup>4</sup> I had almost no drops.<sup>5</sup> Daily attendance was, under the circumstances, astoundingly good. Mental attendance for both faculty and students was usually quite bad. (It was a commonplace that everyone deserved to be on the pass-fail option that semester.) My jokes finally met with the appreciation they deserved. At a university that has no effective attendance policy, students attended. Note-taking seemed to be especially therapeutic, just the act of writing words down on paper. So maybe that's part of the answer to the question "of what use are the Humanities in the aftermath of a natural disaster?" At the moment just past impact, we

were most important because we were in place; we represented continuity and familiarity, routine, and actual progress toward a goal, a degree, and even a grade that said "I stuck it out and didn't flag."

### Exit, Pursued by an Imaginary Bear

I'm not calling this last section "Conclusion" because imagination fails me even now, thinking about what students took away from the literature they read under me that semester. As I noted, perhaps a decade from now some of my former students will be suddenly seized by a line or scene from *King Lear*, and in a moment of insight, connect it to the Katrina experience. It would be pretty to think so. Just past the storm, though, they didn't want to read that "the worst is not / So long as we can say, 'This is the worst,'" or ponder over "We that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long." At this writing, Fall semester 2007 had just ended and they still don't want to talk about it. The students in my Honors seminar this past semester, most of them freshmen in the Katrina semester, were palpably indignant that the mandatory summer reading for incoming freshman was Jed Horne's *Breach of Faith*. "Time to move on" all dozen of them said, with those twenty-something gestures of dismissal we all wearily recognize. In truth, none of us has moved very far, and many are a long, long way from moving home.

Oh yes, a final factor needs to be considered in the students' attitudes, one that might excuse them from simple denial, then and now: we had done pretty damn well, both as individuals and as members of the university community. The failures so evident at the time on world-wide television and even more evident as the years drag on (Spike Lee's *When the Levees Broke* documents this with devastating dispassion) were not the personal failures of our students. The resilience and selflessness of the individual showed itself a thousand times in the experience of each of us. The glamorized individualism and escapist Romanticism our students feed on 24/7 through films, television, and popular music gave way to communal effort and a distancing from the self-centered passions that can easily destroy us in a time of crisis. Hurrah for the students. Hurrah for the Knight and the Parson: for once, *Lear* can take a pass.

### Notes

1. Of course, we were not quite finished with natural disasters when Katrina blew north. On September 27, Hurricane Rita devastated western Louisiana and east Texas, home to many of our students. Because Baton Rouge was on the "bad" (east) side of the hurricane, the town received more wind and water damage than from Katrina, but the serious damage was west of us. Classes were again cancelled officially for a "campus cleanup" day on Monday, but actually so that the LSU-Tennessee game could be held after being postponed on Saturday by the storm.

2. See Donald R. Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (1976).
3. The Duke University Panel on "Race, Class, and the Politics of Death: Critical Responses to Hurricane Katrina," held September 6 while most of us were still without power and still digging out, seemed particularly egregious even to those who generally agreed with its general message. Comments by Wahneema Lubiano, the main organizer, were published in "Race, Class, and the Politics of Death: Critical Responses to Hurricane Katrina," *Transforming Anthropology*, 14.1 (2006).
4. A quotation found in many variants, but probably best known from the film *Play It Again, Sam*.
5. Since they arrived at LSU when classes were already generally filled, most evacuee students were placed in newly-formed sections, at least for popular and General Education courses.

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