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ABSTRACT

These papers are the work of scholars who received support as post-secondary fellows in 1992-93 in the Elementary and Secondary Schools Teacher Curriculum Development Project. The project seeks to familiarize teachers with current developments in the humanities, support their development of curricular materials based on their studies, and disseminates those materials. The seven essays include: (1) "Moving to the Other Side of the Desk: Teachers' Stories of Self-Fashioning" (Linda Wells); (2) "Transforming Canons, Transforming Teachers" (Edward L. Rocklin); (3) "Shaping the Multicultural Curriculum: Biblical Encounters with the Other" (Lois Feuer); (4) "Nationalism, History, the Chicano Subject, and the Text" (Darlene Emily Hicks); (5) "Ms. Higgins and the Culture Warriors: Notes Toward the Creation of an Eighth Grade Humanities Curriculum" (John G. Ramsay); (6) "History and the Humanities: The Politics of Objectivity and the Promise of Subjectivity" (Eve Kornfeld); and (7) "Toward a 'Curriculum of Hope': The Essential Role of Humanities Scholarship in Public School Teaching" (Paul A. Fideler). Contains approximately 250 references. (EH)

# TEACHING THE HUMANITIES:

## Essays from the ACLS Elementary and Secondary Schools Teacher Curriculum Development Project



American Council of Learned Societies



ACLS OCCASIONAL PAPER No. 24
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# Contents

# Introduction

The papers in this number of the American Council of Learned Societies Occasional Paper series are the work of scholars who received support as post-secondary fellows in 1992-93 in our Elementary and Secondary Schools Teacher Curriculum Development project. That project seeks to familiarize teachers with current developments in the humanities, support their development of curricular materials based on their studies, and disseminate those materials. Those public school teachers joining the ACLS project are expected to involve other teachers at their home schools and—with support from central offices—they are expected to involve other teachers throughout their districts in becoming familiar with contemporary scholarship in the humanities and in the development and use of curricular materials that are both appropriate and challenging for their students.

Since 1992-1993, ACLS has been establishing these collaborative programs at sites around the country. At each site there is a year-long workshop on a topic in the humanities of wide interest, facilitated by one or more distinguished scholars from a local research university, working with up to a dozen teacher-fellows from the local public schools.

In 1992-93 each workshop also included the participation of ACLS post-secondary fellows, selected by competitions among humanities scholars at colleges and universities in the vicinity of the host university. During their workshop year the post-secondary fellows participated in the workshops at their sites, joined with the teacher-fellows in the common project of their workshop, visited schools, participated in various ACLS national activities, and pursued their own research. The terms of their fellowships required the production of a report on their fellowship year and a scholarly paper. Nearly all the 1992-93 fellows far exceeded that requirement, completing or initiating book-length projects or multiple papers, as well as spending much more time than was expected with the teacher-fellows in their workshops, which in most cases they have continued to do in the year following their fellowships.

The papers in this volume are interrelated, a poly-vocal discussion, as it were, concerning topics that arose during the workshops. These papers speak to one another, and in most cases, also speak to the work of individual teachers and to the general projects of the workshops in which their authors participated. This dialogic aspect of the papers was itself the result of on-going conversations among the post-secondary fellows during their fellowship year, and is a good representation of the spirit of the project itself.

The first paper in the following pages is by Linda Wells, of Boston University, who was a participant in the Harvard workshop, facilitated by Professor Vito Perrone. Professor Wells has written about "Moving to the Other Side of the Desk: Teachers' Stories of Self-Fashioning," her work with teachers from the Cambridge and Brookline public schools bringing her to an interest in the way in which teachers "fashion" themselves throughout their careers. Professor Wells' own story of "self-fashioning" is particularly striking.

Four papers by professors of literature form a section on canon. Professor Edward L. Rocklin, of California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, has written about "Transforming Canons, Transforming Teachers." Professor Lois Feuer, of California State University, Dominguez Hills, has written about "Shaping the Multicultural Curriculum: Biblical Encounters with the Other." Professors Rocklin and Feuer participated in the UCLA workshop, facilitated by Professor Karen Rowe. Professor Darlene Emily Hicks, of San Diego State University, has written about "Nationalism, History, the Chicano Subject, and the Text": questions of Chicano and Chicana literature, as informed by her experience with teachers in multicultural classrooms in San Diego and Los Angeles. She was a participant in the UCSD workshop, facilitated by Professor Steven Hahn. And Professor John Ramsay, of Carleton College, who was a participant in the University of Minnesota workshop facilitated by Professor Marcia Eaton, has written a paper entitled "Ms. Higgins and the Culture Warriors: Notes Towards the Creation of an Eighth Grade Humanities Curriculum."

Two papers by professors of history form a comparable section. Another participant in the UCSD workshop, Professor Eve Kornfeld, of San Diego State University, has written about "History and the Humanities: The Politics of Objectivity and the Promise of Subjectivity," an issue that represents for historians a set of historical circumstances and theoretical problems similar to that of the question of canon for literary scholars. And Professor Paul Fideler, of Lesley College, who was a participant in the Harvard workshop, has written "Toward a 'Curriculum of Hope': The Essential Role of Humanities Scholarship in Public School Teaching," where he engages curricular issues in the light of the rethinking of history itself.

Each of these papers is thought-provoking on its own, while the set brings us into that conversation about the nature of humanities scholarship that can be heard in seminar rooms and convention corridors throughout the country. They differ, as a set, from what might usually be found in the journals of the learned societies, in that they also are

participants in another conversation, unfortunately less usual, between teachers of post-secondary students and those of elementary and secondary students. That there has been such a conversation within the ACLS workshops is a signal mark of success for those workshops, and a tribute to all involved. It might have been anticipated that there would be no conversation at all, that there simply would be a set of lectures, as each participant fell into a customary role—given the prestigious locations of the workshops—professors speaking, teachers taking notes. And yet that did not happen. The workshop facilitators—Professors Eaton, Hahn, Perrone, and Rowe—came to ACLS as practitioners of an ideal of a community of scholars, an ideal that they shared with both the post-secondary fellows and with the elementary and secondary teacher-fellows who joined them in the workshops at Minnesota, UCSD, Harvard, and UCLA. Moving from that ideal to the practice that ultimately characterized each of the workshops was not easy (the participants in one of the workshops characterized it as a "contentious" dialogue), but it was ultimately successful, as can be seen in the tone of the papers in this volume.

In addition to thanking the workshop participants—teacher-fellows and facilitators—for their work during the year that informed these papers, I would like to thank Douglas Greenberg, now President and Director of the Chicago Historical Society, whose idea it was, when he was Vice President of ACLS, to bring these papers out in this series. Professor Greenberg devoted an extraordinary amount of time and energy to the Elementary and Secondary Schools Teacher Curriculum Development project during its planning and initial year, and was particularly attentive to the post-secondary fellows. Stanley N. Katz, President of ACLS, initially envisioned the project and secured its funding, and has been intimately involved with its various and multiplying activities. And finally, the ACLS Board of Directors' Committee on Publications, Education, and Scholarly Communication has been strongly supportive of these activities: Professor Mario Valdes, Chair; Professor James Millar, and Professor Martha Nussbaum.

The ACLS Elementary and Secondary Schools Teacher Curriculum Development project is supported by core grants from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, and an anonymous funder. Additional funding is provided by the host universities and districts and local foundations.

*Michael Holzman*

# Moving to the Other Side of the Desk: Teachers' Stories of Self-Fashioning

*Linda Wells*
*Boston University*

In his play, *Butley*, Simon Gray has created a marvelously cynical, irreverent English professor at London University who makes us laugh and cringe at the same time. Butley, a drunken slacker, sits in his office behind heaps of unread papers, keeping students at bay with complaints of his administrative duties which must, he claims, take precendence over his tutorials with them. His officemate, Joey, notes that Butley has forgotten to return a student's master's thesis: Butley quips, "Not yet. So far I've forgotten to read it. Forgetting to give it back will come later" (12). As they are discussing curricular developments in the department, Butley rails against Joey for not opposing the new book list of contemporary novels which Butley will then have to teach: "Fool! Imbecile! Traitor! Lackey!—I wouldn't be caught dead reading those books. And you know how it exhausts me to teach books I haven't read" (16). At times we would like to be able to emulate the cynicism of Butley, and in our darker moments of teaching, we no doubt create in our minds Butleyesque dialogue, mortifying the aggressively dull student with our wit or bursting the bubble of the idealistic colleague who expects to change the world with her teaching.

If we have some of Butley in us, we also hope to have equal parts of Kingsfield, the brilliant mythological figure of the law professor in *The Paper Chase*, who hectors and badgers his students until they either quit law school or bend to his will. Foremost is the subject, the law, which must never be compromised. Add to Butley and Kingsfield a little of the character-formation achieved by Miss Stacy in *Anne of Green Gables*, who by her own strength of character motivates students to excel in their studies while never losing sight of the ethical life. Or the dedicated Mr. Chips. Or the romantic though often misbegotten zeal of Miss Jean Brody.

Even though these and a myriad of other images of the teacher crowd our minds, most of us who teach are mere mortals who fashion a persona in the classroom, patching it together from teachers who have inspired and motivated us, and trying to avoid the tactics of those who have disappointed and bored us. Both the positive and negative models have assisted us in our reflection about and creation of the

teacher we want to be or hope we are. Being interested in this process by which students become teachers, I interviewed 17 high school and college history and literature teachers.

When I began this project, I thought they would tell me something of the differences between high school and college teaching in the Humanities. They did this, but they said so much more about the process by which one becomes a teacher and what is the nature of the teaching enterprise. I have entitled this essay, "Moving to the Other Side of the Desk," because unlike other professions, the student becomes what, for many years, he has beheld. Yet the subtitle of the essay is also true, for each teacher spoke of a good deal of unpreparedness for teaching and the process of "self-fashioning," or creating a persona who could teach effectively. While Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* exposes the idea of self-fashioning as it applies to writers and their character-creations, I have taken the term to apply more broadly to the entire process of identity construction. Greenblatt develops a compelling conceptual model of how such construction occurs. In analyzing Othello, for example, he establishes how Iago masks himself publicly; yet we wonder how much of his private narrative revealed only to the audience is also mask and how much is authentic. We see in all of the characters, as well, how each is susceptible to the narratives of others: how Desdemona is fashioned by Emilia or Othello by Iago. These concepts established by Greenblatt seem fruitful when applied to the construction of a teaching persona. Throughout the interviews, teachers wondered at their authenticity, they commented on the masks they wore; they suggested how susceptible they had been to the narratives of their own teachers. They often noted that teaching is a mysterious process, not always fully understood by the conscious mind.

## On Becoming a Teacher

The process of becoming a teacher involves that somewhat mysterious relationship between teacher and student. How much does a student's success depend upon the ability to involve the teacher in her education? This question often remains unexamined, while greater attention is paid to the exclusive role of the teacher. As I interviewed teachers, I became increasingly fascinated by the role of the student. I described my own "education" within the family, because I think I am not an isolated example. I entered formal education with a presence, an attitude that I belonged there and that good things would happen to me there. The teachers I interviewed also had a generally positive attitude toward their own education, though I would characterize most

of them as strongly ambivalent toward "schooling." This may be in part related to the fact that many of them were in school in the 1950s and in college in the 1960s, but the categories seem to apply to the younger teachers as well, so I am inclined to think that teachers are by nature identified with and rebellious toward authority. It may be necessary to hold this tension in balance to be successful as teachers, because it allows us to work with students who are closer to the rebel than the teacher-pleaser.

Although these categories might be applied to all teachers, I chose to interview only history and literature teachers because I am interested in dimensions of humanities education, as well as the broader enterprise of teaching itself. What led these individuals to choose these disciplines, I wondered, and how do they view themselves as teachers of the humanities?

Most of the people in the study knew well before college that they would become literature or history majors. Even those who chose other majors initially did so for practical reasons. In two cases, those who eventually went on to study history began as science or engineering majors, but changed because "history took them over." One selected engineering because it was encouraged in the 1950s even though he quickly came to realize he had little aptitude for it, and the other, in the 1980s, selected chemistry but found that, although she had an aptitude for it, it didn't allow for much personal development. She notes:

> I was loving my history courses but people said there were no jobs. By my sophomore year, it ceased to be important to me if there were jobs or not. It just seemed to be what I wanted to study. The point of a liberal arts education was not to get a job—Lawrence University effectively convinced me of this. Then, too, I had teachers who managed to exam me in ways that made me think I had gotten more out of the course than I thought. And like a good laboratory rat, I continued the behavior.

In the case of the literature teachers, one noted that he had gone to Bronx Science High School in the late 1950s and assumed that he would be a biology major in college. As a junior in high school, however, he read *Crime and Punishment*: "After that there wasn't any doubt that I was in literature." Of course the litetature teachers noted books, in general, as being the reason for their continued study, but three mentioned *Crime and Punishment* specifically as the book that defined their vocation. Another Dostoyevsky devotee tells this story:

> I discovered reading. I did not go on to college right away, because my family couldn't afford it—my father had recently died. So I worked and I read and I can even tell you the book that took the top of my head off: *Crime and Punishment*. That book changed my life. I said I had to read more Dostoyevsky—more literature. I went on to other writers. I've always marveled at the thing literature gives us, "the ability to live life backwards," as Kierkegaard said, while we are living it forwards. It is just the endless plane of imagination where you can escape, you can invent, you can imagine, you can fantasize, question, doubt, reveal yourself, confess, you can do everything, anything, that you ever wanted to do that you can't do in the work-a-day world of reality

I would conclude that both literature and history teachers were led to their fields because they liked stories, whether imaginative narratives or the stories of real people. It was evident that the literature majors could easily have been history majors and vice versa; in fact, in one case, a teacher has a bachelor's degree in English but teaches history. Often this interest in stories developed outside the classroom, in private reading, and was then reinforced by inspiring teachers. Another teacher describes his interest in reading

> I think for me it had to do with adolescence. I went through a period when my family moved when I was 12; it lasted about 20 or 30 years. One of the things I did during that period was to discover music and especially literature. It became an important escape and it probably would have been insignificant for my later life except that the books I read were *Crime and Punishment* and *Madame Bovary*. I inadvertently learned to have taste.

For all the teachers, reading was an education in itself, but each had inspirational role models who encouraged them as students and assisted them in fashioning their own teaching persona when the time came to move to the other side of the desk. The features of an inspiring teacher are not particularly surprising, but the thoughtfulness and respect expressed by those interviewed was itself inspiring, as if the mantle had been passed. Certainly the most often noted features were the depth of knowledge of the teacher and the ability to engage students in the act of learning. It seems that the most inspiring teachers are able to do both, because as one person noted, she had teachers who knew a great deal, but the ones she truly admired were not merely

"acting smart" in front of the class, but could demystify the knowledge and make her feel secure in her ability to learn. She went on to say that she assimilated this into her own teaching, for a rewarding comment on her teaching evaluations is one that says, "I loved this class because it made me feel so smart." Inherent in this statement is the challenge that the course presented, but also the fact that one goal of teaching is to energize the student through the power of ideas.

Another teacher remembers a freshman English teacher, a rather quiet presence in the class, who inspired by his sparing and somewhat cryptic commentary on papers. On the first paper, the teacher had written "You know how to write; you just don't know what to write. That will come." By the eighth paper of the semester, the student had given up trying to discover what the teacher wanted on papers and was beginning to develop an authentic voice. Upon reading *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, this student developed a genuine insight about the book, linking the work with his own Catholic youth. When the paper was returned, the only comment was "Now you've got it." This is an excellent example of what in *Women's Ways of Knowing* is called constructed knowledge, when the knower merges with what is known. Now a teacher himself, this individual seemed to focus less upon the content of what was taught and more upon the process of thinking in which he was encouraged to participate. He said, "Teachers who ask questions of purpose and who invite ideas [are inspiring]. I always responded poorly to teachers who wanted me to tell them what they already knew."

Gaining that balance in the classroom between expectations about content and process is a difficult task for all of us, and many teachers spoke of that balancing act. One way to do it is to create a challenging course of study and establish real expectations, while at the same time, conveying the sense of support for the students. For example, one teacher mentioned his high school Latin teacher: "he was competent and he was hard. He expected us to be competent too. He really instilled the idea that learning this and getting good at it mattered." He goes on to mention a college literature teacher who had the same qualities: "She loved what she was doing (19th century poetry) and exuded this idea that what she was doing was important."

Not surprisingly, high school English teachers figured prominently in people's imagery of inspiration, especially women teachers. It has become commonplace in education to suggest the reason for this: before the 1960s truly dedicated and intellectual women turned to

secondary education as the place for fulfillment, being cut off from most other professions where their talents might have been realized.

Three people mentioned their Latin teachers, for their dedication and scholarly approach to the subject. One teacher described how her Latin teacher became a role model once she began her own teaching of history:

> He laid bare for me the thinking processes and he set Latin forth not as a language, but as a logical system. It was almost mathematical; much like my physics teacher, he said here are the rules to a language. Now fill in the blanks. Here is a particular pattern of thinking; this is how Latin is different because it uses this logical system. Latin is different because there is a different philosophy behind it compared to Romance and Germanic languages. It was like being Helen Keller—an epiphany—and once I discovered this system, I went into other classes and looked for the rules that governed those subjects.

What is significant here is not just that this teacher helped her understand principles of Latin, but she was herself able to extrapolate and apply the idea of governing principles to other disciplines, another example of constructed knowledge. She notes that as a teacher this is her primary pedagogical method, laying bare for students the rules governing inquiry in the social sciences.

### Creating a Teacher Persona

Teachers came to acknowledge their teaching vocation at various times in their lives as students. Some, like myself, knew early on that they were destined to teach, and so it was just a matter of waiting to grow up. We were the kind of students already preparing to teach, as we sat in elementary and high school classes, scrutinizing our own teachers, evaluating their successes and failures. The reality that they would be teachers only dawned on some people, however, when they were getting advanced degrees. Even the high school teachers were not all in teacher training programs as undergraduates, earning instead bachelor's degrees in history or literature without a firm commitment to teaching. Many worked in other fields before going into high school teaching. In two cases, teachers had worked in publishing, found it simply boring, and then began to think seriously about teaching. One individual said he never wanted to be a high school teacher, and only after several years doing it did he finally acknowledge that he was, in

fact, a teacher. Upon reflection, he thought he had been teaching all his life, even as a third-grader, when he became a reader, collected a number of books of his own, and then started a lending library of sorts in his neighborhood. A parent whose child he had motivated to read said that he ought to think about being a teacher, and perhaps the seed was planted at that early age.

Career selection is usually preceded by visual imagery. What can I see myself doing? What kind of work will be satisfying? Some people had identified early with their teachers and could easily see themselves in that role. Others had more difficulty with the choice. One college literature teacher said he truly admired old-fashioned scholars, teachers with an aggressive pursuit of the scholarly and who were still curious about the subject even after thirty years teaching it. Occasionally, however, he would look at one of these somewhat eccentric scholars with papers bulging out of his briefcase and be taken over with approach avoidance: "Is *that* what I want to be? . . . *That's* what I want to *be*."

If these teachers are right, no one can teach someone else how to teach. Those who had been in teacher training programs were singularly negative in their views about such programs, believing them to be for the most part a waste of time. This may arise from the fact that teaching is not a procedure, like brain surgery or brick-laying, but a constant interaction. Effectiveness requires more than talent; it requires a good deal of time to mature. It is also incredibly tiring, for the teacher is usually the primary energy force in the classroom, especially for those who have a captive audience of high school students or general education non-majors. I realized as I was conducting this study that teachers are unique in that *all* their work time involves interaction; perhaps an orchestra conductor is the closest comparison.

Nearly all the college teachers felt they too were ill-prepared for teaching, because while a Ph.D. prepares one to be an effective scholar and researcher, very little time is devoted in most programs to teaching. Most college literature teachers had been teaching fellows, before beginning their first full-time teaching, but the process was to throw them into freshman composition or literature classes and watch them sink or swim. How, then, did we become teachers of the Humanities? One teacher, who is also a writer, spoke about the process of self-fashioning: "I am not a natural teacher and am basically a shy individual. I wrote a fictional character called Wex who could be a successful teacher. So in a sense that is a literary creation, a kind of mask that adheres." While he spoke of many teachers who inspired him in the

field of literary studies, he never thought of modeling himself on anyone who had been his teacher. His initial attempts at course design were based upon what he had learned to do well in graduate school: to write papers. "So my approach to teaching these very talented 18-20-year-old people was to spend time in the library writing three hours worth of graduate seminar-type papers each week and delivering them as lectures in class. I had no other conception of how to do things and the students were extremely nice to me, put up with this, and even said they valued what I was doing. But I obviously had learned nothing about teaching then."

## The Emergent Teacher

While few of the teachers I spoke with felt well prepared for their first teaching assignment, all have survived those first years with a vision of what they are doing as teachers of the humanities. We were formed by the vision of our own teachers and have become their product. We were, to use Greenblatt's concept, in large part susceptible to their narratives. That product, however, is not static, but is itself continuing to change over time. Said another way, as teachers we continue to be students, and we hope that the process will live on in our students, some of whom may also become teachers. If we take another set of categories from *Women's Ways of Knowing*, received and procedural knowledge, perhaps we can get at some of the variations in the vision of what should be humanities education. I was interested in finding out if teachers taught what they were taught, receiving knowledge and learning the procedures that governed their discipline, or did they do something more; did they alter their perspective over time, participating in the construction of knowledge? Part of the self-fashioning is the creation of a pedagogue, but equally important in the self-fashioning is the creation of a scholar. How we teach is formed by what we idealize as the inspirational teacher, and the teachers were very close together in defining that ideal.

It is in the area of scholarship, or more specifically content, that the greatest variations occur. This is not surprising, given the explosion of new knowledge and new perspectives of the past two decades. There were equal numbers of progressives, seeking change in content and method, and conservatives, looking to preserve the tradition, among the high school and college teachers, though few could be called purely one or the other. Probably more typical was the schizophrenic—or less pejoratively, the Renaissance figure—who blended progressive and conservative approaches to the humanities in his or her teaching.

Nearly everyone I interviewed, except the very youngest teachers, was taught from the new critical perspective in literature or the master narrative perspective in history. Nearly everyone valued these perspectives, in literature because it teaches close readings of texts and in history because it gives a spine to historical narrative. I concluded that what has occurred over the past two decades is a shaking out and a blending of different approaches and perspectives. While critical trends may be set by high-powered scholars who teach primarily graduate students and while the heated debates may go on among those individuals, the rank-and-file teachers in high schools and general education college programs seem less inclined to be defined as one kind of "ist" over another. One teacher noted that he had always avoided being an *ist*:

> I don't want to be thought of as *the* deconstructionist or new critic or whatever . . . You use the critical device most appropriate to the text before you. For "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," new criticism is appropriate, whereas feminist criticism works for "The Story of an Hour." The same holds for philosophy. I make Plato and Aristotle a good deal clearer for my students with a Marxist analysis, showing their class interests, whereas I might not do that with Kant. Here the biographical approach might be best: why did he develop a guilty conscience based upon what happened to him and his parents? . . . I guess I see critical theory as a series of contributions to a very large body—a bulky instrument, sometimes a blunderbuss—and you pick and choose what is most helpful, and it's not that one excludes the other.

This position is illustrative of nearly all the literature teachers interviewed, though high school teachers thought they lacked depth in the area of literary and cultural theory. This is no doubt the case because the traditional approach is to read primary texts as an undergraduate and only at the graduate level is one trained as a literary critic, in terms of taking on or being reflective about different schools of thought. All of the literature teachers spoke about selecting "good" literature, though that did not necessarily mean European, English or American literature.

One need that I heard expressed by the high school teachers in particular was more time for scholarship. In general, they feel so overwhelmed by the juggling act of teaching four or five classes a day,

that reading in new areas is virtually impossible. But it is that reading which is so vital. How can a teacher maintain a conceptually challenging course without such continuing scholarship?

Among the history teachers, there was a similar blending of perspectives. Nearly everyone saw the danger in losing a master narrative which might act as a spine, but nearly everyone was also dedicated to the teaching of social history, along with political and economic history. Social history was for some a way to enliven the narrative for students who seem fascinated by letters, diaries, and journals, when state documents and official knowledge escape them. For others it was necessary to show students that history wasn't something that just happened to presidents or empire builders; one might say it is both vertical, moving through the society at a particular moment, and horizontal, moving through time. It wasn't that teachers disagreed philosophically; the problems arise in the implementation when courses are designed and knowledge is packaged. Everyone spoke of the pinch of time—as one teacher noted, "the problem isn't what to put in, but what to leave out."

Most people compromise by teaching ways of reading—the methodology that opens up critical inquiry in the humanities, rather than coverage, thinking that if students know how to read a text or how to take apart an argument, they can extrapolate to other areas of study. All of the teachers spoke of the need to create intellectually rich and challenging courses filled with generative ideas, citing their most inspiring teachers as being capable of just that. But what are the obstacles to the achievement of such lofty goals?

## Knowledge: The Teacher and the Student

In a provocative essay entitled "On the Hidden Treasure of Paid Attention: The Need to Know," developmental psychologist Robert Graham Kegan focuses his critical lens on the child rather than the teacher. He argues that the successful child has been able to get others to take an interest in her. Following this line of inquiry, we might conclude that the successful students who sit before us when they are 15 or 18 or 20 have found a way to insinuate themselves into the consciousness of their teachers. Kegan claims that this need to connect with others may be universal:

> The reasons why we are drawn to others, especially to their welfare, are surely mysterious. But so many of the eliciting situations seem to harken back to the exigencies

> of this basic life motion, the activity of knowing and the threat of not knowing. We are drawn to a person in heroic struggle; we are drawn to a person vulnerably alone; we are drawn to a person who seems intensely alive; we are drawn to a person whose efforts make a kind of "perfect sense" to us. I admit to wondering if our attraction is not of some force "bigger than both of us," a kind of "species sympathy" which we do not share so much as it shares us. (28)

Many of those interviewed mentioned inspiring teachers who had touched them in some way, by taking a personal interest in them, singling them out for special encouragement, or helping them through a particularly difficult time. Certainly this is admirable, but I suggested that perhaps it was something in them, as students, that had elicited this interest. There is a mystery to the classroom, and nearly everyone spoke in some way about it. How is it that students and teachers look across the desk at each other and are able to connect one to the other on both an intellectual and emotional level? One teacher noted that his goal as a teacher is to become transparent such that the text can speak directly to the student: "That's what I aspire to—to make myself obsolete and to vanish. To become clear as glass. But I understand that with the students I currently teach, sometimes that while they may not be able to understand Kierkegaard, they may be able to understand me explaining Kierkegaard."

At the heart of all the teachers' comments was a deeply ethical dimension to the entire enterprise of teaching the humanities. In both pedagogy and content, teachers held real convictions about the value of the humanities. Their words were filled with hope that students would be larger, richer, more multi-dimensional, more stimulated, more fulfilled for having studied the humanities. For both history and literature teachers alike, there was the assumption that students would learn something about themselves from this inquiry, something about relationships with others, and something about cultures and how they function.

Were there obstacles to achieving these ideals? Of course. Nearly all teachers bemoaned the fact that students are essentially non-readers. For people who have made books the center of their lives, this is a hard pill to swallow, not simply because non-readers will miss a whole world of the imagination, but because it is difficult to conceive of a democracy functioning without a literate and engaged populace. For one teacher, in particular, this latter reason prompted him to stress the need to teach

Western culture, for he argues that it is the culture that founded the idea of democracy and continues to speak for personal freedom.

Often, however, we don't know what long-term impact our courses have on our students. Perhaps the ones who seem disengaged, the ones in whom we find it difficult to take an interest, may in fact be enlivened by an idea years later. One teacher told a story about a student, an African-American man, who sat through his philosophy course, getting a C and looking somewhat bored. Yet, two years later, the student came up to him and asked if he had seen *A Soldier's Story*. The teacher said no, but that didn't dissuade the student from laying out an analysis, with full references to split consciousness and intersubjectivity. "When he was in the class, he gave no indication that he had anything more than a superficial understanding of the concepts, yet he got from my class the equipment to talk about the film, and pretty articulately, as I remember." The categories of thought were there, the generative ideas: what the student needed was a text that resonated with him, another fine example of constructed knowledge. This is perhaps most illustrative of the need to develop richly-textured, conceptual courses, for the concept will remain when the details of a battle, or the flower imagery of a poem has been forgotten.

In trying to discover how teachers constructed humanities courses, I asked what became one of the most provocative questions in the interview. The question read, if you knew you had the following groups of students in your course, would you change anything in pedagogy or content: six Black Muslims, six fundamentalist Christians, six gay or lesbian students, six feminists, and six recent immigrants? Whether people initially said yes or no, they all went on to qualify their answers. Most people said they would not change the content, working from the assumption that the course they had constructed was good in itself, a body of essential knowledge for all students regardless of their personal histories or circumstances. Nearly everyone said they would welcome such students because of the diversity of views it would provide, or that these students were already in their classes. Here again we note the ethical position of these teachers. No one wanted to make a student feel uncomfortable because of his beliefs or orientation. There was a consistently expressed view that the classroom was a kind of sacred space in which students should be free to express themselves, and could effectively learn in that space how to be impassioned without belittling people with different views. Also everyone commented upon the lively discussions that come from such a diverse group, recognizing that students do speak and analyze from a personal perspective.

Yet the matter of representation of groups in the curriculum was a thorny one. People were of two minds about this, but the consensus was that representation was not a good basis for curriculum design. For example, a novel by an African-American might be chosen, not because African-American students needed to see their culture represented, but because the book was good for all students to read and because there was some principle driving the selection of all texts in the course. Of course, teachers select from what they know, and if they only know the traditional canon of authors, then one might argue that all their students are a little poorer for this. The virtue of the struggles in the past two decades might be that teachers have been encouraged or forced to keep up in their discipline either to enrich their courses or to talk back to their critics. Here again the rank-and-file teachers have, over time, blended and synthesized new knowledge. For example, history teachers spoke of the need to teach world cultures, not just Western civilization, because knowing more about all cultures is a virtue.

In the interviews, I mentioned that some of my women students who are interested in gender issues often go on to read very difficult theoretical feminist texts. In this way a personal perspective feeds one's intellectual interests and leads one to do challenging work. I am, however, aware of the need for balance. I don't want to assume that women will necessarily go on to study women's history and African-Americans will go on to be ethnic studies specialists. Maybe they will go on to be economists, engineers, or concert pianists. As one teacher noted, when it is time to give the gender lecture in a team-taught social science course, everyone looks around the conference table. It just happens that among the faculty, the one best schooled in feminist theory is a male, while the women are specialists in the Scottish Reformation and post-war China.

The challenge is how to capture reluctant students' attention through their personal experience with material, but then to move them to other material more foreign to them. I recall that in my own reading history, two of my favorite books in high school were Boswell's *Life of Johnson* and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. The role of the humanities is to show us that, while our experiences are valid and often become the stuff of novels, we have the power to appreciate totally "foreign" texts and ideas.

## On Becoming a Teacher: Personal Reflections

In the process of interviewing these 17 teachers, I became reflective about my own experiences as a student and training as a teacher. I also

had to examine my own assumptions about humanities education and the role of the teacher in contemporary culture, for the patterns I delineate from the interviews are projected through my own selection of detail, emphasis, and interpretive stance.

My first teachers were not teachers at all in the formal sense, but my maternal grandparents who gave me "an attitude." They were about as incompatible as a couple could be: my grandmother, a hard-nosed pragmatist, a steam-roller of a woman, could work like a man in the fields and then come indoors and do another full job of washing, ironing, cooking, and cleaning; my grandfather, also a powerful worker, but a dreamer too, fantasized about leaving the farm which was his prison to make a name for himself. At five, I lived with them, together with my mother and sister, following the death of my father a year earlier. My mother worked and my sister went to first grade (we had no kindergarten in rural Colorado of the 1950s). That year on the farm, I was my grandmother's partner and slave, learning to be not merely competent, but omnicompetent. As a five-year-old, I could churn butter in the dasher churn (until it really became butter and was too heavy for me to lift), gather eggs and kindling, pluck chickens with some assistance (after witnessing my grandmother whack off their heads in the wood pile), iron my grandfather's work shirt since a few wrinkles didn't matter, and crawl behind the wood stove to scrub the baseboards. I must say, while I learned that physical labor could be satisfying, I have never taken on the view that obscure dirt needs to be rooted out. Given the choice between the removal of even obvious clutter and reading a book, I'll read the book every time.

My grandfather took his turn as teacher, but with him I was more the observer, since my hands were too small and weak to milk cows effectively or to scrape bristles from the newly-butchered pig. In retrospect, I suppose that year was a bit bloody in its imagery; certainly it was earthy with the ammonia smell of the newly-plowed fields or the jewel-like feel of the wheat and oats in the granary or the deep-red of ripe tomatoes in the garden. That year was simply idyllic, and the lesson was that a five-year-old could *work* and gain the satisfaction from such labor.

Once I started school, my grandparents would teach me lessons of a different sort, or maybe it is more accurate to say that the competence I learned from them carried over into my schooling, and that each of them had an attitude about schooling itself. Even before I started first grade, my sister, my third teacher, would return each day from her class, taught by Miss Brannam, and teach me what she had learned. When I

started first grade, I entered Miss Brannam's class, sat in my desk, and opened my pencil box and Big Chief tablet, ready for business. Quickly I ascended to the Blue Bird group, for my sister had already taught me to read, something which she regreted,when reading took over my life.

Teresa was a bit of a tomboy, so living on a farm provided a rich landscape for the adventures she concocted in her mind. The farm, primitive even for its time, was worked with draft horses, Buster, Bob, and Bill (my grandfather, the dreamer, didn't waste much imagination on names of horses). Teresa would sit on the stationary equipment—plow, harrow, or whatever—and pretend that she was a pioneer moving West. But it was a lonely life, going West alone, so she would come indoors and plead with me. "Please, come outside. You can even have the seat on the manure spreader." As I looked up at her from my place in my grandfather's reclining chair, my upper lip curled back in disdain, I held my book like a sacred text for her to see: "The *manure spreader*, when I have *this*? You must be joking!" I wish I could say that at the age of eight, I was reading fine literature, but it was only Nancy Drew's *The Clue in the Diary*, the first big book I ever read, and the rest, as they say, is history. I didn't know then that you could actually be paid for reading books and talking about them to students, but my life from that time forward was taken up with books. School was now the place to be. I carried to school that need to be competent, and to this day, calling me incompetent is the greatest injury anyone could do to me. I wanted to please the teachers because they were worthy, in my eyes, of such respect: they had knowledge; they could tell me about more books.

This quest for education was reinforced by my grandfather, a brilliant man who had been denied the education he would have cherished. He preached education to us, and not just because it would "get us somewhere," beyond the working class peasantry. But there was magic in knowing. Even while he taught us to love learning, he also taught us to be skeptical and wary of ideas and the purveyors of those ideas. He was what I have come to understand now as an unschooled Marxist, with a strong streak of the Italian anarchist in him. More than the content of what he conveyed about "the little man," the abuse of power, and the corruption of government, my sister and I took from him an attitude of skepticism and an analytical ability that is necessary for one to appreciate and be capable of irony.

My grandmother also conveyed to us an attitude about education that was somewhat contradictory. My grandmother's early life had been much harder than my grandfather's. She was also the daughter of Italian

immigrants, but when she was seven years old, her father died of miner's consumption, leaving my great-grandmother with six children under the age of 10. After the second grade, my grandmother had to leave school, along with her older brother, to work the farm and help provide for the younger children. Despite my grandmother's lack of education, she possessed great wit and common sense. She, along with her brothers and sisters, were also the best story tellers I have ever known, which may account for my continuing love of stories in all forms. Grandmother held a thoroughly pragmatic view of education: it would provide a woman economic security and some modicum of freedom. Certainly this was an easy lesson for us to learn, given the death of my father and the necessity for my mother to support us. My mother must have learned the lessons from her parents too, for she attended college for two years before the war came.

Quite ironically like my grandfather, my grandmother was also what we in the criticism trade call a "counter-identifier." While they both saw the virtue in education—one as an end in itself and the other as a means to an end—they were on the alert for the possible stupifying power of education. My grandfather was suspicious of those ideas which might obscure what he took to be the realities of economic power. My grandmother's skepticism was directed less at ideas and more at individuals. When a person in our community was treated with deference because of his advanced education, my grandmother would sometimes hurrumph that there were a lot of educated jackasses in the world. To this day, I check my own behavior against that standard: has my education gotten in the way of my common sense or humility? Sometimes at faculty or committee meetings where the educated are particularly prone to transforming themselves into jackasses, I look around the conference table and chuckle, as in my mind's eye certain individuals become *el burro* in academic regalia. The academy has not entirely disappointed me in its affirmation of my grandmother's dictum, nor, I'm sure, would many other professions.

The lessons my grandparents taught me have caused me to be simultaneously drawn to and repelled by the whole education enterprise, yet there have surely been more people to admire and emulate than to despise. The counter-identification must be left to another time, though some of my rebellious attitudes have probably seeped through in this analysis. The identification came early and continued over time: my grandmother called me a bookworm, usually on those occasions when I no longer wanted to look for obscure dirt behind the wood stove; my aunt called me "the little professor," not only because I read a lot, but also because I held forth on a variety of subjects, probably a

bore already at the age of eight. The nuns thought I would make a marvelous teacher, when they observed me teaching catechism to the younger children in the Catholic summer school. If they knew me now, they might approve of my teaching vocation, but not, I fear, of the state of my soul. By the time I was a junior in high school, I could boldly state to my English teacher that I would one day be a college professor. And here I am. I continue to be fascinated in my own students by the ways early experiences with books, teachers, and schooling operate in their lives. I, too, am often dismayed by the lack of force reading has for them, but I remember that we are in a time of great social change, with visual literacy rising as print literacy wanes. If I tend to rail too much against students for not reading, I seek correction by recalling that medieval monks may have railed against the invention of the printing press because it would mean no more illustrated texts. I hope students see the value in critical awareness and the application of ideas to experience, regardless of the artistic form of a work. Like the other teachers interviewed, I hold a strong conviction that the study of the humanities has a moral as well as an aesthetic dimension. We read stories, historical as well as fictional, to develop greater insight into how others see human existence. We witness the lives of artists—writers, filmmakers, painters—to see the world from their vantage point; we read history and biography to gain a look into the past, and to place ourselves in a context.

Richard Rorty, in his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, argues the need for all of us, students and teachers alike, to think in terms of contingent rather than final vocabularies. Rorty says we must first be aware of the final vocabularies we have internalized (in the form of received knowledge). This necessitates becoming conscious of others' narratives speaking through us, both personal and historical—of our grandparents, our teachers, our friends, as well as the voices of Plato, Kant, Marx, Austen, Wright, Neruda, Kurasawa, and others. If we have ceased to be students, then our vocabulary is final, fixed, unchanging, and we have atrophied. The ideal is for the vocabulary to remain contingent, changing with each new teacher we hear. Of course, students are themselves engaged directly in developing their "final" vocabulary. Our voices join the many teachers who have come before us in their minds; we encourage them to "talk back" the way Kant spoke to Plato and Nietzsche spoke to Kant. The richness of humanities education is realized as teachers and students alike continue to develop through multiple voices and wrestle with the legitimacy and hegemony of ideas. In this way, the process of self-fashioning is unending.

# Transforming Canons, Transforming Teachers

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## Prologue: Initiating Questions and Shaping Experiences

In the last decade, one central topic of educational reform has been the debate over the canon, and over efforts to "open up the canon." As is true with other hot issues, the debate has not only aroused fiercely divided responses but prompted discussions that have sometimes produced more heat than light. The complexity of the issue is illustrated and one source of that heat is illuminated by Wendell Harris's essay on "Canonicity," perhaps the best introduction to the debate, which offers 10 definitions of canon and distinguishes seven functions that canons may perform. The opening of the essay demonstrates how easily we can generate apparent paradoxes simply by use of different meanings and functions:

> The canonical facts about the canons of English and American literature are, first, that there are no canons and never have been; second, that there have necessarily always been canons; and third, that canons are made up of readings, not disembodied texts. What is contradictory in that statement results from play on different connotations of the word canon—a critical strategy that is constantly, though often more subtly, abused. As with many another critical term, the first step in understanding canon is to unpack its meanings. The "canon question" then proves much more complex than contemporary ideological criticism admits. (Harris, "Canonicity" 110)

Thus the starting point for this essay, as it is for Harris, is indeed to *unpack* what a canon is and does. However, I will suggest that for teachers—and I take it that it is participation in the act of teaching that provides the common ground for all members of the ACLS Teacher and Curriculum Development Project—the issue is not simply to answer the question "What is a canon?" but rather the questions "What does a canon do?" and "What do we do through forming, employing, and reforming canons?" Furthermore, I will also suggest that just as "canons are made up of readings, not disembodied texts," so also transformations of the canon must be carried out by individual teachers. Thus it

is imperative to recognize that opening up the canon entails not only revising our reading lists but also revising our designs and practices in ways that, while they offer us great opportunities for growth as readers and greater effectiveness as teachers, also make sharp demands of us. Confronting these demands is exactly what ACLS Teacher and Curriculum Development Project has given us the time and space to do—and it has thereby made clear that canon reformation and curriculum development does indeed demand that school districts offer teachers adequate time and support if they want those teachers to own such transformation, as they must own any new canon they set out to teach.

Let me say something about the route I have taken in writing this essay because it is clear, as Linda Wells makes clear in her essay, that how each of us comes to a question shapes the answers we compose. I am in my 21st year as a college teacher, and my seventh year working in the English and Foreign Languages Department at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. Like many of those in my generation of Ph.D. candidates, I am a hybrid creature in that I have been trained not only to teach literature but to teach writing. I have taught at least one composition course in every term, as well as teaching 71 writing workshops for the United States Government, and these workshops were important in shaping not only how I teach but my belief that we must pay much greater attention to the relation between what we teach and how we teach. My dissertation was on that most canonical of English literary figures, Shakespeare, whose plays I teach using performance approaches—which is to say approaches that are canonical in theater departments but still contested and, in most cases, marginal in literature departments. In addition, I teach courses in drama from 1390 to 1990; courses in Renaissance literature; general education literature courses; and graduate courses in Shakespeare, drama, and Renaissance literature, as well as in pedagogy.

More immediately, as one of the post-secondary fellows in the ACLS program, I have spent the past 10 months working with eight teachers from the Los Angeles Unified School District, all members of the Humanitas program within the district, discussing canon reformation, multi-cultural education, and curriculum revision. Our immersion in these topics has been intense—during the fall quarter we read 30 novels and books of criticism, as well as over 60 other stories, essays, and critical studies. Nonetheless, I am not an expert on canons or on multiculturalism. But this work has taught me about the process of revising the canon and the curriculum, and I have learned, thanks especially to the generosity of the teachers in our team, about the specific demands such a revision places on those who must enact it—and about the

constraints within which they must perform their transforming magic. It is this work with teachers that shapes what I have written here.[1]

But what also shapes what I have written is my conviction that the debate over the canon is, in fact, part of a larger and more fundamental argument, in which we are engaged in the task of reconceiving the nature of English as one of the humanities. Employing a metaphor, I would suggest that the canon debate forms one of three dimensions in which this reconception is being enacted. The canon debate is over what we will teach, but the other two dimensions—although they are phrased and inflected differently by those working in the public schools and those working in colleges and universities—are defined by debates over the connections between reading and writing, and debates about the relation of what we teach to how we teach. My own efforts over the past 10 years have been focused on these latter two dimensions. My work with performance approaches in teaching drama in general and Shakespeare's plays in particular (the ACLS fellowship has enabled me to complete a book embodying this approach) is concerned with the third dimension of rethinking how we teach—and it connects with the work of Eve Kornfeld, whose essay in this volume suggests how we can use performance approaches in teaching history. At the same time, this work connects with the essay by Lois Feuer since, like Professor Feuer, I suggest non-canonical ways and contexts in which to teach canonical texts. Furthermore, the performance approach I propose also aims to integrate reading and writing in a number of ways. But while my efforts as critic and teacher have been and are primarily in these second and third dimensions, I also find myself necessarily engaged in rethinking the canon directly, and this essay is the result of turning my attention to this question, both because that was a way I could contribute to the seminar and because it is a step in my own project

This way of situating the canon debate has consequences, furthermore, not only in terms of the purposes I set myself but also in terms of the way I have imagined my readers—or invited them to situate themselves. For as several readers have noted, in what follows it may seem that I am addressing public school teachers more than the university faculty who are the members of the ACLS or its constituent societies and the audience for this collection. Of course I certainly am addressing public school teachers, attempting to capture the experience of one group of such teachers in order to provide other teachers with a map to the territory of canon reformation. Nonetheless, my audience is also very much the university faculty who comprise the

primary constituency of the ACLS, though I am speaking to them first of all as teachers rather than as researchers.

By addressing my readers as teachers, I am seeking to foreground what we share in our professional identities, hence what we share in the debates over reforming the canon. But as the experience of participants at all four first-year sites of the ACLS Project demonstrated, the effort to define common ground must also acknowledge the differences that occur when teachers in universities and teachers in public schools set out to reform the canon. This is a crucial point that is developed in John Ramsay's fine essay. What Ramsay shows us is how a teacher, having been transformed herself by encounters with new literature and new theory, and having decided to transform her local canon, begins to enact the transformation not simply of her reading list but of her curriculum and her pedagogy. Even more important, John's essay begins to articulate many of the dimensions of such a transformation that are usually invisible to university faculty, whose efforts do not automatically have to confront the developmental issues of their students nor the pressures exerted by state frameworks, district policies, and local administrative choices, and can therefore transform their local canons largely by transforming their reading lists, digesting the appropriate criticism, and exploring some new ways of framing the texts they ask students to read. While this way of phrasing the matter may make it seem that I am understating the obstacles that can confront university faculty—for example the intense hostility of colleagues who do not want the canon reformed—the urgent issue here is to be(come) aware of differences that, left unacknowledged, tend to subvert the efforts of university faculty to work with public school teachers, who will quickly sense when university faculty do not have any conception of the pressures and the opportunities that the teachers face.

This need to understand differences as well as similarities in our shared identity was acknowledged in the address with which Stanley N. Katz, President of the ACLS, inaugurated the project:

> The underlying premise of the program in which we are engaged is that there is an unnecessary and counter-productive fracture within the teaching profession, between those who teach youngsters in the K through 12 years and those who teach grades 13-16. We should share the same concerns for the education of our students, although of course our strategies, techniques, and interim goals will frequently be quite different . . . .

> What happens educationally in the schools is important to post-secondary educators not only because precollegiate teachers prepare some of their students for us, but also because they have both experiential and theoretical knowledge about pedagogy (both teaching and learning) to impart to us, though we have seldom taken their expertise with sufficient seriousness. Conversely, the disciplinary professionals of the colleges and universities have subject matter expertise which is essential to school teachers. Both need to learn from each other, but until fairly recently there were few institutional mechanisms for the sharing of knowledge and experience across the high school-college crevasse. (2-3)

Arguments about these issues have been a major element in the ACLS Project, and perhaps they will be taken up in another volume of ACLS essays. Certainly, it is a topic vital to this particular project, especially if one believes, as I do, that is not just the public schools but the universities which need to transform both what they do and how they do what they do.

Some of the differences come into focus, it seems to me, if we shift to the phrase more commonly used in the general public debate, *opening up the canon*. For university faculty, this means opening up the list of texts read and taught. But for a public school teacher, the act of opening up the canon may entail opening up, some or all of the following: the state mandated curriculum framework; local district policies; the school-site administration's policies; the department's curriculum; and the minds of students and their parents. For example, most university faculty have never had to ask themselves what they would do if a group of students complained to an assistant principal about a new reading list, nor have they had to think about what they would do if a group of students went to a guidance counselor to complain they were being forced to try performance activities in class, activities in which they are compelled to do things they had never done before—both situations encountered by high school teachers in the districts in which my university is located. It is in the context of becoming aware of the similarities and differences of our situations—our material conditions, to use another vocabulary—that I write this essay, and those conditions are among those implied in my title.

I would add, then, that my essay complements John Ramsay's in another way, for John presents *dramatically* what I (re)present more *analytically*. Indeed, in his very choice to dramatize the problems of

creating revised humanities curriculum John enables us to learn crucial lessons about the complex, reciprocal—not unidirectional—relation of theory and pedagogy. Furthermore, his models offer one possible movement by which a K-12 humanities teacher can not only join the conversation but also find common ground across the differences that can easily isolate university and public school teachers from one another:

> At that moment, I realized I was no longer a reading teacher. At that point, I knew I had become a humanities professional, on an equal footing with the scholars and policy makers I have been reading. I realized that the culture warriors had won at least one battle: I had become one of them. (Ramsay 102)

I would suggest that the essays in this volume invite readers to reflect on how they too "become" different because they become transformed when they set out to transform the canon

Let me stress that I will not be offering "answers" to the problems examined in this essay. Answers or solutions are what participants in the dialogue must produce through their own engagement, discussion, debate, and choices. What I will be offering are some categories and concepts that can help in confronting these issues, and perhaps even help to establish some common ground from which to discuss different points of view and different options for action. Furthermore, while there are general theoretical issues to be debated, canon formation and the use of canons is an affair of individuals and local institutions, of teachers in school districts making choices, testing those choices out in their classes, discussing results with each other, and so on. In that sense, the whole ACLS project itself is participating in the process of opening up the canon—and not just the canon of literature but the canons of teaching as well.

This essay is divided into three parts. Part I unpacks the concept of canon by looking at the etymology of the term and laying out a spectrum of positions in the debate about the canon. Part II uses that spectrum to explore the different routes by which the canon may be changed, and to analyze some of the consequences of taking those different routes. Part III looks at how transforming the canon is likely to demand that teachers transform themselves, in terms not only of learning about new authors and new works but in terms of reconceiving some aspects of our discipline as "English" teachers.

## *"Opening Up the Canon": A Spectrum of Positions in the Canon Debate*

It is surely no coincidence that there is a canonical way to begin any discussion of the canon, and since I do not want to appear heretical, I will begin with this canonical move, which is to trace the etymology of the word. Here, for example, is the tracing offered by M. H. Abrams in the entry for "Canon of Literature" from *The Glossary of Literary Terms* (6th edition, 1993):

> The Greek word "kanon," signifying a measuring rod or a rule, was extended to denote a list or catalogue, then came to be applied to the list of books in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament which were designated by church authorities as comprising the genuine Holy Scriptures. A number of writings related to those in the Scriptures, but not admitted into the canon, are called apocrypha; eleven books which have been included in the Roman Catholic biblical canon are considered *apocryphal* by Protestants.
>
> The term "canon" was later used in a literary application, to signify the list of works accepted by experts as genuinely written by a particular author. We speak thus of "the Chaucer canon" and "the Shakespeare canon," and refer to other works that have sometimes been attributed to an author, but on evidence judged to be inadequate or invalid, as "apocryphal." In recent decades the phrase *literary canon* has come to denote—in world literature, or in European literature, but most frequently in a national literature—those authors who by a cumulative consensus of critics, scholars, and teachers, have come to be widely recognized as "major," and to have written works often hailed as literary classics. These canonical writers are the ones which, at any given time, are most kept in print, most frequently and fully discussed by literary critics, and most likely to be included in anthologies and taught in college courses with titles such as "World Masterpieces," "Major English Authors," or "Great American Writers."
>
> The social process by which an author comes to be tacitly and durably recognized as canonical is often called "canon formation." The factors in this formative process

> are complex and disputed. It seems clear, however, that the process involves, among other things, the wide concurrence of critics, scholars, and authors with diverse viewpoints and sensibilities; the persistent influence of, and reference to, an author in the work of other authors; the frequent reference to an author within the discourse of a cultural community; and the widespread assignment of an author or text in school and college curricula. Such factors are of course mutually interactive, and they need to be sustained over a considerable period of time....
>
> At any time, the boundaries of a canon remain indefinite, while inside those boundaries some authors are central and others marginal. Occasionally an earlier author who was for long on the fringe of the canon, or even outside it, gets transferred to a position of eminence. Once firmly established as a central figure, however, an author shows remarkable resistance to being disestablished by adverse criticism and changing literary preferences and criteria. (19-20)[2]

Even if you have not followed it, you could probably infer the nature of the debate about the canon just from the etymology, with its focus on measures and evaluations, rules and rulers, authorized texts and authorized interpretations. And indeed the heated public debate has been cast in polarized terms between those claiming to defend the canon and those who are portrayed as attacking that canon. Those who proclaim themselves as defenders of "the canon" are usually, in fact, employing two different concepts of a secular canon: for they conflate the canon of classical, that is Greek and Roman, writings (which constituted the core of the non-theological texts employed in the rhetorical model of education which endured for a thousand years), with the vernacular or national canons that emerged starting in thirteenth century Italy. Thus they tend to propose a canon which actually merges the classic and vernacular canons of European literature, starting with Homer and Plato, continuing through Dante, Cervantes, and Shakespeare, and concluding with a selection of what we now recognize as the modernist writers. (Similarly they tend to downplay or ignore another major topic about the emergence of vernacular canons, namely the place of canon-formation as an element, some would argue a constitutive element, in the process of nation-formation in early modern Europe. To take a familiar example, even a cursory reading of English authors from the early modern period writing on the subject of education and literature reveals just how (self-)

conscious they were in articulating the need to elevate the English language as part of the elevation of the English nation, and to do so by the creation of English literature that could equal the achievements of classical literature and of the more developed continental vernaculars. Sidney's claims for the potentials of English as a poetic language in "The Defence of Poesie" and Spenser's nation-building purposes in *The Faerie Queene* are among the best known of such claims.)[3] Those opposing this standard list argue for "opening up the canon." In fact, we can distinguish what might be would called horizontal and vertical models of opening up the canon.

*Opening Up the Canon Horizontally:* One challenge to the canon can be called "horizontal" because it takes the logic of the canon as creating inside and outside, center and margin, and argues that this logic has had pernicious consequences in what has been included, what has been marginalized, and what has been placed outside the canon. This horizontal attack on the standard canon starts from the charge that it is overwhelmingly composed of works by white, male, European or European-descended authors, the majority of whom were—or have been represented as being—heterosexual. Put schematically, then, those making this challenge argue that the problem is either the exclusion of some authors who do not fit this paradigm, or, more fundamentally, that whole categories of writers have been excluded. And the proposal is to add individual writers or to add to the canon selected writers from groups marginalized or placed outside the canon—groups that include women, Native Americans, African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian-Americans, and gays and lesbians. (The overlap between categories is itself a source of other elements in the debate.)

*Opening Up the Canon Vertically:* The vertical challenge, in contrast, focuses on the logic of the canon as having higher and lower echelons. The bias challenged here is not only the distinctions between center and margin within the canon—Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton as the central three in English literature, for example, entitled to a course each—but again with larger categorical problems by which only high culture seems eligible for the canon, so that *Moby Dick* is canonical and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is not. Those proposing this challenge seek to dissolve the high-low distinction.

Pushed far enough, the impulse to open up the canon can lead to proposals to abolish it, and in fact you can seek to abolish the canon in two senses: this can mean either abolishing the standard canon and replacing it with writings by those previously considered marginal and

low; or, more radically, with abolishing the very concept of a canon altogether. Although I cannot develop the point, many critics argue that abolishing a canon or canons is in fact impossible—and I think most readers can immediately think of several very practical reasons why, at least in the public schools, this should be the case. (For arguments as to why there must be a canon, see Harris; Kermode; and Felperin.)

## II. Moving Through the Spectrum of Ways to Open the Canon

We can summarize this debate about the canon, then, as a spectrum of five major positions:

(1) Defense of the standard canon as it is (or seems to have been).
(2) Adding new texts, while defending the standard canon, or its logic.
(3) Widening the canon by adding new categories of authors and works: expanding horizontally, adding works by women, Native American, African-American, Hispanic American, Asian-American, gay and lesbian authors; expanding vertically, adding different "classes" of works.
(4) Transforming the canon: not only multiple new classes as in widening, but recognition of new bases and new functions.
(5) Abolishing the canon: either breaking the high-low distinction, or arguing for no canons at all.

I propose that we use this spectrum as a map of the territory we plunge into when we enter the debate, especially when we enter the debate as teachers who find themselves rethinking the canon in the form of our own selection of readings for our students. This spectrum will provide an itinerary for the route I follow in this segment. Moreover, in terms of the metaphor of mapping a territory, I will assume that neither of the extreme positions is going to prevail, so that defense of and abolition of the canon mark the borders of the territory I explore. That is, I think we can take it that while the canon debate is not over—and will never be over—the question of whether the canon will be, in the simplest sense, opened has been settled in the affirmative. What I want to do in this segment of my presentation is to look at what happens when we move from polarized debate to the reality of change: as in the first part, I want to continue to unpack the complexities that emerge when we stop thinking in oversimplifying polarities and false binaries, and, as Wendell Harris suggests, look at the multiple types of canons and the different, even divergent, functions for which we employ them.

In this description of how these different challenges open up the canon, I will be drawing extensively on the collective experience of the

teachers in the Los Angeles ACLS workshop. In essence, what I am offering is a highly schematized account of the odyssey of the workshop as we explored the debate about the canon in the context of working out some of the challenges inherent in constructing a wider or multicultural curriculum. My claim here is that this spectrum does accurately represent some dimensions of the structure of the problem itself, and thus represents one analysis of how this debate will unfold for others because there is an underlying logic to that debate. What I offer here is a map that features some of the larger landmarks for this territory, and some of the main routes people are likely to travel as they enter and move through this territory. Such a map, I hope, can help you recognize where you are when you find yourself in this territory. At the same time, there will be unique landmarks, obstacles, and constraints, for each school district, each discipline, each group of teachers, or teachers and parents and students, who cross the border into this territory. You will have to refine the map for yourself, based on your local geography, articulating your own local knowledge, and responding to your own scene of learning.

*Adding New Authors and Works to the Canon*

The first route is to acknowledge some limits to a present canon, and to add new or rediscovered authors and works, while leaving that canon largely undisturbed. This seems like a sensible solution, furthermore, because as all but the most extreme defenders of the status quo acknowledge it is what is always happening to secular canons. At first this looks like a simple task, a task that can be met by the sort of maneuver offered by Harold Kolb, Jr., in his essay on "Defining the Canon" (which appears in the important collection dedicated to *Redefining American Literary History*). In proposing to add new works, Kolb argues for what he calls a tiered canon:

> My suggestion is that we think of the literary canon not as a single authoritarian list and not as a pluralistic cacophony of innumerable voices but as *a tiered set of options*, relatively stable at one end, relatively open at the other, joined by the possibility of change. We might start at the first level of authors whose acquaintance we find necessary for educated Americans in our society at this time, no matter what their ethnic or religious or gender identification. The membership in this *pantheon* would be small, restricted to those authors who profoundly *represent* their times and yet whose vision, *amaranthine*, seems to transcend time; authors whose popularity is

long-standing with both general and specialist readers; authors whose style is so memorable that is has changed the language in form and expression . . . . Here, then, is one definition of *the literary summit*, using Western European literature as an illustration:

> First Level (Western European literature): The Bible, Homer, Chaucer, Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes

We could construct a first level for literature in English, or separately for British literature, or for American literature, though, aided less by the winnowing of time, these categories become more controversial. Here is one possible top level for a canon of American literature:

> First Level (American literature): Hawthorne, Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman, Dickinson, Twain, Henry James, T. S. Eliot, Richard Wright, Faulkner

Then we might construct a second tier . . . consisting of those authors who, while not as predominant as the first group, have made a significant contribution to our culture. Educated Americans should be generally acquainted with all of these writers, specifically familiar with some:

> Second level (American literature): Franklin, Irving, Cooper, Poe, Douglass, Howells, Stephen Crane, Henry Adams, Dreiser, Cather, Chopin, Frost, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Jewett, O'Neill, Pound, Stevens, Ellison, William Carlos Williams, James Baldwin, Momaday

Finally, we can add a third level, which combines two groups: older writers whose work continues to be of interest; and newcomers, *massed like the Boston Marathon runners at Hopkinton*, in the race but with endurance yet to be tested. Our hypothetical educated American should know some of these writers . . . . Here is a representative selection of a small fraction of this large group.

> Third level (American literature A-C): Oscar Zeta Acosta . . . J. V. Cunningham (Kolb 40-41; emphases added)

At first glance, Kolb's proposal for tiers has a certain plausibility and even seems to play out the analogy of sacred and secular canons. It may even remind us of the way that the apocryphal books were nonetheless conceived of as having some authority: as when Luther (cited by E.R. Curtius 256) says "that the apocryphal books are 'not held equal to Holy Scripture and yet are profitable and good to be read'." However, Kolb's proposal contains assumptions (some of which I have tried to indicate by italicizing key phrases) which are challenged by those who seek not merely to add to but to widen canon.

*Widening the Canon: Adding New Categories of Authors and Works*

Critics who seek to widen the canon argue that the real problem with the standard canon is not the absence of a particular author but rather the way in which the canon has almost completely excluded whole classes of authors, members of groups other than white European and American male writers. The point is not simply to have, say Richard Wright and James Baldwin added to the canon, but to recognize that the very principles upon which that canon is constructed function to exclude African-American writers as a group, and thus replicate the ways in which the dominant culture has excluded African-Americans in almost all spheres of life—or, as Toni Morrison and others have recently argued, repressed any recognition of the African-American presence in areas where that presence has been not just pervasive but constitutive.[4] The argument is that an adequate canon must add texts by women, Native Americans, African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian-Americans, by gays and lesbians, and by members of classes whose work was previously considered as low or popular culture. For example, in "In the American Canon," Robert Hemenway offers this argument against the tiered model proposed by Kolb:

> Possibly drawing a parallel with the academic rank structure, where the work of full professors is assumed by definition to be of greater value than that of assistant professors, these scholars have suggested a ranked canon in which some authors are more important than others. All qualified applicants, regardless of race, enter the canon, but most minorities cluster at the lowest levels, while the upper ranks remain predominantly white, male, and relatively free of the coming and going of literary reputations. In the lower ranks, meanwhile, because they are more inclusive, a good deal of substitution occurs—a situation analogous to the coming and going of assistant professors in the search for tenure.

> Under the merit-system canon, Melville's place is secure, Hemingway is good but not in the first rank (an associate professor presumably), and Langston Hughes has a precarious hold . . . .
>
> While such efforts may be well meaning, and while they do have an effect on the classroom—since black writers are more likely to be taught under an inclusionary rule than not—the ranked canon seems an attempt to preserve the power of traditional value determination without confronting the fundamental interrelationship between social class and aesthetic value. (67-68)[5]

As Hemenway's distinction between social and aesthetic value suggests, those who want to widen the canon also tend to open up the very bases by which works are chosen, and, more fundamentally, the very bases on which canons are composed.

Thus Hemenway's argument against proposals such as Kolb's brings us to the point where we must also recognize how widening the canon almost inevitably means transforming the canon as well. Indeed, what I want to explore now is how a widening of the canon leads to transforming the canon in terms of functions and criteria, and in particular in terms of compelling us to recognize the multiple and perhaps divergent aesthetics involved in the newer canons.

*Transforming the Canon: Multiple Aesthetics*

As Hemenway makes clear, in articulating the argument for widening the canon by classes of excluded writers, another and in some ways more radical challenge to the canon emerges. Now we find ourselves asking if we have to rethink one of the bases on which we select the individual texts, because the different classes have written in part on the basis of different aesthetics. That is, in the early phases of the canon debate, and in a proposal like that by Kolb, it appears that the criteria for entry into the canon may be agreed upon. Specifically, it looks as if we can agree on aesthetic criteria, which were presented as being simultaneously specific to literature and universal. The problem seems to be that whole classes of authors who might meet these criteria had been neglected and now must be examined, the justice of their merits compelling entry into the canon. But as scholars and critics begin not only to restore works to the accessible canon but then to project these works into the critical canon as well, what they discover is that to study these texts is to develop new forms of criticism based on the principles these works embodied.

The argument here is made not only by students of African-American literature, but with at least equal force in relation to women's writing and the writing of Native American authors. That is, the claim that women have developed or embodied different ways of knowing, leads to an argument that some, although not all, literature by women in fact embodies a different aesthetic or aesthetics, and that its high quality, the quality that makes it a successful candidate for inclusion in the canon, can only be adequately judged by first accepting the contrasting assumptions of this different aesthetic.

This argument is also very clear with Native American literature, especially literature produced before the arrival of Europeans. For it is obvious, or rather it has become obvious to those of us who are not Native Americans and have only lately begun to study this immense literature, that Native American peoples lived and live within a radically different cosmology or world-view, and that precisely insofar as their aesthetics corresponded with that world-view, their criteria for what we call their literature was or were in many ways incompatible with, if not opposed to, the world-view of the colonizers. The very features that would make a Native American poem, song, tale, narrative seem great, hence canonical—or canonical, hence great—within that culture might be features that the aesthetic of a European canon either might not value or might not even be able to perceive. This is especially important in learning to "read" oral poems and narratives: these pieces were performed, and frequently performative, in their cultures of origins, but we are much more likely to read them on the page—and find them "flat" in terms of modernist aesthetics, without recognizing many of the dimensions which would be realized in performance, and without being aware of the functions that they would enact.[6] And the argument holds also for at least some contemporary literature by Native American authors, who in fact make the problem of conflicting cosmologies and aesthetics the subject of their work even as they embody attempts at transformation within those same works.

A parallel argument is offered by those who propose the inclusion of works from popular culture or from classes of people who were previously believed not to create literature. So Paul Lauter, one of the major proponents of rethinking the canon in terms of class, as well as race and gender, offers this example:

> Another way of thinking about the different concepts of artistic function may be provided by the distinction (or relationship) nicely embodied . . . between the "exchange value" and the "use value" of art. An especially

> moving example of "use value" is offered by the Kentucky mountain songs sung at the funeral of "Jock" Yablonski and recorded with great majesty in the film "Harlan County, U.S.A." In a larger sense, all marginalized art (all art) must be explored precisely in terms of its use. Partly that is a function of marginality itself . . . But partly, I think, this phenomenon is explained by the fundamental character of marginalized (in this instance specifically working class) culture, what Raymond Williams called "solidarity." Solidarity is not simply a slogan or an abstraction that happens to appeal to many people who work. It is, rather, a way of describing the culture of people who have been pushed together into workplaces and communities where survival and growth enforce interdependence. In this context, the work of an artist—while it may in some respects be expressive and private—remains overwhelmingly functional in his or her community. And an approach to it cannot strip it of this context without ripping away its substance. (67-68)[7]

That is, in terms of solidarity, the very criteria that make a good marching song, whether for soldiers or pacifists, for strikers or strikebreakers, are precisely the sort of single-pointed focus which seems to be antithetical to the emphasis placed on tension, ambiguity, irony, and complexity dominant in high modernist ideas about the canon. Certainly they are not the criteria by which we judge Ariel's "Full fathom five," they are not the criteria by which Eliot argued for making John Donne's poems a central rather than a marginal part of the canon, and they are not the criteria by which Eliot's own poems, such as "The Waste Land," were judged to be at the core of the modern(ist) canon.

*Transforming the Canon: Do We Produce a Single Canon or Parallel Canons?*

Arguments such as those offered by Hemenway and Lauter thus bring us to the next step in the process by which widening the canon may be seen to transform it. For if we widen the canon by categories of authors and texts, based on gender, race, and class, then we soon find ourselves asking "Are we transforming the very basis on which the canon is conceived in the first place?" and "How many canons will we have?" This challenge to the logic of a single canon finds expression in "Thoreau's Last Words—and America's First Literatures" by Jarold Ramsey, specifically in a proposal for publication of a Native American canon:

> I will leave off with one final project, the undertaking of which would signal more clearly than anything else I can think of that the American literary establishment had actually accepted, belatedly, its intellectual and artistic obligations to America's first literatures. Nothing less than a native counterpart to the monumental collaboration that has produced the Center for Editions of American Authors series, it would call for the systematic preparation and publication of a "standard" dual-language edition of the surviving Native American repertories—proceeding tribe by tribe, with full textual apparatus as needed. The task I propose is formidable, and no doubt at present far beyond either our scholarly or our financial capabilities, but in light of the historical barriers between Anglo and native literatures, the missed chances and literary rootlessness of Americans writing in the European tradition, the continuing loss among the Indians of stories and storytellers and the continued inaccessibility to them of scholarly texts, can we afford to do anything less now? (59-60)

This proposal seems breathtaking not only because of its scope but because it seems intended to jolt those trained in the standard canon, as it certainly jolts me, into awareness of the discrepancy between what Wendell Harris (following Alastair Fowler) distinguishes as the potential and the accessible canons. Clearly, one of Ramsey's points in proposing to transform a part of the potential canon into a part of the accessible canon is to remind us of how much literature we have been oblivious to.

Thus Ramsey's proposal is one of a number which compels us to confront ways in which widening the canon may seem to propose new problems even as it seems to resolve old ones. That is, if we seek a multicultural model are we going to find ourselves operating with multiple canons as well? Do we have a European-American canon, a Native American canon, an African-American canon, an Hispanic or Chicano canon, a canon of woman's literature, a canon of gay literature? Surely this sort of "separatism," as it is sometimes called, runs at least two grave dangers: first, as already noted, the danger of ghettoization; and second, the danger of seeming to reduce literary works, as it can seem to reduce people, to nothing more than their membership in various classes and categories.

When we reach this point, it seems to be the case that we do not have anything like a single coherent set of criteria for constituting or reconstituting the canon. And yet if there are not standards that can cross some lines of difference, then logically it would seem impossible to share judgment across those lines. Can we articulate a position that allows for difference and valuing differences, and yet also offers some shared criteria? If we can, what position or positions might we formulate? If we cannot, what will be the consequences for our proposals for a new canon or canons?

*Transforming the Canon: Does Multicultural Mean Multilingual?*

Another challenge emerges in Juan Bruce-Novoa's "Canonical and Noncanonical Texts: A Chicano Case Study." This essay raises issues which were crucial in our workshop.[8] For Bruce-Novoa takes the issue of multiculturalism a step further, claiming that the presence of American literature in Spanish offers a radical challenge to the nature of the traditional canon:

> Two of the essential biases of culture in the United States are a general anti-Hispanism and a specific anti-Mexicanism. Thus the recent emergence of a multifaceted cultural identity—which bespeaks an American experience, but speaks sometimes in Spanish and at other times with a Hispanic accent—has been received with nothing short of alarm. The new literary expression represents itself as a legitimate product of this country *and, as such, demands a place in the canon.* This literature apparently also demands, or at least implies, a radical change in the ideal of one common language and culture. While it is still relatively small in the number of texts it has produced, the literature constitutes the most significant challenge to Anglo-American chauvinism to date. The repressed pluralism lamented by Whitman has begun to surface as a threat to the very material of the canon, language . . . .
>
> When contextualized in this way, what Hispanic literature and history infuse into the canon is radical dialectics. It could be argued, of course, that black, Jewish, feminist, and even mainstream American writers challenge the paradigms of identity, but it is the language difference—a difference present even in Hispanic texts written in English—that makes Hispanic literature a more

> general threat to the canon. The literary canon and its academic-commercial support are faced with a dilemma. It is no longer a matter of absorbing "foreign" expressions within a national literature but of heeding an insistent, multivoiced call for the restructuring of the canon into a polyglot, pluralistic expression of the many nations within a common frontier. The canon is under egalitarian pressure to melt itself down and include more in the next recasting. (198-199, emphasis added)

This claim is extremely provocative, and it opens up questions which would be or would seem unthinkable to some defenders of a traditional canon: Is a canon always in a single language? Must the canon for American literature be in English? If we push this logic further, it seems evident that if we truly want to widen the canon we, the teachers, must learn to speak and read other languages ourselves—which is, of course, the exact situation of many of the students in Los Angeles. Conversely, for the proponents of multiculturalism, the challenge can go the other way: if we truly mean what we say, can someone who does not speak the original language teach that text? that culture? These, then, constitute some of the main questions that the debate on opening up the canon has impelled critics to begin asking and exploring, and that the members of the Los Angeles workshop found ourselves rehearsing as we immersed ourselves in this debate. I think these questions emerge out of the very logic of the canon debate itself, and that they are the questions any group of people are likely to find themselves engaged in discussing who start down this road. At this point, I will turn to Part III of the presentation, and look at a few of the implications for teachers.

## III. What Challenges Do We Face in Teaching a Transformed Canon?

One way to summarize this exploration of the spectrum of challenges and the alternate routes those challenges seem to project is to formulate another question, namely "Is opening the canon an additive or a transformative process? And if it turns out to be a transformative process, then what is the nature of the transformation(s) we need to enact?" What the spectrum suggests is not so much an either/or but a both/and situation, in which all the routes are being tried simultaneously. If we look at recent anthologies for college and university courses in English, for example, we see both single-canon and multiple-canon strategies being pursued simultaneously, whatever the logical clashes and theoretical incompatibilities. On the one hand, there is the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* (1990) edited by Paul

Lauter and his colleagues, which includes numerous writers and dozens of genres not represented in earlier, more traditional anthologies. On the other hand, there is *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English* (1985) edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and *The Norton Anthology of Afro-American Literature* (1990) edited by Henry Gates and others. And the publishers, whose logic is to try to cover all the possibilities, are also reaching back to the classical canon, with *The Norton Book of Classical Literature* (1992) edited by Bernard Knox.

In this third part of my essay, I want to sketch out how these questions take on urgent and concrete form when we move to the task of teaching a revised canon, especially in the public schools. When we make this move into our local worlds as teachers, then the question becomes "In what ways does transforming the pedagogic canon seem to demand that teachers transform what they teach, how they teach, and why they teach—and transform themselves?"

The canon debate, as Harris notes, is not just about texts but about readings. For us, teaching a canon must be a process by which we not only mandate that students read certain works but, crucially, find ways for students to become engaged with and immersed in those works. We may not design courses so successful that every one of our students falls in love with reading literature, but as we reform the curriculum surely most of us do seek to design courses which will elicit sustained engagement with the works we assign from as many students as possible. So we can imagine a college teacher selecting one of the new anthologies listed above or a team of high school teachers in a Humanitas program like that in which the Los Angeles teachers participate meeting and agreeing on a wide selection of works from a newer canon, but the true challenge becomes inventing ways to teach this new selection.

Thus as we imagine the different types of canon-reformation we can begin to analyze the different demands they will place on us as teachers. So, for example, if we follow a route of adding to the canon, then we will find ourselves needing to read new texts, but we may be able keep using the same critical methods and approaches that we have used all along. We will have to learn about new authors and their lives, about the contexts that shaped their lives and so on, but we will be working within familiar models. But if we widen or transform the canon, then some much more far-reaching re-education may be necessary. Two issues that I can delineate concern the imperative which is sometimes spoken of as the need make the canon *more representative* and the need

for the teacher to re-educate herself in the contexts from which this wider canon emerges.

*Unpacking the Imperative to Make the Canon "More Representative"*

Among the seven functions that canons have performed and can perform, Harris lists "Providing Models, Ideals, and Inspiration" and "Creating Common Frames of Reference," and these two functions meet and collide in an interesting fashion when we examine one of the impulses animating some of those who propose opening up the canon, namely the impulse to make the canon *more representative*.

The function of providing models has taken a variety of forms. As E. R. Curtius notes "The Alexandrian philologists are the first to put together a selection of earlier literature for the use of grammarians in their schools" (249); and the more comprehensive idea of offering paradigms for teaching correct written forms of a language is one purpose that the canon has served.[9] What I would suggest is that for many teachers today, when correctness is an issue framed in quite different ways (because of recently formulated understandings of the relation of written and spoken language; because of an emergent understanding of the process by which people learn a second language; and because of research which suggests that too great and too early an emphasis on grammatical correctness tends to block creativity), much of the concern for literature as offering paradigms for speaking and writing has been replaced by a concern for the function of literature as *representation*.

But as a number of critics have noted, to employ the canon as providing a model in the sense of *a representation* is a very problematic assertion because of the multiple senses of "representation"—senses which can produce confusions as troubling as those caused by the word *canon* itself. Three meanings of *representative* overlap and people often fail to clarify which definition they are using.

The first and most obvious sense in which those proposing that we widen the canon claim they want to make it *more representative* is that by including writers from previously marginalized categories the canon will more adequately represent the full range of human experience. In particular this widening will enable it to represent points of view which are qualitatively different from the point of view of white, male, heterosexual European-American authors. The argument here is that without such a diversity of points of view, the claim to speak for human experience that so many defenders offer as the primary reason for perpetuating the traditional canon is and will continue to be falsified.

A second sense in which widening the canon can be presented as making it *more representative* is that it will more adequately represent literary accomplishment—the production of works which deserve and will achieve the status of classics by authors from marginalized and unseen groups. It seems that, say, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, and Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* have already entered what Harris calls the diachronic canon, and it seems clear that works such as Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me Ultima*, Sandra Cisnero's *The House on Mango Street*, and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* have already entered what Harris calls the nonce canon, and may well enter whatever revised diachronic canon emerges in the next 50 years.[10]

And a third sense in which widening the canon is presented as making it *more representative* is that it will more adequately *represent*, in the sense of imitate and express, the experience of students who come from those groups previously enumerated. The argument here is a pedagogic one—and an argument that goes back to Kenneth Clark's famous psychological experiments cited in the original Brown vs. Board of Education decision—namely that unless young people find representations of themselves and representations of lives they might aspire to in the literature they read in school, they will come to perceive of themselves, in part by virtue of their membership in unrepresented, unseen, groups, as being marginal and as living in a society which offers them no place, hence no hope for a fulfilling existence.[11]

This point has been made with great urgency, for example, by a number of teachers arguing for the inclusion of literature by and about gays and lesbians. As Michael Jackson, one of the teacher-fellows in the Los Angeles team, argued:

> Research has shown that above all, the gay and lesbian student feels isolated. One of the most common comments adult gays and lesbians make on looking back to their childhood is "I thought I was the only one." Sad to say, many students sit through an entire education never hearing the word "gay" or "lesbian" except in relation to death, suicide, or murder. Silence about a group is a signal that the group is deemed shameful, inappropriate or unworthy of being written or spoken about. (Remember when it was forbidden for teachers to be visibly pregnant in school?) Your silence carries a powerful message that there is something wrong with gays and

> lesbians. ("Gay and Lesbian Young Adult Database Project;" also see Jackson, "Introduction")

These teachers point out, furthermore, the alarming statistics about the suicide-attempt rate among gay and lesbian adolescents:

> The suicide attempt rate among gay teenagers is extremely high—an estimated 30 to 40 percent among gay boys and 20 percent among young lesbians, research indicates. The rate is 10 percent for teen-agers overall, according to the Youth Suicide National Center. (Murdoch A1)

Thus they argue that it is essential the pedagogic canon to include representations of homosexual women and men living sane, productive lives in order for gay and lesbian adolescents to be able to imagine possible futures and thus fulfill the task facing all adolescents, namely to imagine a future self into existence.

As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., for one, has repeatedly pointed out, the concepts of mimetic representation and of demographic or political representation are significantly different and it is important to note the distinction because a failure to be clear as to which meaning is intended can lead speakers into some quite destructive debates. On the other hand, debates about the different ways in which we may want a canon that is representative—of classes of people, of classes of writers, of literary excellence, and of our student populations—seem essential for those having to deal with the pedagogic canon: for they concern the question of offering authors and works who help students find themselves in the culture they are being asked, invited, and impelled to inherit and enter— even as they receive messages that indicate that society seeks to ignore, exclude, or erase them.

At this point, I would like to suggest that we might be well served to add another function to Harris's list, namely the function of teaching students to fall in love with reading and reading literature in particular. This is, as Cornel Bonca has pointed out, surely one of the most fundamental objectives that a canon serves, and a function that might unite teachers divided on other issues about the canon. (While the idea of inviting students to "fall in love" with literature may seem retrograde to some readers, who hear in it echoes of critical positions that invite us to fall in love with literature only to attack the study of literature or reduce literary study to literary appreciation, that is not what either Bonca or I suggest. Rather, what the phrase signifies is an invitation not only to fall in love with reading literature, but also to fall in love with

studying literature, so that, for example, students come to be aware of and can begin to master—if they choose to do so and for their own purposes—the acts of reading with, against, and through the grain of the text which together constitute the current array of critical practices.) So a teacher may decide to replace *Silas Marner* with *Bless Me, Ultima* because the latter elicits, as the former currently does not, the engagement of her students—and yet the teacher might also hope that engagement with Anaya's novel might lead some students to Eliot's. However, another choice might be to teach both books, or similar pairs of books, precisely to engage students in analysis of what is different and what is similar in the cultures represented, as well as in the representations themselves.

*Transforming Teachers: What Types of Knowledge Will Teachers Need to Acquire?*

A second issue comes into focus when we find ourselves asking, as the members of the Los Angeles workshop asked, "What must teachers learn in order to teach a transformed canon? Not merely what new texts, but what types of knowledge about the cultures of origin for the new texts?" This was a major topic throughout the year, and I will offer an example that helped me think about how I have been retraining myself this year, and will have to continue to retrain myself as I start to revise, say, a general education course like the Introduction to Modern Fiction.

What I discovered in the course of the workshop is that I can think about what I have to do to retrain myself by an analogy with what I had to do to learn to read and then to teach Shakespeare's plays. When I first studied and when I began to teach Shakespeare's plays, I had to learn about what Tillyard, in a book now much attacked, called *The Elizabethan World Picture*. Although Tillyard has been critiqued for a number of quite intelligible reasons, the title—especially if we drop the definite article and make it plural, so as to allow for multiple world-views and contests between such world-views within a society—still captures an important truth. If I am going to grasp the plays of Shakespeare with real depth of understanding, I must also learn about the context in which they were written and performed. In particular, I must learn about the fundamental intellectual systems and social practices that formed the culture of origin: the Christian world picture, the split in Christianity, and the violent conflicts between different forms of that religion; the hierarchic model of the natural world; the microcosm and macrocosm; the humours physiology and psychology; the political beliefs about the state; the ways in which these beliefs and ideas were enacted in families, in guilds and other corporate bodies, in

the state and the offices up to the king . . . and so on. (At this point the challenges in teaching literature intersect with the challenges in teaching history explored in Eve Kornfeld's essay. In particular, in suggesting that historians "embrace enthusiastically the possibilities contained in subjectivity and the humanities" (109), that they may empathy a part of their pedagogy, and that they embody these premises in inviting students to do role-playing, Kornfeld proposes, in effect, that historians integrate reading through a text as actors read through a script; conversely, in my own work, I suggest that literary critics can use role-playing as a means for initiating students into historical research.)

As a shorthand for thinking about this need to retrain, even transform ourselves as teachers, I found myself using a phrase cited by Julie Klein in her book on "*interdisciplinarity*." In describing the model of synthesizing history developed by the Annales school, Klein concluded that "In many cases they wound up producing what has been termed a '*retrospective anthropology*,'"—a term amplified by Tony Judt when he speaks of "*retrospective cultural anthropology*"(Klein 3; Judt 87).[12] Generalizing, we can say that to teach literature from another culture, whether that culture is distant from or near to us in time and in space, we must know something about that culture in an anthropological sense, which is to say know something about the primary systems of thought and primary institutions that constitute the culture. We need a map of that culture, however sketchy, if we are to enable our students to interpret works from that culture in something approaching the logic within which they were composed.

Those of us who majored in or obtained advanced degrees in English under the dispensation of the older canon acquired, in effect, some of the knowledge offered by such retrospective cultural anthropology about earlier forms of the culture in which English literature was composed. For teachers of "English" born in England, this has been a knowledge of their ancestral culture; for teachers of English born or living in the United States, and often descended from parents born in non-English speaking cultures, or born in English-speaking but non-metropolitan parts of a now-dissolved empire, this has been knowledge of what might be thought of as an adopted culture. But when we shift from teaching texts from cultures that are far off in time to those that are in our own time and in our own space, then the problem gets even more complex, since we are not doing retrospective anthropology, but rather learning cultures that in fact constitute part of the present-day United States. Furthermore, this task is made more challenging because there are two key differences between learning English Renaissance culture and, say, Native American culture(s).

First of all, the Native American cultures are in many ways more challenging to "learn" because they are alive, not dead, and because we will encounter living members of these cultures in our classrooms—a situation which tends to make the nature of our authority as teachers more problematic. Second, because these cultures are alive, they are also evolving at the very moment we are trying to learn them. In fact, a number of the books we are most likely to teach are themselves part of this evolution, and indeed can be seen as agents of that evolution. They thus demand that we learn about several phases of that culture as we try to teach some of the literature from that culture.[14]

Thus as our workshop unfolded, and as each of us began to imagine how we might add, say, Native American, or African-American or Hispanic readings, we found ourselves wondering if there is some "handbook" for these cultures. For example, as we studied the literature of the southwest and of the border with Mexico, we learned that we must acquire some knowledge of the Native American and Spanish cultures which fused into the culture of Mexico, which meant learning about the Virgin of Guadalupe, La Malinche, and La Llorona. Or as we looked at works by Leslie Marmon Silko, we found ourselves wondering about the sacred knowledge embodied in the ceremonies of the Laguna people, curious as to where we might turn for elucidation of a non-verbal feature such as the star pattern that occupies a page of *Ceremony*, and which seems a central element in the metamorphosis of the protagonist. There were days when we felt the exhilaration that most teachers feel at learning something knew—but there were days when we simply felt overwhelmed at learning how much we might need to learn.

## Epilogue

> Instead of stamping works with authority, literary canons propose entries into a culture's critical colloquy.
>
> —Wendell Harris, "Canonicity" (112)

In the midst of this discussion of how we are widening and thereby transforming the canon, I know, from my experience in redesigning my own courses, from the voices of the teachers I have worked with, and from the critics I have been reading, that we all share an awareness which I expect my reader is also voicing, namely that what does not change is the amount of time we have in our classes: whether it is a 10-week quarter, a 15-week semester, or a public school semester, whether we spend 40, 60, or 100 hours with our students, we work within severe constraints, constraints that narrow our options at the

very moment we most passionately want to consider widening them. Wendell Harris concludes his article by reminding us of these constraints:

> We need more than ever, then, to be honest with ourselves and with our students about the limited purposes both of individual courses and of the requirements for our degrees—to be honest about what our selection of texts and our approach to them does *not* accomplish. If The Canon no longer lives, the reason is that it never did; there have been and are only selections with purposes. If anything has been clarified by the last twenty years of critical alarms and excursions, it is the multiplicity of possible purposes. ("Canonicity" 119)

One of the reasons that I have not sought to offer answers is this essay but rather to define the problems and challenges and delineate some of the routes is precisely because I know—and know better than I did 10 months ago—the folly of attempting to prescribe a canon. Nor do I delude myself that even if anyone could prescribe a canon they would have solved the pedagogical challenge. One of the things we commonly, often glibly, say, about the humanities is that they are or can be and should be, in part, an education about the education students are receiving. But it is surely the case that debate about the canon is or should be a means for self-reflection, not just about the selection of readings but also about our quite diverse and even divergent purposes and about what we cannot do within the constraints of our teaching lives. In part, to be clear and open about our purposes is something we owe our students. But in part, to be clearer about our purposes and the things we do not do may also be a way of deciding if we want to revise not just what we teach but what we know and how we teach—as well as a way to help us decide what we need to learn next.

## Notes

1. As I finish writing this essay, I am conscious of my great debt to the members of the Los Angeles site of the ACLS Elementary and Secondary Schools Teacher Curriculum Development Project. It was through working with them—in a process in which we read the literature and the criticism; discussed and debated the issues raised by opening the canon and multiculturalism; and experimented with the pedagogical challenge of transforming the curriculum—that I learned about the realities of opening up the canon. My thanks, then, to Sue Anderson, Marie Collins, Lynne Culp, Lois Feuer, Terry Henderson, Michael

Jackson, Sandra Okura, Karen Rowe, Beverly Tate, and Howard Wilf. I owe a special debt to Lois Feuer, who has read and commented on earlier drafts of this essay, often within hours of receiving the manuscript. Readers will benefit from her precise and eloquent insight, which has helped me learn what I was trying to say and taught me better ways to articulate those ideas.

2. It is a sign of how the canon debate has unfolded that in the 5th edition, published in 1988, Abrams took less than three pages, while in the 6th edition, published 1993, he needed almost four pages for his entry on the canon. There are also changes in diction and syntax which register, in small but precise and striking ways, how the debate has changed over the last decade. For example:

> The collective cultural process by which an author comes to be firmly and durably recognized as canonical is often called "canon formation." (5th edition: 20)
>
> The social process by which an author comes to be tacitly and durably recognized as canonical is called "canon formation." (6th edition: 20)

I take it that the shift from *cultural* to *social* registers the way in which proponents of social constructivist and political or historicizing models of criticism—exponents of what we may call, following the linguistic turn and the rhetorical turn, the ideological turn—have succeeded in reformulating the terms of the debate itself. For a fuller, more elaborate tracing, and one that is particularly interesting in exploring some of the metaphoric aspects of the etymology, the reader might look at the version with which Robert Scholes opens his essay "Aiming a Canon at the Curriculum." The essay appears with five responses in *Salmagundi* 72 (1986): 101-63.

3. Conversely, as Philip Edwards notes, Spenser attacks Irish poets precisely because they incite their countrymen to rebellion on nationalist grounds (10-11). The apparent incontestibility of a connection between the formation of a canon and of a nation is manifest in the introduction to *The Faerie Queene* provided by John Hollander and Frank Kermode in *The Literature of Renaissance England*:

> Heroic poetry, which in the Renaissance was taken by most commentators to be the highest kind, was necessarily associated with the growth of nationalist feelings, since it attempted to achieve in the vernacular what Virgil had done for the Roman empire in Latin. This explains Spenser's interest not only in the ancient models but also

> in modern Italian and French poetry—he would learn what he could from renaissances that flowered earlier than the English. But it also explains why *The Faerie Queene*, for all its dreamy Romance landscape and narrative, is very much a poem of its moment. He was celebrating national or imperial power, and did so not only by placing its origins in a fictive British past but by justifying modern policies, ecclesiastical, political, and military. He had to make his poem relevant to the glories, real and imaginary, of the reign he chose to represent as climactic in history; but he could not ignore the dark side of the picture. (162)

In the 20 years since Hollander and Kermode first wrote this passage, the inflection of those making this point has, of course, darkened considerably, as those engaged in new historicist, materialist, and cultural forms of criticism have focused on the dark side not only of the poem but of Spenser's own investment in England's imperial ambitions and colonial activities.

4. See Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken" and *Playing in the Dark;* Baker and Pierce-Baker, "Patches"; and Baker, "The Promised Body."

5. There is a further point made by Hemenway, which both develops the full scope of the challenge and meshes with the point made in note 4 above:

> Black texts challenge traditional literary ideas. That the slave narrative is unquestionably the first indigenous written literary genre America offered the world places a whole literary tradition in a new perspective and helps us understand both generic properties and European influence on American literature. Gates has suggested that black texts predict their opposites, that slave narratives provide a kind of perverse literary foregrounding, virtually ensuring the creation of the plantation novel as a reversed image of the slave's narrative indictment. Such a theory begins to assess the dialectic between white aesthetics and black aesthetics. (69)

6. And this argument does not even reach to a crucial point made by Dorris, namely that the variety of Native American cultures and frames is such that we cannot speak of Native American literature as if it were a unity; hence we cannot speak as if there is or were a single aesthetic

governing the literature produced by the diverse Native American tribes.

7. In what I think is one of the most important contributions to the canon controversy so far, ***Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation***, John Guillory responds to the type of argument offered by Lauter, among others, by rethinking the issue of use and exchange value. He does so in the course of making a larger argument against those who seem to claim that any attempt to employ aesthetic criteria is invalid:

> In its most extreme form this critique seeks to discredit the concept of the aesthetic altogether, as intrinsically repressive. In the final chapter of this book I argue that the extrapolation of a critique of aesthetics from the critique of the canon is mistaken in its fundamental premise . . . . The reduction of aesthetic value to economic use value forgets precisely the fact that the problem of the work of art was crucial for political economy's founding distinction between use value and *exchange value*. The conflation of these two terms in current anti-aesthetic arguments betrays how much the present critique of judgment has actually forgotten about the intimate historical relations between aesthetic and economic discourses. The cost of that amnesia is a kind of false enlightenment, the restatement in altogether more reductive terms of a relation between the aesthetic and the economic much more interestingly and problematically engaged in eighteenth-century moral philosophy than in our recent neorelativist critiques . . . .
>
> The strangest consequence of the canon debate has surely been the discrediting of judgment, as though human beings could ever refrain from judging the things they make. But if this notion has been bad sociology, it has proven to be even worse politics. The argument that one should suspend judgment on behalf of the politically urgent objective of making the canon more "representative" of diverse social groups invited the reactionary objection to the abandonment of "standards." The most politically strategic argument for revising the canon remains the argument that the works so revalued are important and valuable cultural works. If literary critics are not yet in a position to recognize the inevitability of

> the social practice of judgment, that is a measure of how far the critique of the canon still is from developing a sociology of judgment. The theory of cultural capital elaborated in this book is an attempt to construct just such a sociology. (xiii-xiv)

Just as I agree with those who suggest that canons are nearly indispensable elements, and certainly constitutive for the institutions of education and literary criticism, so I would agree that, as Guillory insists, we as a profession will continue to exercise literary judgment, and that our choices will be based in part on aesthetic criteria, however we redefine and qualify the concept of the aesthetic. That we will continue to dispute both the category of aesthetics and argue about (and for and against) different criteria or aesthetics also seems undeniable.

8. Bruce-Novoa also explicitly raises the question of whether canon-formation for "minority" literature will also replicate the very features in forming the standard canon that led to the attempt to form a new canon. (200-202)

9. John Guillory's essay on "Canon" offers some interesting suggestions about the place of canon in relation to the emergence of correctness as an issue in the evolution of the relation between spoken and written English. (240-242)

10. Carey Kaplan and Ellen Cronan Rose offer a thought-provoking account of Lessing's entry into the canon as a case study in Chapter 5 of *The Canon and the Common Reader*. From their perspective, which uses feminist theory as a basis for rearticulating the idea of the common reader developed by Samuel Johnson and redeployed by Virginia Woolf, they suggest that we need to recognize an opposition between the professoriat and the common reader. Members of the professoriat, especially the most privileged senior members, form a priestly class of professional readers, for whom publishing criticism is a career; common readers, on the other hand, are people who become engaged with books as part of the effort to make sense of their lives. Part of the feminist revolution, they argue, is that many women and some men who have become professors nonetheless teach and write from the motives of the common reader. Their argument also leads them to point out that canonization may not, in fact, be an unqualified blessing, especially in the case of a "prophetic" writer such as Lessing:

> But if not exact, the analogy between the biblical and the literary canon is suggestive. In both cases, a "priestly

> class" certifies that certain texts are valuable. Why? What, in particular, are we to make of the canonization of a prophetic book like *The Golden Notebook*, of a prophetic writer like Doris Lessing? Is it an attempt to assure that future generations try "to make sense of [her] prophetic message in order to understand and account for their own situation?" Or is it, as Alan Golding has charged in a slightly different context, an attempt to "detoxify" Lessing's message by dehistoricizing it, rendering it "culturally and intellectually harmless." (85)

This ironic perception of canonization as an undesirable event, or as a desirable event with at least one undesirable effect, is rarely voiced in the canon debate. In the broadest sense, the ironic effect of literary canonization can be seen, I suppose, as parallel to the often commented on ironic effect that follows from the moment when a new and living faith becomes institutionalized as a church. Certainly writers have commented on the ironic effect of having a society they sought to attack canonize their works while ignoring the call to repent and reform that is at the heart of those works.

11. Charles Altieri has argued with great passion, in describing what he sees as the limits of the currently dominant theoretical models of reading *against* the text, that it is folly to discard the idealizing function of literature: we need its ability not only to imitate human existence but to project ideals which function as images of selves we might become—hence to provide one of the most essential elements by which adolescents, in particular, might imagine themselves into existence. In this context, Altieri has proposed what I take to be a fourth sense in which we can speak of a text as *representative*: "Texts become representative less by the general truths they demonstrate than by their capacity to make what they exemplify seem shareable in clarifying or negotiating certain situations" (*Canons and Consequences* 15).

12. Klein quotes this phrase from George Iggers and Harold Parker, eds., *International Handbook of Historical Studies: Contemporary Research and Theory* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979): 5-6, 10.

13. And this is leaving aside the complexities created by the fact that the Native American culture(s) are not only the ancestral cultures for this land, this space, but that they are also present cultures, and present cultures enjoying their own renaissance. To offer a rough analogy: it is as if when I teach Renaissance drama, Faustus or a descendent (so to speak) of Faustus might walk into my classroom and challenge the way in which I am mis-teaching the play which purports to tell his story.

# Shaping the Multicultural Curriculum: Biblical Encounters with the Other

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As we expand the range of materials we teach, moving toward greater inclusiveness, we create new dilemmas as well as new richness. When we were willing to work within a standard canon and let the textbook publishers decide what we taught, setting up the syllabus seemed simpler; now, we face decisions that set competing goods against each other. Often, in answer to the question "what should we teach?" we seem to be presented with either/or choices: dead white European males versus the culturally diverse spectrum of authors writing in modern America. The most common tone in this debate is polemical, all sides convinced of their own righteousness, with the Jeremiah intonations of the late Allan Bloom in counterpoint with, say, the angry voices of a recent sit-in by UCLA students demanding a Chicano Studies Department; the political undercurrent—the "struggle for the soul of America" and for its reading lists—is clear.[1]

Whatever its costs in civility and social cohesion, one of the many benefits of the canon debate is the way in which it has forced us to reconsider the basis on which we choose. What are our criteria? Assuming for the purposes of discussion that my imagined readers, an audience of teachers, are willing enough to rethink what we do and to alter the syllabus in the direction of inclusion, how do we decide what to include? Do we select on the basis of aesthetics ("this is a great book"), of a knowledge imperative ("everybody in this society needs to know about a variety of cultures"), or on the basis of demographics ("our students need readings that reflect their lives and their cultures of origin")? We know these choices to be significant, for with them we say what we think is worth spending time on, and since each of these motives comes with its own pedagogical approach attached (the knowledge-imperative requires a lot more giving of "background" information than the aesthetic impulse, for example, though one can argue that fullest appreciation requires familiarity with the cultural context of a work of literature).

Our choices will not only reflect our assumptions about what literature *is*, and *is for*, they will also shape our views of the included works—and those left out—themselves. Paul Lauter, a leading figure

urging our rethinking of the terms of argument, suggests that the motive for teaching what we now call noncanonical texts is deeper than the issue of representation, mirroring in our assigned authors the ethnicity of our students, valuable though that may be. Beyond that, says Lauter, "I suspect that the central reason it is necessary to read noncanonical texts is that they *teach us* how to view experience through the prisms of gender, race, nationality, and other forms of marginalization" (161). I would add to this what we take for granted but need to say more often: our job is to teach good literature, and that's a category whose boundaries extend far beyond the traditional canon. If we want to extend the range of our students' access to experience, as well as to provide them with the multicultural literacy their world will continue to demand of them, on the one hand, and to present them also with the unarguable benefits of an acquaintance with Homer and Shakespeare, on the other, we need to find a way to arrive at both/and rather than either/or (a straw-man argument in any case), and the problem then becomes one of selection: there's only so much time in a school term.

I would argue that using narratives and poetry from the Bible in the literature/humanities classroom offers a number of advantages to the teacher seeking to develop a curriculum embracing both Western classics and the expanded canon. We can show our students the relationship between the Bible and other literature, and we can take one of the Bible's recurring themes—the encounter with the "other"—as the basis for studying the interplay among diverse cultural groups in the modern world.

By reading the Bible in conjunction with the literature of the formerly excluded, we see both in new ways: one way of rethinking traditional literature is by juxtaposing it with the non-traditional. Lauter again: while asserting the importance of rereading the traditional canon with the aid of newer perspectives—those of gender, ethnicity, and class, for example—he notes that "the best lens for that rereading is provided by noncanonical works themselves" (161). We will see the Bible itself differently if we juxtapose it with noncanonical texts: for one thing, doing so desacralizes it sufficiently so we can see its narratives as literature rather than as *exempla*, illustrations of moral or theological "lessons." T.S. Eliot, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," makes the point that each new great work of literature makes us see the others differently; the analogy he uses is that of a group of monuments which gets ever so slightly rearranged by the appearance of an addition to the existing group.[2] So just as James Joyce's *Ulysses* caused readers of literature to see Homer's *Odyssey* in a new light, so studying the origin

myths of Native American groups. such as the Spider Woman stories of the Laguna Pueblo, can make us see the creation in Genesis freshly.

The converse is true as well: we can use the Bible to see noncanonical literature in new ways. And so, for example, the Bible's pervasive emphasis on the continuing warfare within the family and with neighboring peoples illuminates contemporary discussion of boundaries and borders. The *mestiza* culture to which Gloria Anzuldua describes herself belonging in *Borderlands/La Frontera* finds its earlier analogue in the experience of the non-Israelite women of the Bible, Moabite Ruth (presumably), Hittite Bathsheba and dark-skinned Queen of Sheba (as well as the "dark and comely sister" of the Song of Songs), straddling two cultures, shunned by exclusivists on both sides, belonging to two worlds and none. Our students are so often themselves living on "frontiers," participating in two cultures simultaneously, that their experience of doubleness, of being "the Other," will find expression both in contemporary literature and in its biblical antecedents.

Given these benefits, what are the costs? We might assume that we don't need to *teach* the Bible, given its centrality in our tradition and the pervasiveness of religion—and images of apocalypse—in American life, but we do. Ironically, this most "canonical" of texts is fairly infrequently studied. Even if some of our students are singers in their church choirs, increasingly others come from Asian or other religious traditions which make this foreign territory rather than shared vocabulary. And still others derive from no tradition at all. Even among the traditionally religious Christian and Jewish students, Bible-reading may not be part of their spiritual education. And certainly a *literary* view of the Bible is unlikely to have been part of their Sunday-school regimen.

We might be concerned about teaching the Bible, making ourselves vulnerable to attacks from parents and community activists embracing the full spectrum from left to right. And certainly my own experience suggests that teaching the Bible in a public institution involves crossing a minefield in which the ways to get blown up are innumerable but those to navigate safely are few. These are valid concerns, but we can't deprive students of this essential part of a common vocabulary merely because their elders are pursuing their own agendas, and in fact many curriculum guidelines now encourage us to teach biblical texts as part of historical, if not literary, education. The California *History-Social Science Framework*, for example, mandates reading sacred texts as part of historical literacy: the historically literate student will "understand the importance of religion, philosophy, and other major belief systems in history. To understand why individuals and groups acted as they did,

we must see what values and assumptions they held, what they honored, what they sought, and what they feared. By studying a people's religion and philosophy as well as their folkways and traditions, we gain an understanding of their ethical and moral commitments. By reading the texts that people revere, we gain important insights into their thinking" (13). Without some such acquaintance with this central text in Western literature, our students are ill-equipped to deal with other literature dependent in some way upon it: "a student of English literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a good deal of what is going on in what he reads" whether that reading is Milton or Morrison.[3]

We can smooth a lot of difficulties with approach, of course, and each of us will have her own strategies for setting the right tone. In my classes, I talk to students about the likelihood that I'll inadvertently offend various of them from time to time, and I suggest that the best I can offer is to try to offend everyone equally. I talk about narrative as a form of *representation*, like painting, and that in this context "Abraham" is no more a real person than a painting of an apple is real fruit. So we are not making judgments about the existence of an historical Abraham any more than an art class makes statements about the existence of apples. By saying some of these things at the beginning, we can head off some of the more obvious confrontations between student belief and skepticism.

One way to keep the focus literary rather than more exclusively theological is to teach more materials from the Hebrew Scriptures than from the New Testament, since the former emphasize story rather than doctrine. As Robert Alter puts it, "the Hebrew Bible is animated by an untiring, shrewdly perceptive fascination with the theater of human behavior in the textual foreground, seen against a background of forces that can be neither grasped nor controlled by humankind. (The New Testament tends to reverse the relation between background and foreground or, at any rate, to make the background obtrude more into the foreground)" (*World* 22).

One fairly common way of avoiding the problems described above is to teach historical or textual issues, looking at the doings of the Hittites or the Documentary Hypothesis rather than at the texts. But to do so not only skirts the real issues but belies the nature of the writings themselves: "literary analysis [of the Bible] brackets the question of history, not necessarily out of indifference to history but because it assumes that factual history is not the primary concern of the text and that it is, in any case, largely indeterminable, given the scant data we

have to work with at a remove of two to three millennia from the originating events to which the text refers" (Alter, *World* 203). So although the history teacher will rightly use the Bible as one means of pursuing the study of the ancient world, the literature teacher will focus on the narrative and poetic qualities of the text. Furthermore, too great a focus on the historical dimension risks re-entering the minefield through the side entrance, involving students in asking questions about King David's "reality" rather than those related to the storytelling skill of his author (and, whatever our students' views on divine inspiration, it seems unarguably necessary for the purposes of analysis to treat the authors as human).

If the reader will grant for the moment a successful escape from the various dangers facing the teacher of the Bible, we can turn to ways of integrating the study of biblical literature into a variety of curricular contexts. Other literature is related to the Bible in several ways: first, by direct influence of several sorts, second, by common archetypal patterns, and third, by common themes. In what follows, I will describe each of these relations, exploring two examples in some depth, and referring throughout to examples of likely pairings of biblical and modern noncanonical texts.[4]

## Direct Biblical Influence on Later Literature

The most obvious way in which other literature is related to the Bible is by the latter's direct influence in plot or characters, in image or theme, or in style. The first is the most familiar form, as we have examples that range from the various Christ figures in modern fiction—Billy Budd, Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*, McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*—to the inspiration of the story of Rachel in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* to retellings like the musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Equally familiar, and perhaps equally frequently noted by teachers, is the impact of the Exodus story on Negro spirituals.

A far greater richness results when we go beyond merely noting the influence on image or theme to having students read the Exodus narrative while they are hearing, and reading the lyrics of, spirituals like "Go Down Moses" or "Oh Mary Don't You Weep" (which in fact combines Old and New Testament references, not an uncommon synthesis in spirituals).[5] Only by such direct juxtaposition will the pervasiveness of the Moses references in African-American culture become clear, along with the complex variety of emphases this reference carries. One such emphasis is the poignant anticipation of

Martin Luther King Jr.'s comparison in his last major speech, the leader unable to accompany his followers into the new world his work has helped them create: "I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we as a people will get to the promised land."[6] Another emphasis singles out the quality of leadership, the courage and daring of Harriet Tubman, "the Moses of her people." Yet a third view emphasizes Moses before Pharaoh, the suppliant negotiating with the established authorities in Aaron Douglas' powerful painting, "Let My People Go." When we read Exodus with our students and they see Moses as a reluctant hero who keeps raising objections to his serving when God calls on him, the allusions take on a depth they might otherwise lack. And the dominant metaphor here retains its power through an impressive number of variations; a recent anthology of fiction about immigration and migration, *Imagining America*, is subtitled "Stories from the Promised Land" (Brown and Ling). America has long been envisioned by those who chose to come here as a latter-day promised land, the place of new beginnings and divine fulfillment, and so the imagery of the New Jerusalem is seen as appropriate by those who view their country as "the last best hope of mankind."

The third kind of direct influence is stylistic, and the opportunities here are especially useful in the teaching of writing, becoming more visible as we juxtapose the biblical and contemporary canons. Though few teachers these days assign passages of stylistic excellence as models for their students' imitation, looking at, say, the influence of the biblical pattern of tricolon on Lincoln's prose in his Gettysburg Address ("we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow") can illuminate the structure of prose for the student who has never thought of his own sentences in terms of patterns and rhythms.[7] The most pervasive rhetorical device of biblical prose and poetry is parallelism and repetition, both in plot and style, and again its presence is felt most obviously in words written to be spoken aloud, like the speeches of Dr. King, but can also be seen in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail."[8] In the third paragraph of his response to the Alabama clergymen who had objected to his presence in Birmingham, King wrote: "I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their 'thus saith the Lord' far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town . . . . Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (343).

Both the parallelism of the "just as . . . and just as . . ." structure and the repetition of the words "justice" and "injustice" demonstrate the biblical rhythms. One of the reasons Dr. King was able to communicate so effectively to a broad spectrum of Americans is that he worked out of a biblical tradition, the prophetic call for justice, that was the common heritage of black and white America alike, and no assertion of that point is as effective as its demonstration through juxtaposition of texts.

## Shared Archetypal Patterns

A second sort of relation between the Bible and other literature is comprised of the shared archetypal patterns that are the fundamental ways human beings have imposed order on our otherwise chaotic experience. Through archetypes, biblical and classical literature can be juxtaposed with popular culture, and with myth. We tend to think of our lives, for example, as journeys with a beginning, middle and end, and so literary works from the Bible to the *Odyssey* to *Star Trek* see human experience in journey form. Likewise, we tend to assimilate human beings, real and fictive, to certain types such as the hero, the tempter, or the scapegoat. These are, in fact, the two basic categories of archetypes, one following a story-pattern and the other grouping people into different kinds of archetypal characters (these categories eventually merge, but we can talk about them separately). These archetypal patterns cut across a wide variety of human creations, from fairy tales to historical narratives, and can be seen as related to the human creation of myth. We would use myth in this instance not as meaning something untrue, but in Aristotle's sense of the word *mythos*, story. This point needs to be considered more fully.[9]

Myths, let me say briefly, give a humanly comprehensible structure and meaning to the universe, which "human beings regard as demonstrations of the inner meaning of the universe and of human life" (Watts 7). We are apparently incapable of believing that our lives or the universe have no meaning, that life is just one thing after another with no pattern or shape. Myths seem to be a part of our mental equipment, a pair of glasses we can't take off. The philosopher Ernst Cassirer calls us *animal symbolicum* (26), defining humankind as the symbol-making animal; we may in fact be the story-making, pattern-imposing animal. "We tell ourselves stories in order to live," asserts the first line of Joan Didion's *The White Album*.

These myths fall into recurring patterns: they show up in our children's stories, in our dreams as adults, in the way we think of famous people in the past and in our own time, in our novels, movies

and television programs, and in fact, in the Bible. The clearest example is the journey. A minute's thought will produce an amazing number of instances of the journey. One can start a list with Little Red Ridinghood, who travels to Grandma's house only to meet up with the wolf, and continue it with the journey of Odysseus, the Greek hero who took 10 years to return home from the Trojan War, continually meeting up with monsters and the wrath of angry gods who tried to stop his return. How much a part of our own culture is the journey westward of the pioneers, their courage and hardship as they traveled to the promised land of California? Their more recent equivalent, of course, is the immigrant: willing, like so many grandparents who came over on the boat in the early part of this century, or unwilling, like the Africans who came here as slaves. The *Godfather* series of movies is an immigrant journey saga from Sicily to America and--in Part Three—back. The journey of the boy Huck and the runaway slave Jim as they travel the Mississippi to freedom from their restrictive society in *Huck Finn* mirrors the journeys of fugitive slaves northward to freedom.

In our dreams we often travel out into mysterious—often threatening—landscapes, encountering strange beings who remind us of people we know but are something beyond that. The medieval poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* captures this dream-journey landscape in the terms of the Christian and hierarchical society in which it was written. In our own time, technology has focused our attention on our idea of the journey to the stars: space travel has an emphatic hold on our imaginations, as became clear when that journey was interrupted in a burst of flame and smoke and death when the Challenger blew up.

The next step in this line of thought links biblical with other archetypal patterns. Adam and Eve journey out of Eden into a world of pain and sorrow. Moses has two journeys: one he makes down the Nile as an infant in a reed basket, and the other as the leader of his people as he takes them out of the Egypt of slavery into the promised land of freedom. Jesus, too, makes a journey out into the wilderness for forty days, where he meets up with and conquers the temptations of the devil before returning home and beginning his ministry. In fact, the whole Bible is the story of a journey from Eden lost and then back to Paradise, the new Eden (or New Jerusalem) which will be ours, we are told, after the end of the world as we know it. Milton, in his poem about part of the journey, makes the connection clear when the angel tells Adam that he and his descendants will have, in compensation for the paradise that has been lost, "a paradise within thee, happier far."

These wanderings are transformative; the person who goes on the journey comes back changed. The astronauts return to earth (the way it's supposed to happen, anyway) with new knowledge and information about the universe. The Israelites, after their slavery in Egypt and their wandering in the wilderness, have a new covenant with their God and a new sense of their destiny as a people. Huck Finn has decided that he'd rather be an outcast than accept the idea of slavery for his friend Jim. And even Little Red Ridinghood has encountered the danger of the world and learned something about life in the process. Journeys are, then, journeys of self-discovery in our imaginative shaping of them; a trip is not just traveling over territory but traveling into ourselves and learning something about ourselves or about our world that changes us forever.

Archetypal story patterns include, in addition to the journey, initiation when youth encounters experience (which we see frequently in novels and films about adolescents, *Catcher in the Rye* being one of the most obvious examples) or the quest, where the hero sets out to recover something precious—the holy grail, for instance. These forms overlap, one story having parts of another, as Luke Skywalker's journey of initiation becomes a quest to save the princess and ultimately his own self-discovery, the knowledge of who his father is.

Archetypal characters include the hero, the temptress (this is a pretty sexist one—if women had written the stories we'd likely have another sort), and the outcast—Jonah, for instance. They also include the devil as a figure of temptation, and the *Faustus* story is the story of the man who makes sort of a reverse journey, *away* from self-knowledge rather than toward it, journeying not into light and knowledge but into darkness by succumbing to temptation. This is a negative rebirth, where, after selling his soul (succumbing to temptation), the hero/villain descends to hell (either literally or into a hell of his own mind: "Why, this is Hell, nor am I out of it") rather than completing a journey.

Looking at archetypal patterns shared by biblical and modern materials, whether "Young Goodman Brown" or "The Lottery," whether Luke Skywalker or Bruce Lee, can enable students to see their own experience in patterned ways, and to see a connection between the literature they read in English class and the movies they watch for entertainment.

## Shared Themes

In addition to direct influence and to the sharing of archetypal patterns, the Bible has a third sort of link with other literature, and that is the sharing of themes whether through influence or through universality.

The theme of rebirth is a pervasive one, and nowhere more so than in African-American slave narratives and autobiographies. St. Paul sets the pattern by telling us that the old man must die so that the new man can be born, drawing on Jesus' paradoxes in the Beatitudes. Repeatedly, the narratives composed by former slaves such as Frederick Douglass or Harriet Jacobs speak of the new self emerging when they gain their freedom, or, to a lesser extent, when they learn to read. This motif of the new self, says Henry Louis Gates, reappears in the autobiographies of African-Americans such as Malcolm X, whose new name sharply distinguishes the old and new selves, or Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* (note that we've combined several sorts of Biblical relationship as Brown's title indicates), and the autobiographical fiction of *Invisible Man*, where the protagonist's moments of revelation give birth to successive new selves (*Loose Canons* 43-69).

One of the most significant biblical themes tells of the encounters of the Israelites with their neighbors, often seen as an alien and threatening—or dangerously seductive—"Other." Since many biblical narratives, Jonah, Ruth and Exodus among them, are shaped by this theme, it provides a way to look at "otherness" in cultural studies and at the interactions between and among groups in modern America.[10]

We commonly focus on the exclusivity of the Israelites, in the tradition of the prophets inveighing against whoring after false gods, understanding this as part of the struggle of this people to retain their group identity rather than be swallowed up by the myriad of related and more powerful cultures surrounding them. This resistance to assimilation finds its modern analogue in the desire of many members of ethnic groups to preserve their cultures: the dominant metaphor for cultural mix in modern America has become the salad, whose ingredients remain distinct even when they become part of a new whole, rather than the melting pot.

Closer examination of this issue in the Hebrew Scriptures seems to contradict that exclusivity, however. In the story of Joseph, for instance, "Joseph does not hesitate to mix with Egyptians; of course he has no choice. But he even marries an Egyptian girl and is not condemned for it by the writer. Joseph is able to communicate with the Egyptians on

moral issues by appealing to the universal sense of right and wrong. Both he and the Egyptians speak of 'God' with no further qualification, and there is no disapproval expressed at the thought that Joseph, a pious Israelite, is moving among outright idolaters" (Redford 247).

The stories of Jonah and Ruth take this willingness to mix freely with "the Other" while retaining one's own group identity a large step further, and so I would like to look at these two biblical narratives in some detail. They seem positively designed to assert human interconnectedness and the overcoming of social and cultural barriers, and therefore can function effectively in the multicultural curriculum.

Let us notice at the outset that Jonah is an example of the unlikely hero, a figure which turns up a lot: Moses with his speech impediment tries to suggest that God find someone else, and Samson's wild violence, moral obtuseness and lack of self-discipline do not make him the most likely candidacy for champion of God, but that's what he is. And King David, at first an obscure adolescent and later a murderous adulterer: can this be the hero of Israel? This theme of the unlikely hero suggests, perhaps, that Israel itself, most unlikely of victorious nations, third-rate power beset on all sides by more powerful neighbors and torn from within by gaps between rich and poor and even among families, continually backsliding from its good resolutions—Israel itself, unlikely hero that it is, will be God's champion and, in the longest of long runs, triumph over those rivals who are now remembered only *because* they were rivals.

This theme of the least likely hero is related to that of the reluctant prophet. I said earlier that Moses keeps saying, "why me?" and that is exactly what happens to Isaiah, who feels unworthy to carry God's message until, in a magnificent image, his lips are touched by a burning coal (held by an angel) and he is purified and compelled to serve. Jonah, however, carries this idea of the reluctant prophet to an extreme: when God tells him to go preach to the Ninevites, he immediately takes ship for Tarshish, in the opposite direction.

As we look at Jonah's story we'll see at least two themes, that love and mercy are stronger than mere reward and punishment "justice," and that this love, on God's part, is universal. These themes are among the things Jonah has to learn, and he is an unlikely hero not only in his resistance to learning them but also in the fact that we don't know, even at the end, if he *has* learned them—though *we* have.

These themes are expressed through the structure of the story, in the three instances of mercy God offers: Jonah is saved from the storm (or

the whale, depending on which you see as the greater danger), Nineveh is saved from destruction, and Jonah is given and then loses a sheltering vine, to show him the point of pity.

Jonah's actions contradict his words. His name means "son of the faithful" but his immediate response to God's command is to flee. As Edwin M. Good puts it, "Jonah . . . is a 'son of faithfulness or truth,' but he abandoned his faithfulness at the first opportunity and speaks truth only under duress, even then not understanding it" (42). He tells the sailors he fears God but of course he has tried to escape His power by sailing to Tarshish—out of His sphere of influence, perhaps, or at least as far away as he can get. The incongruity of Jonah seeing Yahweh as the creator of the sea, as Jonah professes to the sailors in 1:9, and his attempting to flee His command on that very sea, is lost on Jonah but not upon the readers of his tale (45).

In fact Jonah is satirized, made fun of, I think, through much of the story: he sleeps in unjustified assurance during the storm; the sailors have more compassion for him than he for the people of Nineveh, and when he has the most spectacular success in the history of prophecy—he says five words and this whole kingdom, down to the animals, repents in sackcloth and ashes—instead of rejoicing, he sulks. His response to the loss of the vine is as excessive as his response to his unexpected success at Nineveh: it would have been better for me to have died, he says. So the narrator has a bit of ironic fun at Jonah's expense, beyond the quite hilarious picture of the cattle in sackcloth. The serious point is that this irony helps shape our attitude toward Jonah. At the beginning, we are I think prepared to see things from his perspective, but by the end we see them from God's.

Even when he prays, in the whale, after having been delivered from the storm, he offers no recognition of his error in fleeing God's command. He's learned he can't get away with running and hiding, but has learned no deeper sense of mercy or obligation. He thinks in simple terms of "fault": the sailors should throw him overboard because the storm is his *fault*, but he sees no more profound point here.

So he goes to Nineveh, having acknowledged God's power to make him do so, and he preaches perhaps a bit beyond his instructions. God told him to "cry unto the people of Nineveh" but what he does is say "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Again, in other words, he sees things in terms of simple reward and punishment. God mentioned the wickedness of the Ninevites, but it is Jonah who envisions consequences and punishment. At this point we may be reminded of Job's comforters. They, too, think in terms of reward and

punishment: Job must have done something wrong, because look, he's being punished.

And so when the Ninevites, in an astounding, magical and therefore fantasy conversion, do repent, Jonah is angry: now, in his prayer to God, he says that's why he fled in the first place (we were not told this before), because he knew God was merciful. He is thus in the position of being angry that all these people were saved—his prophecy has been proved incorrect and perhaps he feels foolish—and blaming it all on God's mercifulness. He goes and sulks, "till he might see what would become of the city," perhaps hoping for a relapse.

God puts up a gourd-vine to shelter Jonah, then takes it away, in an attempt to show Jonah that his "I wish I were dead" is beside the point, as is his anger. "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night," says God; "And should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right and left hand?"[11]

We don't know if Jonah got the point; the crucial thing is that we do, and that we see that love and mercy are more important than simple "justice," punishment for wrongdoing which would condemn the Ninevites. That is why the story of Jonah is read at Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. And the author takes his point further still, because the city in question is not some Israelite stronghold which would turn its accustomed deaf ear to the cry of a prophet, but the stronghold of the enemy. Nineveh, capital of Assyria, is a pretty unlikely place for a Jew to feel mercy, and that is the very point, of course. It's *easy* to feel mercy for those *we* care about: but what about the Ninevites? We can see why Jonah was so resistant to their being saved, but we can also see that the story repudiates his narrowness and insists that God is God of all, even the Ninevites. Here, the idea of the border as fixed boundary between groups is repudiated in favor of a transcultural unity.

This universalism of lovingkindness is what the author of Ruth was showing us too, of course; part of what Jonah needs to learn is what Ruth the Moabite already knew, and what Joseph struggles to learn as he struggles to forgive his brothers. It's also what the so-called friends of Job need to learn too: life resists our simple formulas, our passion for pigeonholed justice and concern that stops at the border. Like the stories of Joseph and Ruth, the story of Jonah suggests to us that we bring about the desired ending when we strive to overcome our understandably human limitations and imitate God's lovingkindness.

As a commentator on this story has said, "Jonah must learn that mercy is not merely a capricious and negative suspension of law and order, but is an affirmative act of love. The implication is that man, made in God's image, should emulate God's compassion" (Warshaw 194).

As the author of Jonah made the significant choice of Nineveh as the city singled out for God's mercy, so it is important to note that Ruth is a Moabite, one of the neighboring but indelibly "foreign" peoples with whom the Jews had traffic. That this was an uneasy relationship is made clear by Deut. 23:3: "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever."[12]

As the story opens, Naomi, her husband, and her two sons have fled to Moab, leaving their homeland because of the famine there. The sons marry Moabite women and then, in a series of inexplicable calamities like those in Job, the father and two sons die, so that we move from the general loss in the famine, to the loss in this family and finally center our attention on Naomi, the bereft individual. She tells her daughters-in-law to leave her and seek new husbands, and Orpah, foil to Ruth, does so after an initial protest. Naomi sees herself as empty, and plays upon her name, suggesting it be changed from Naomi, "pleasant," to Mara, "bitter" as the two women travel to Naomi's homeland, Bethlehem, at harvest time. We know before the characters do—so we can enjoy watching them find out—that the field to which Ruth has come to glean the harvesters' leavings belongs to Naomi's kinsman, Boaz. One may see coincidence, the hand of Providence, or a long-range plan of Naomi to provide for Ruth here; evidence for such a plan increases when she advises Ruth to go to Boaz at night on the threshing-floor and ask for his protection.[13] Boaz, at first polite and kind, then admiring of Ruth's goodness to Naomi, at last looks upon her as a potential wife, going to the city gate to give an unnamed closer kinsman the first opportunity, as was customary. Ruth and Boaz marry and their son is "given" to Naomi to replace her lost sons. So the story moves from emptiness to fullness, from Ruth's being a stranger in Bethlehem to her becoming a member of a family group. Restoration is a key theme here, symbolized by the imagery of harvest and plenty at the end, in contrast to loss and famine at the beginning. Ruth and Boaz meet in a harvest field, and every conversation between them ends with Boaz giving Ruth food to take to Naomi; Boaz' commitment to Ruth is made on a threshing floor next to a heap of grain. Ruth goes from the barrenness of widowhood to the fertility of marriage as the earth itself is restored to fruitfulness.

The hand of Providence is light here, and the lovingkindness (*hesed*) in the human scene corresponds to God's. Boaz invokes God's sheltering wings for Ruth, but he himself acts to protect her. We have here a correlation of divine and human activity in which human goodness doesn't *earn* God's favor (any more than Naomi and Ruth "deserved" their losses at the beginning), but parallels it.

We would have here "only" a beautifully-wrought and moving short story without the point of Ruth's foreignness. But that is in fact emphasized, as the author insists on relating a genealogy at the end. Ruth and Boaz' son, Obed, we learn, is the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David, great king of Israel. Our narrator here insists on going far beyond what could have been left as an entirely sufficient "kindness to strangers" theme to place the stranger Ruth in the direct line of ancestry to the greatest of Hebrew national heroes. As with Jonah, the point here is that the God described is the God of *all*, Ninevites and Moabites and Israelites alike, and that this is a vision of their God the human authors of the Bible developed over a long period of time.

This is in some crucial senses Naomi's story—hers is the greatest loss and thus the greatest restoration—but if we shift our perspectives slightly and see it as Ruth's story, emphasizing her role as stranger with a claim on two conflicting cultural traditions, she will be a suitable literary companion for *The Woman Warrior*, for the women of *The Joy Luck Club*, and for the immigrant protagonist of "The Cariboo Cafe" (Kingston; Tan; Viramontes).

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One of the dangers we as teachers face as we expand the range of the texts we teach is that we will be perceived as selecting readings on the basis of some sort of literary affirmative action, condemning our assignments to be undervalued and their authors to be seen as fulfilling a quota. By using the Bible in conjunction with the work of modern noncanonical writers, we can set that perception straight, exposing our students to the wealth of first-rate literature available both within and outside the traditional canon. A literary reading of the Bible "presupposes a deep continuity of human experience that makes the concerns of the ancient text directly accessible to [us]. These millenia-old expressions of fear, anguish, passion, perplexity, and exultation speak to us because they issue from human predicaments in some respects quite like our own and are cast in the molds of plot, character, dialogue, scene, imagery, wordplay, and sound play that are recognizable analogues to the modalities of literary texts more easily familiar to us, closer to us in time and space" (Alter, *World* 205).

Thus the student who comes to the writings of, for example, Malcolm X, having studied (however briefly) the prophetic tradition of Amos and Hosea, will see the modern writer as embodying the concern for social justice that motivated the biblical figures, and will understand a prophet not as one who foretells the future in some mystical way but as one who projects the present trajectory into the future: if we keep on behaving in such and such a manner, certain consequences will result.[14] That student's understanding of the body of literature as a coherent whole, and regard for its individual parts as belonging within and being related to that whole, will surely be considerably advanced by such a project. Likewise, the student who reads Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* having seen how Amos and Hosea work at adapting and retaining an older ethical and spiritual system (that of egalitarian nomadic tribes) to altered circumstances in an urban, monarchical environment will see the dilemma in Silko's novel—whether the Native American can accommodate her need for, and sense of, ritual in a contemporary pluralistic society—as part of a continuing human dialogue on the topic.

In the end, perhaps, many of us still find much of our curriculum-building motivation in the opportunity to read first-rate literature with our students. Silko's novel succeeds as a novel not because it discusses significant ideas—though it does—but because, among other reasons, she creates enduring characters of depth and individuality about whom we come to care. In like manner, the authors of biblical narratives have created characters whose development over time and whose (illusion of) growth and change make us see them, as we do the characters of Shakespeare, not as exemplars of philosophic positions, but as figures with lives we can care about and understand. As Herbert Schneidau says, "Jacob and David truly age, wax and wane, and become unforgettably vivid in the process" (143).

Although its potential for enriching and extending the multicultural curriculum is clear, and although its presence in the literature classroom is one way between the Scylla of a rigid traditional canon and a Charybdis-like plunge into a canonless whirlpool, perhaps one of the most important benefits of integrating the Bible into the literature curriculum is the opportunity to introduce our students to these masterfully-wrought narratives.

## Notes

1. I am happily conscious of an enormous debt to my colleagues in the Los Angeles workshop of the 1992-93 ACLS Elementary and Secondary Schools Teacher Curriculum Development Project; from them I have learned much about teaching, literature, the humanities, and collegiality. In particular I would like to thank the keen editorial eye and generous spirit of Ed Rocklin, who has given lavishly of his time and expertise this year. He, and Susan Anderson, Marie Collins, Lynne Culp, Terry Henderson, Michael Jackson, Sandra Okura, Karen Rowe, Beverly Tate, and Howard Wilf, have contributed a great deal to both my education and my enjoyment.

2. Eliot's essay, first published in 1919, is often reprinted. I am using *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*.

3. The words in quotation marks are from Frye, *The Great Code* xii. The Morrison example is my addition to Frye's point; we may consider, for example, whether the final scenes of *Song of Solomon* are not indebted to biblical stories of bodily assumption into heaven as well as, more obviously, to African folktales such as "The People Could Fly."

4. Using the word "canonical" in the context of biblical studies can produce unintended and sometimes hilarious results. Since this is not a textual study, the reader can assume that any reference to the "canon" indicates contemporary rather than biblical works.

5. See, on Negro spirituals, Thurman, Walker, and Levine.

6. About this speech, Frederick L. Downing says "King framed that speech, as he had so many others, with the biblical imagery of the Hebrew exodus from slavery in Egypt. That night he talked of a long journey: out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, through the desolate wilderness, and then the hopeful march toward the promised land. The metaphors were personal and collective" (xii). Downing notes also the pervasiveness of the Exodus imagery in the writing of James Baldwin, such as *Go Tell It On the Mountain*.

7 Gilbert Highet's rhetorical analysis of The Gettysburg Address is often reprinted; I am using *The Little, Brown Reader*, 5th ed.

8. See the masterful rhetorical analyses of the "Letter" by Corbett and Fulkerson in Corbett's *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. For biblical patterns, see Alter, *Art of Biblical Poetry* and Licht.

9. The two most influential authors on archetypes are the literary critic Northrop Frye and the psychologist C.G. Jung. See Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* and Jung's *Man and His Symbols.*

10. I will not explore here the concept of the "otherness" of God as developed by Martin Buber among others, though that is certainly a pervasive theme as well and is captured in part by Harold Bloom's use of the word "uncanny" for the God of Genesis in his *Book of J.*

11. I use here as elsewhere the King James translation, not because it is the most accurate by contemporary standards (among others, the Jerusalem Bible is superior in that regard), but because if the issue is influence, we need to teach from the text that will enable our students to hear the verbal as well as the narrative echoes.

12. The passage is cited as evidence of the tradition against which the author of Ruth may be working by Northrop Frye ("Bride" 4).

13. Frye notes and dismisses the latter possibility: "When Boaz lies down to sleep on the harvest field, somewhat drunk, and Ruth comes to him and asks him to spread his cloak over his "handmaid," it is clear that with a very slight change of tone we should have a rather cynical seduction story in which Boaz is, as we say, being set up. Needless to say, that is not the tone of the Book of Ruth, nor what happens in it" ("Bride" 3-4).

For Naomi's understanding of the plan involved, whether it be God's or hers, see Rauber (170).

14. See Ackerman (xiv-xv) for an analogous unit on the prophetic tradition, ancient and modern.

# Nationalism, History, the Chicano Subject, and the Text

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Current events in Eastern Europe make it impossible not to be critical of nationalism, and, of course, marxism. I begin my inquiry with the observation that there was an anti-democratic tendency within the Chicano movement which manifested itself in the form of the suppression of alterity, specifically, the otherness of the Chicana lesbian and otherness of experimental art.[1] An analysis of this tendency will make it possible to consider a global issue, the relationship between democracy and alterity. I propose that one way to test the premise expressed by Jürgen Habermas and others, that modernity is based on the integration rather than the exclusion of alterity, is to turn to the work of spokespersons of alterity, Chicana lesbians.[2] In addition to the work of Marie Collins and Sue Anderson, my methodological approach in this essay draws on work done in cultural studies and particularly in the area of multicultural art, such as Lucy R. Lippard's *Mixed Blessings*.[3] I will argue that Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian has been repressed in Chicano nationalist and marxist culture. The link between the Dionysian and alterity in the context of democracy has been developed by Gilles Deleuze, Antonio Negri, and Michael Hardt. In a lecture at the University of California, San Diego, Chicano poet Alurista characterized Chicano literature as falling into three phases: 1) The Nascent Period (1965-75); 2) The Assimilationist Period (1975-85); and 3) The Current Period (1985-present).[4] In the first, basic social tension was largely related to racial and cultural issues. In the second, class distinctions were dominant. In the third and present period, conflicts over gender issues dominate. I will use Alurista's categories as markers if not guideposts. They will prove to be both useful and ultimately inadequate; Chicana writing did not just emerge; it has existed all along. Only sexism can be the sufficient, if not the necessary explanation for the exclusion of the discussion of gender issues in the first two periods.

The use I am making of Nietzsche's categories "Apollonian" and "Dionysian" is merely a starting point to get back to the moment of the theft or appropriation, in both Western theatre and pre-Colombian cultures, the theft of the feminine. It would be more accurate to speak of the pre-Apollonian/Dionysian, or perhaps of the time to which Gloria Anzaldúa refers in *Borderlands*, a time before the division of the

various attributes of Coatlicue into "good" and "evil."[5] It is the assimilation of female sexuality and Dionysus that makes the discussion so complex. By analogy, the Virgin of Guadalupe may be seen as linked to conservative political forces, as she is in Mexico in the guadalupana movement, or as a many-layered icon who ultimately harkens back to Tonantsín, as she is seen by Anzaldúa and many Chicanas. Similarly, Dionysus, Nietzsche's appropriation of Dionysus, and Deleuze's notion of "becoming-woman" may be rejected by feminists on the grounds that men are usurping the feminine, or that the Dionysian can be reclaimed in order to ground it in an older pantheon of female deities, as I am attempting to do in this discussion.

Three passages which deal with modernity, history, and capitalism have captured my attention lately, and I have returned to them compulsively. I believe they contextualize the problems of nationalism and the subject and allow us to enter into the arena of the relationship between democracy and alterity. The first, which refers to the views of French philosopher Michael Foucault, comes from Luc Ferry and Alan Renaut's *French Philosophy of the Sixties:*

> Contrary to Foucault's claim, the dynamics of modernity are not essentially that of the exclusion of otherness. The logic of modern societies is rather more like the one Tocqueville describes, namely, the logic of integration sustained by the proposition of the fundamental equality of all man[sic]kind. (90)

I consider this view to be Habermasian. I believe that Gloria Anzaldúa's documentation of the exclusion of otherness in the borderlands refutes this statement. Habermas' optimism regarding the "dignity of modernity" and the possibility of a dialogue, in which all parties would be able to begin and end the conversation and give and receive orders, fails to recognize the very real concerns about dialogue addressed by Anzaldúa.[6] In which language would the dialogue occur? She lists eight "languages" she speaks, all related to Spanish and/or English, that are found in the U.S.-Mexico region alone. The treatment of the other, poignantly portrayed in such poems as "We Call Them Greasers," hardly speaks to modernism's ability to integrate the other.[7]

The second, from Fredric Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious,* appears in the context of commentary on Louis Althusser's anti-teleological formula for history, and its relation to Jacques Lacan's notion of the Real and Baruch Spinoza's idea of the "absent cause":

> history is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, . . . as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form . . . our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconsciousness. (35)

Both passages raise issues which would have to be part of an inquiry into the nature of the logic of modern society from the perspective of someone living in the borderlands and would help us to formulate various alternative viewpoints regarding the relationship between democracy and alterity. Whether or not the logic of modern society is based on the exclusion of otherness or the logic of integration, and whether or not we can only know history in textual form, would have to be part of an inquiry into the nature of the logic of modern society. One version of this might go as follows: if we can only know history in textual form, then in order to answer the question about whether or not the logic of modern society is based on the exclusion of otherness, we might want to turn to literary texts about the exclusion of otherness. Certainly, the work of contemporary Chicana lesbian writers is useful here as is the research of Collins and Anderson and their use of the notion of "the generational unit" in order to study the history of the Chicano movement and one of its central figures, Valdez.

Finally, because a theory of the voice of the subaltern may itself be merely a contemporary form of colonialism, it is useful here to consider Gayatri Spivak. She argues, in "Can the Subaltern Speak?," that Deleuze and Foucault's insistence on the subaltern's ability to speak is comparable to the British attempts to outlaw widow suicide in India: "it is another case of white men telling brown men what to do with brown women" (Spivak 305).[8] Nevertheless, in the following passage, she accurately explains their model in *Anti-Oedipus:*

> Their suggestion, summarized, is that, since capital decodes and deterritorializes the socius by releasing the abstract [cf. Nietzsche's slave logic] as such, capitalism manages the crisis by way of the generalized psychoanalytic mode of production of affective value, which operates via a generalized system of affective equivalence, however spectacular in its complexity and discontinuity. (Spivak 110; brackets added)

Although this may not have been intentional, Spivak's reference to affect can alert the reader to Spinoza and his discussion of affect in the *Ethics*. Spinoza's theory of affects would take us beyond the confines of this paper. Suffice it to say that Spivak is discussing the links that

connect us through desire and how, according to Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism manages and controls these connections by reducing their differences to "a system of affective equivalence." Spinoza's theory of affects is discussed by the Italian critic Negri in relation to his conception of social organization and liberation grounded not in capitalism but an alternative tradition of democracy, making Spinoza a "savage anomaly." In Spinoza's "good city," inhabitants would have the opportunity to encounter each other in chance encounters which, rather than being unpleasant, might lead to joyful interaction. Spinoza's model allows for the inclusion of alterity without the homogenization of difference. Deleuze argues that there is a tradition of thought that runs from Spinoza to Nietzsche that does not lead to Hegel's dialectic and the subsumption of difference. How to bring the voices of the excluded into a discussion of history is what finally brings us back to the cultural production of Chicana lesbian writers and their emergence in this historic moment, that is, to the beginning of this essay. The following pages describe the emergence of an audience for Chicana writing against the background of the activist theatre of Valdez and others, and while doing so, engages in a discussion of the issues of the adequacy of periodization to account for the development of an audience for Chicana writing.

If we shift from a theoretical discussion of democracy and alterity to the concreteness of the classroom using Jean-Paul Sartre's work, with the reminder that he taught in the lycée, there should be nothing unusual about referring to the research of two high school teachers in the United States. Recently Anderson and Collins, who both teach in high schools, asked me how I would teach Anzaldúa's work, particularly to their Latino high school students, given the homophobia they knew they would face. I had been impressed with their attempts to bring Chicano culture into the high school curriculum in their joint research project entitled "Affirmation, Resistance, Transformation." They explained that they had not included Anzaldúa in the curriculum yet, but they wanted to do so; furthermore, they had been influenced by her work. In their curriculum project "Team-Based Curriculum: The Emergence of the Chicano," they look at the 1960s and 1970s from Chicano/a perspectives, while grappling with both historical and pedagogical issues and discussing three alternative pedagogies: constructivism, critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy. They use the concept of the "historical generation" to frame their work. I believe they have made a significant contribution to gender studies with their project and I am presenting my own research in relation to theirs. Their work

may shed some light on the Habermas-Deleuze debates with which I began this essay.[9]

Collins and Anderson create a curriculum "which allows the teacher to continue to teach the 'major' events of the traditional canon of American history . . ." but point out that "the concept of generational units allows the flexibility to examine the response of various cultural groups as well as gender and class groups" ("Affirmation" 4). I found this concept to be very compatible with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "minor" or what I would call "border" culture and, furthermore, an appropriate context for Anzaldúa's work. A generation may not be biologically or geographically homogeneous. Rather, its members can be linked politically and form a collective voice, although their voices are not identical (see Deleuze and Gauttari). While living between cultures, they react to a set of shared experiences, as do Anglos and Latinos living in the U.S.-Mexico border region. Collins and Anderson refer to Marvin Rintale's definition of generation: "a group of human beings who have undergone the same historical experiences" ("Affirmation" 4). The shared historical experiences Anderson and Collins discuss include membership in the "baby boom" generation; McCarthyism; the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis; detente; nationalist movements in Chicana, Cuba, Bangladesh, and African nations; Vietnam; political assassinations, in the United States; Watts; and Watergate. The responses to these experiences covered in their curriculum include the Black Civil Rights Movement, the Students' Youth Movement, Women's Liberation, the Chicano Movement, the American Indian Movement, and the War on Poverty. In thinking about shared historical experiences, I found it useful to return to the work of Ernst Bloch, "Nonsynchrony and its Dialectics." Bloch argues that we do not all experience a given historical period in the same way. For example, not everyone experienced 1968 the same way in which many French students and intellectuals did. Anderson and Collins underscore the importance of highlighting "difference within difference" in their discussion of the 1960s. Although they do not yet include Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga in their curriculum, they have laid the groundwork for doing so: the Chicana lesbian is the quintessential example of "difference within difference." It is in the context of this emphasis on alterity that I can introduce Nietzsche's categories.

I would argue that the Dionysian allow for alterity and that the Apollonian dominated the Dionysian in the early days of Chicano theatre, but that the tension between cultural nationalist and marxists reveals that the Dionysian/Coatlicuan conflict was present. That is, there was a space for the Dionysian among some cultural nationalists,

particularly in relation to pre-Conquest culture, a space that did not interest most Marxists. Nevertheless, it is not until recently, in the work of the "new generation" of Chicana writers, that the Dionysian has been allowed to emerge. I hope to uncover some of the rhizomatic relationships that connect form and content, "the traditional" and the experimental, and the Dionysian and the Apollonian in relation to contemporary Chicana writing. The contribution of conceptual art to the encouragement of formal experimentation among Chicana writers, and the demise of both Chicano nationalism and marxism have coincided with the outpouring of literary production from and audience support for Chicana writers. Despite the limitations placed on gender definition imposed by the historical antecedents of Chicano/theatre, including *commedia dell'arte*, *carpa*, and morality plays, and the forms favored by Valdez, the *acto*, the *mito*, and the *corrido*, new genres and reworking of older genres have emerged to allow for new forms of gender definition in theatre. This "new generation" connects women of different ages and sexual preferences, spanning 20 years. Whereas some of the younger writers are getting recognition in their twenties, their older sisters are getting the recognition they deserve in their forties. To make the point as strong as possible, my premise is that Moraga's work is not only more relevant than Valdez', but it has been, for the last 15 years, more useful in considering democracy and its relation to alterity.

Moraga has written about sexism in the Chicano movement in *Loving in the War Years*. Regarding the early period, during which youth and students of the Chicano movement developed a separatist, cultural nationalist philosophy, Collins and Anderson describe "the utopian '*El plan espiritual de Aztlan*,'" adopted in March 1969 at a conference in Denver, Colorado: "It called for the reclamation and control of lands stolen from Mexico (the U.S. Southwest), anti-Europeanism, an insistence on the importance and glory of brown-skinned Indian heritage and an emphasis on humanistic and non- materialistic culture and education" ("Affirmation, Resistance, and Transformation in Chicano Culture": Appendix). This important document did not address gender issues.

The situation is further complicated by the splitting described by Anzaldúa: "The male-dominated Azteca-Mexica culture drove the powerful female deities underground by giving them monstrous attributes and by substituting male deities in their place, by splitting the female Self and the female deities" (27). I cannot overemphasize this point.

In order to understand the dominance of gender issues in the current period, it is helpful to consider their past exclusion by examining: 1) three major elements within Valdez' work, the *acto*, the *mito*, and the *corrido*, 2) the influences of such figures as Bertholt Brecht, and 3) some of the historical antecedents of Chicano theatre, including Italian *commedia dell-arte*, *carpa*, and morality plays. What traditional forms have been recuperated and reworked in order to explore gender issues? Despite the aesthetic decisions made by Valdez and many Chicano artists, there is no need to assume that formal experimentation will result in depoliticization. As YvonneYarbro-Bejarano points out, "most recently, the lesbian Chicana emerged as desiring subject in a non-narrative form that showed the class and cultural construction of gender and sexuality" (148-49). Why was this not possible in the *acto* or the *mito?*

The most overtly political and didactic form used by Valdez was the *acto*; not surprisingly, it is somewhat limited both in terms of its depth of analysis of feminist issues and its openness to experimental element. The common drudgery and difficulties suffered by men in low-paying jobs and housewives were presented in parallel. In defense of the *acto*, Huerta notes that the high cost of living, unemployment, and inadequate housing made early Chicano theatre closer to the *acto* than to Ibsen. More contemporary Chicana feminists go further than both the *acto* and Ibsen: Anzaldúa and Moraga write about deeper spiritual, sexual and creative processes in women. The problem with the early *actos* is that the daily conflicts that become the scenarios of early *actos* all had one solution in common: "Join the union." Unfortunately, joining the union was not an adequate solution to gender issues. The union does not appear in Moraga's plays *Giving up the Ghost* and *Shadow of a Man*.

Unlike the *acto*, the *mito* is a form more amenable to a serious treatment of gender issues. Huerta writes: "To Valdez, the *acto* portrays the Chicano through the eyes of man, while the *mito* sees the Chicano through the eyes of God" (97). Note that neither see through the eyes of the Chicana; nevertheless the spirituality in the *mito* brings us closer to the Dionysian/Coatlicuan

The *corrido* is another prominent form in Valdez' work, unlike the *acto* and *mito*, it forms an integral part of Mexican culture. Just as the musical form of the *cumbia* embraced the issue of AIDS in Tijuana in the mid-1980s, there could conceivably be feminist *corridos* in the future. Collins and Anderson have students write their own *corridos*.

Having looked at three major elements in Valdez' work, the *acto*, the *mito*, and the *corrido*, I now want to address briefly the influence on his work of such figures as Bertholt Brecht. As Goldsmith Barclay relates in his essay on Brecht and Chicano theatre, "certain theatrical forms," that is, non-didactic forms, were rejected by *El teatro Campesino* because some *campesinos* said they could not understand them. One wonders if women farmworkers were asked.

What experimental currents existed alongside of, although perhaps out of sight from, Chicano *teatro?* Moraga began writing *Loving in the War Years* in 1976. As Moraga explains, her sense of Chicana identity grew out of her growing sense of lesbian identity. Given the attitudes about homosexuality that were prevalent in the Chicano movement during the 1970s, this is not surprising. Nor is it surprising that she found alternative forms in which to write, which did not include the *acto* or the *mito*: none of Valdez' work to date has addressed the situation of the lesbian Chicana.

We can return to *commedia dell'arte*, *carpa*, and morality plays to continue to explore the construction of gender in various theatrical forms which have influenced Chicano theatre. The multiplicity of forms found in *carpa*, which includes vignettes, songs, and dances, forms linked mainly by the fact that they could be performed under a tent by a travelling troupe, make *carpa* a genre that is conducive to the discussion of contemporary issues, including gender issues. Like the "slices of life" in the PBS production of Valdez' *Corridos*, "slices of life" continue to be part of the work of contemporary Chicana lesbian comedians/performance artists such as Monica Palacios and Marga Gómez. Both Palacios and Gómez use humor to explore gender issues. "Slices of life" and the telling of stories are also combined in the work of the Native American performance group Spiderwoman Theatre.

The prescriptive attitudes toward gender roles in morality plays make this a rich form for reworking in a contemporary context. Although written during the Nascent period (in 1973), in *El Jardín*, Carlos Morton does look at gender in a provocative manner. As Huerta explains, "the premise of the play is 'What if Adam and Eve were Chicanos and God a rich early Californian?' " (196). What remains intriguing about the play is the way in which the relation between a man and a woman is negotiated in the context of racism and the Church. When performed by Diana Contreras in 1992 at the Centro Cultural de la Raza in San Diego, the strength and eroticism of Eve was strikingly contemporary and closer to Chicana lesbian writers in its interrogation

of gender construction; it did not merely reiterate a simple virgin/whore dichotomy.

The urgency of the United Farm Worker's situation in the late 1960s, the influences of marxism and Chicano nationalism, and the lack of recognition of gender construction as a crucial part of political analysis resulted in a truncated Dionysian/Coatlicuan in Chicano theatre of the Nascent Period. In other words, there was a suppression of alterity within the Chicano movement. For example, in San Juan Bautista, Chicanos dressed for the Day of the Dead celebrations, using images that evoked the carnivalesque, in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense, and the Dionysian, in Nietzsche's sense. However, the context for these images was Apollonian; it was the use of theatre to teach and to politicize. The didactic overpowered the Dionysian. It was not until Chicana feminism and conceptual art on the West Coast, from the Bay Area to Mexico City, entering from Brazil, not just Europe, freeing the Latino/a artist from Western logic and European neo-colonialism, that a force as visually strong as the didactic art of Chicano murals and early *teatro campesino* could successfully counter these forms. We can compare the Day of the Dead celebration of the Nascent Period, in which gay and lesbian identity was not addressed, to the Day of Dead Celebration in San Francisco in 1986, for example, when the gay and lesbian communities joined forces with Chicanos in the Mission District to create a parade of stunningly beautiful floats containing altars memorializing those who had died of AIDS.

It was only after the convergence of "folk ritual" and the "secret history of women" as it informed the work of women linked to both overtly political and conceptual art, that the Dionysian could again be freed in the work of Latinas such as *altarista* and critic Amalia Mesa-Bains. As Ramón Saldívar writes:

> no study of Chicano narrative . . . would be complete without a consideration of the most vibrant new development in Chicano literature, the emergence of a significant body of works by women authors in the 1970s and 1980s. (172)

He adds, "Chicana writers are . . . building an instructive alternative to exclusively phallocentric subject of contemporary Chicano narrative" (Saldívar 175).

In conclusion, feminist pedagogy and gender studies can play an important role at the high school level; conversely, research generated in the classroom can be illuminating in the context of current debates

in gender studies and in the global discussion of democracy, our understanding of modern societies, and the analysis of capital logic. In "After *Aztlán* . . . A New Generation of Latino Writers," the final lesson of Collins and Anderson's curriculum, students read Cisneros, Latina/o poets of the nineties, and other contemporary work. They are encouraged to meet muralist Judy Baca and to visit the art gallery and community center Self-Help Graphics. The research of Collins and Anderson, particularly the use of the notion of "generational unit," is preparing the way for the creation of a curriculum in which the work of contemporary Chicana writers can be understood. With the fracturing of the paradigms of cultural nationalism and marxism in the border region, Chicanas find themselves relating to Aztec culture and to Aztlán in a new way. While developed in the high schools, the project of Collins and Anderson will have far-reaching implications for the teaching of Chicana writers at the university level. Their work can contextualize the introduction of Chicana lesbian writers at the university level, and, one hopes, at the high school level. Their research is being carried out, not insignificantly, on the West Coast, which can no longer be seen only in relation to the East Coast, or even to the north/south division between the United States and Mexico, but instead as part of a global Pacific Rim recentering. As such, it opens up new ways of thinking about how cultural groups may function in relation to one another in a multicultural classroom. The rejection of cultural nationalism by contemporary Chicana writers may serve as a paradigm for different rhizomatic connections linking culture, nation and gender in other border regions. It is a call for the necessity to go beyond both a cultural nationalist politics and aesthetics. It is an opportunity to reconsider the relationship between democracy and alterity.

## Notes

1. This essay is part of a work in progress; it is also the basis of a chapter of a book entitled *Nietzsche and Performance* to be published by the University of Minnesota Press. Parts of it and/or a related essay, "Foucault's Ventriloquism: Can the Subaltern Speak?," which will also appear in the book, have been presented at a reading at the University of California at Riverside, 10 February 1993, and at a *Cultural Critique* conference at National University, San Diego, 26 February 1994. This work will be presented in July 1994 in Germany at a conference on border culture in the context of Eastern Europe and in a special issue of *Diacritics* on Latin America (forthcoming).

2. This formulation of the relationship between modernity and alterity appears in Ferry and Renaut. It is my view that it is a Habermasian formulation. In his introduction to *Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age,"* Habermas distinguishes himself from the New Right: "The New Right warns against the discursive dissolution of values, against the erosion of natural traditions, against the overburdening of the individual, and against excessive individualism. Its adherents want to see modernization restricted to capitalist growth and technical progress while at the same time wishing to arrest cultural transformation, identity formation, changes in motivation and attitude—in short, to freeze the contents of tradition. By contrast, we must again bring to consciousness the dignity of modernity, the dimension of a non-truncated rationality" (15). Habermas is also the author of *Knowledge and Human Interests.*

3. Anderson and Collins are Los Angeles area high school teachers. They both participated as post-secondary fellows in 1992-93 in the UCLA workshop of the ACLS Program in Humanities Curriculum Development. Currently, Collins is continuing her research as a Ph.D. candidate.

4. Alurista was the editor of the seminal Chicano journal *Maize.*

5. As Anzaldua explains in *Borderlands,* the female deities were driven underground by Azteca-Mexica culture: "They divided her who had been complete, who possessed both upper (light) and underworld (dark) aspects. Coatlicue, the Serpent goddess, and her more sinister aspects, Tlazolteotl and Cihuacoatl, were "darkened" and disempowered much in the same manner as the Indian Kali" (27).

6. Habermas writes this in his introduction to *Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age."* Seyla Benhabib has written about the ideal speech situation in her essay "The Utopian Dimension in Communicative Ethics."

7. This poem can be found in *Borderlands* (134-35).

8. Since the publication of this essay, I have been told that Spivak has adopted a more pro-Foucault position. I want to thank Jim Merod for bringing this to my attention.

9. In my essay "Focault's Ventriloquism," I address both the Habermas-Deleuze debates and Spivak's attack on Foucault and Deleuze.

# Ms. Higgins and the Culture Warriors: Notes Toward the Creation of an Eighth Grade Humanities Curriculum

*John G. Ramsay*
*Carleton College*

Beneatha: Then why read books? Why go to school?
George: It's simple. You read books—to learn facts—to get grades—to pass the course—to get a degree. That's all—it has nothing to do with thoughts.
Beneatha: I see. (He starts to sit) Good night, George.

— Lorraine Hansberry,
*A Raisin in the Sun*

## Meet Ms. Higgins

In September, she'll begin her eighth grade humanities class with Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. Ms. Higgins knows that much. What her students will read next is uncertain. But at least she is excited about the first book in her new course at her new job.[1]

She was surprised to learn that *Raisin* was not already being taught. Then she read Arthur Applebee's *A Study of Book-Length Works Taught in High School English Courses*. Applebee found that although Hansberry was the most frequently required minority author in American public schools (grades 7-12), 41 white writers were more frequently assigned. *Raisin* is required reading in fewer than 30% of the nation's schools, although that percentage jumps to one-half in schools with a 50% minority enrollment (Applebee 12-17). Hansberry is not one of the recommended authors in William Bennett's "James Madison High." Ms. Higgins felt confident she had made the right choice: one of the great, but sadly neglected American plays of the twentieth century.

She had not thought she had a good chance for the job, even as she prepared for her interview back in May. She had a district wide reputation as an outstanding reading instructor, but she had earned that reputation as a third grade teacher, and had never worked with early adolescents before. And, although in college she had majored in both English and history, she had felt daunted by the job title: middle school humanities coordinator.

Still, she did her homework, including the reading of the AAUW's *How Schools Shortchange Girls*. The report infuriated her and she said so in her interview. She told Ms. Johnson, her prospective principal, that she would not tolerate the "boys will be boys" rationalization for the harassment of her female students. And she would work hard to create an atmosphere and a curriculum that would sustain and build female self-esteem rather than diminish it. Ms. Johnson seemed pleased with these pledges, but then asked: "But what does any of that have to do with *A Raisin in the Sun*?"

As she replied, Higgins was pleased by the certainty she heard in her voice. She said: "I want both my young men and women to meet and understand Beneatha Younger—her intelligence, integrity, dignity, and, of course, her love of reading. She is exactly the kind of young woman they are not going to find on television, or in the pages of *Sassy*, *Seventeen*, and *Young Miss* (Evans et al.). She is exactly the kind of young person, I hope all of them will become—curious, thoughtful, feisty, and loving."

But now that she has the job and June is slipping away, she is beginning to feel overwhelmed. During the first week of August, she will work with her colleagues, the other members of the eighth grade team, on redesigning the English, social studies and art curriculum. Late in September, she will stand before the parents of her students and explain the role of the humanities in the education of an eighth grader. Each morning when she gives herself a pep talk, she says the same thing: "*You* better become more like Beneatha Younger, if you expect to pull this off."

What scares her most about her new job is knowing that she will be inheriting many of the reading problems she saw in the third grade. Only now those problems will be five years older, five years worse. She is shocked by some of the findings reported in *Reading In and Out of School*. In 1990, 30 percent of eighth graders reported that they never read in their spare time—up 11 percent since 1988. Fifty-two percent of eighth graders reported that they talked about their reading with family or friends "monthly, yearly or never" (Foertsch 29). According to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress, the weakest quarter of her readers will be reading only slightly more skillfully than most fourth graders. Since 1971 only the top quarter of all eighth graders have made any significant gains in reading. The skills of the bottom three quarters have declined since 1980 (Mullis et al. 118-119). Each week eighth graders spend 21.4 hours watching television, 5.6 hours doing homework, and only 1.8 hours engaged in outside reading

*(National Education Longitudinal Study* 48). "Somehow we're teaching them that reading doesn't matter," Ms. Higgins has thought during her more discouraged moments.

But at the same time, she feels a growing sense of purpose and direction. She has been working on the questions, "Why read at all?", and "What is the educational value of studying the humanities?", and thinks she has found a mentor: Dennie Palmer Wolf. As she read Wolf's *Reading Reconsidered*, she stopped and looked down in her notes and found on page after page: "Yes!" She likes Wolf's insistence that reading—serious, reflective reading—is both a developmental and an investigative process. It involves thinking out loud, talking to oneself, keeping a journal, making connections to other texts and stories. Reading is a way of "becoming mindful," and all children are, but can become more mindful. Mindfulness is not reserved for her brightest, or best readers. The teacher of mindful students "must be willing and able to unfold for their students the process of wondering and investigating"*(Wolf, "Reading" 31, 39). Higgins thinks best in metaphors. In her notes she writes: "Good readers and students of the humanities are good detectives of texts."

Still Higgins has lingering questions. Wolf seems long and true on process, but short and vague on the question: "Mindful about what?" Higgins agrees that her students need to read a variety of genres: essays, letters, poems, novels and plays. She would add biography and autobiography to Wolf's list. And, "Yes!", Higgins agrees that "we have to offer them books worth entering, worth groping toward, or worth being crisscrossed." But what are those books? Or does it really matter? Will any reasonably interesting offerings do for this year? Should she just return to Applebee's list (or Bennett's, for that matter), and do what everyone else is doing? Or should she accept Wolf's challenge "that teachers in a school might spend time thinking about a core of works they want to be able to build on . . . ."(*Reading* 53).

She turns to Tom Holt's *Thinking Historically*, and finds it helpful. A humanities curriculum cannot be comprised entirely of literature. And in any case, she knows that literature cannot be taught apart from the history which educated its author. "Is there a scene, or even a line in *Raisin* that is not informed by the history of race and racism in the United States?", she asks herself. What she wants to avoid is the approach of some of her old English teachers: If you know just one key biographical or historical fact, then the entire story, play or poem becomes crystal clear. She agrees with Holt that history needs to be taught as an "ongoing conversation and debate rather than a dry

compilation of 'facts' and dates, a closed catechism, or a set of questions already answered" (13). She wonders what primary historical documents could be used to illuminate *Raisin* and vice versa.

But what she finds most interesting and challenging is Holt's insistence that to study history is to be confronted by one's own assumptions, myths, values and value hierarchies. He writes:

> The act of interpretation cannot be value neutral or entirely objective. The "discipline" we aspire to is to bring the values and subjective influences out into the open. In other words, we must ask questions of ourselves as well as of the documents. (Holt 26)

She begins to reexamine her admiration for Beneatha, her instant dislike of Walter Lee, and her ambivalence toward Lena and Ruth. She scribbles in her notes: "Raise the questions: To what extent does *Raisin* dramatize the folly of allegiance to a single governing value? How have certain stories shaped the values of family members? In what ways do the values of each member of the Younger family change and why?" She has heard numerous quotations and slogans about the self-revelatory capacity of the humanities, but now for the first time she begins to believe she can describe, and explain how that process works—and sometimes does not work.

Higgins now recognizes that she has two distinct paths ahead of her. She can stick with what got her this far: her skills as a reading teacher, her passion for literature and history, and her love of children. When she meets with her colleagues and addresses the parents of her students, she can trot out the goals and justifications she already knows. "Studying the humanities this year will make your children stronger readers, better thinkers, and skilled detectives of texts." Echoing Wolf, she can vow to close the skill gaps between her strongest and weakest readers: "We cannot continue to create a kind of two-tiered literacy" ("Reading" 53).

She could employ the humanities as tools metaphor: tools for higher order thinking, more effective problem solving, more advanced academic tasks. She is willing to argue that the development of increasingly skilled and insightful readers is an educational end, in fact, an incomparable end in itself. Reading is the key to a self-educating life, and a deliberative, democratic society. She has no doubt that she could pull it off convincingly. She believes, in other words, that she can develop a persuasive, impregnable rationale for her curriculum without having to address the issue of the distinctive educational virtues of the

humanities. Then she pauses and looks at her notes again: "To what extent does *Raisin* dramatize the folly of allegiance to a single governing value?"

The other path leads back to her question for Wolf: "Mindfulness about what?" As an elementary reading teacher she was quite comfortable with a professional conception of self as skill builder. But Holt's concern with values is leading in another direction. What bothers her about her skills rationale for the humanities is the worst case scenario. What if it works? What if her young women at the end of the year are still reading *Sassy*, in fact reading more *Sassy* than ever before? What if their vocabularies have increased, and they are reading more critically and perceptively, but they are still emotionally and intellectually satisfied by reading articles entitled: "How to Flirt," "How to Ask the Time Without Hyperventilating," and "How to Kiss" (Evans et al. 106)?

When she first heard the expression "culture wars," Higgins had to laugh. She wondered why comfortable academics on cushy campuses were so eager to embrace such a violent metaphor to describe their tranquil lives of researching, lecturing and writing about ideas. Perhaps it made them feel more alive and imperiled, more connected to the front lines, more in touch with the housing projects, streets and playgrounds of her students. She remains skeptical. The last thing she wants to do is spend her summer reading vitriol by people who do not know what they are talking about.

Still she has assembled her reading list and her list of questions. She knows her list is highly selective, if not idiosyncratic, but she is confident that her readings will lead outward to a broader sampling. She is hoping to find some insight, some provisional answers to the questions she believes will help her build a humanities curriculum and a rationale for it.

Her questions are: How important is reading to the study of the humanities and why? When students study the humanities, what should they study? How do individuals, groups, communities and societies benefit from the study of the humanities? What interpretation of history and contemporary national circumstances informs a particular view of humanities education? What are the curricular implications of a particular view of the humanities?

Higgins begins her summer reading, strangely comforted by Lola Szladits' idea: "Research in the humanities is the quest of a potentially unexpected answer to a possibly ill-defined question" (19).

Higgins is surprised to feel an immediate affinity for the work of Diane Ravitch. She knows that Ravitch was Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement in the Bush Administration--a regime Higgins found long on rhetoric and short on action. She also knows that Ravitch is often associated with the common culture programs of William Bennett, E. D. Hirsch, Lynne Cheney and other educational and political conservatives. Higgins does not see herself as conservative, however often her students insist that her tastes in clothes and music are very old-fashioned.

But as Higgins reads Ravitch's *The American Reader: Words That Moved a Nation*, she thinks to herself: "This woman knows what I'm up against." The humanities texts in the anthology are organized into historical periods, and Higgins is impressed by their quality and variety —political manifestoes, speeches, poems, letters, songs, essays, court documents and decisions. The number of pieces by writers of color and women is significant— Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Stanton, Lucy Stone, Emily Dickinson, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Booker T. Washington, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and on and on.

Higgins is pleased to learn that Ravitch is a strong advocate for the idea that reading is an essential and neglected skill. She makes compelling points about the place and importance of reading in American education. First, she points out how self-defeating school book publishers and curriculum designers often are by noting how infrequently elementary school readers "depict boys and girls who like to read, or adults whose education allowed them to make a great contribution to the good of society" (Ravitch and Finn 216). Second, she argues that reading cannot be replaced by other means of obtaining information. Illiteracy and aliteracy disenfranchise—politically and culturally: "those who only listen and watch will be at the mercy of those who write the scripts, program the computers, interpret the news, and extract meaning from the past" (Ravitch, *American Reader* xiv). And she lists Hansberry among the major writers around whom an English curriculum should be built (Ravitch and Finn 220).

Ravitch's view of the benefits to individuals who study the humanities seems modest, even cautious to Higgins. Ravitch writes: "Knowledge of the humanities cannot guarantee that one will become wise, ethical, or moral, but it engages one in the serious consideration of what it means to be wise, ethical, and moral." The nation as a whole benefits from a "well-conceived and well-taught humanities curriculum" be-

cause such a curriculum "is a means to larger ends: the enhancement of a free, just, stable, and secure society" (Finn, Ravitch, and Fancher 6). Higgins has no quarrel with these ideas, but she has heard them before, and worries that her eighth graders, their parents and her colleagues will find them vague, impractical, and insufficiently rousing.

Ravitch's vision for humanities education is informed by her forebodings about the renewal and rise of ethnocentrism throughout the world. In her view, the schools must play an important role in preventing the balkanization of American culture.

> Ethnocentrism is the specter that has been haunting the world for centuries—causing war, injustice, and civil conflict. Ethnocentrism tells people that they must trust and accept only members of their own group. It tells them that they must immerse themselves in their own cultures and close their minds to others. It says to members of the groups that they have nothing in common with people who are of a different race, a different religion, a different culture. It breeds hatred and distrust (Finn, Ravitch, and Fancher 243).

The United States will be a society held together by cultural glue, only if educators reject the ethnocentrism of particularistic multiculturalism and embrace the pluralistic version of multiculturalism, which she favors.

Higgins finds four key elements to Ravitch's concept of a common culture. First it is a civic culture, "shaped by our Constitution, our commitment to democratic values, and our historical experience as a nation." Second, it is multicultural, "the creation of many groups of immigrants, American Indians, Africans, and their descendants." Third, it is dynamic, "we remake it in every generation." Finally, it assumes that our common humanity binds us together culturally "transcending race, color, ethnicity, language, and religion" (Ravitch, "Multiculturalism Yes" A44). Higgins finds this conception of a common culture desirable as an ideal, but not a very accurate description of the cultural world of American public schools. She wonders: "If this is true, why is Lorraine Hansberry read in only a third of our schools?"

On closer inspection of *The American Reader* Higgins discovers that Ravitch really cares most about the first element of her concept of common culture: civic culture. The emphasis is clearly on our national political life, the democratic experiment, as the subtitle says: "words that moved a nation." What Higgins finds lacking are those texts which

address intrapersonal issues of identity development and interpersonal issues of love and betrayal within friendships, families and cultural communities. She knows that these issues of the heart are often the most compelling for eighth graders—and central to her own reading of *Raisin*.

Higgins would like, at some point, to place the play in the context of the national movement for black civil rights. In theory, Ravitch would endorse that approach. In her view some chapters of the black quest for civil rights illustrate "milestones of oppression"; others "our national commitment to justice and equal rights." She argues in favor of white and black students studying the history of racial discrimination in the United States: "This is not a black story, but an American story" (Ravitch and Finn 249). And Ravitch is in full agreement with Holt about the educational value of teaching conflicting historical interpretations: "Where genuine controversies exist, they should be taught and debated in the classroom" (Ravitch, "Multiculturalism: E Pluribus Plures" 352).

Unfortunately, *The American Reader* would not be of much help in supplying the supplementary historical curricula for situating *Raisin* during the civil rights movement. Although she does include both Martin Luther King's "Letter From Birmingham Jail" and his "I Have A Dream" speech, they are in a section entitled "Troubled Times." There are no other texts on the civil rights movement by people of color. Still, Higgins has to concede that Ravitch's framework is provocative and worth exploring further. Certainly racial discrimination, civil rights, and assimilationism are important themes in *Raisin*. If Higgins' approach to the play is to address these issues, she will have to know more about the biographical and historical events and ideas which influenced Hansberry. She makes a note for herself: "Find a copy of Hansberry's *The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality*."

## The Multiculturalism of David Mura

At the outset, Higgins is confident about her approach to multiculturalism. Part of her intention in selecting *Raisin* as her first book is to send a message to her students and their parents: multiculturalism will be an important theme this year. We will not just be reading books written by and for the white middle class. We will read and study the literature and history of people of color for aesthetic, cultural, and educational reasons.

She can imagine herself providing her rationale for a strong multicultural emphasis in the following way. "All students need to learn about the richness of African-American, Latino, Native American and

Asian-American literature. Students should read about the issues of bigotry and racism, prejudice and discrimination that inform many pieces of multicultural literature. Students of color should know that many people of their race and ethnicity have answered their calling, served arduous apprenticeships, and then given us some of the greatest literature in the English language." But as she listens to herself rehearse this rationale, Higgins hears herself reciting the standard liberal pluralist model: "Our country is made up of many wonderful and diverse peoples. We need to learn about as many of them as possible if we are to understand who we are as a people." She hears Ravitch.

As she reads several of David Mura's essays, her doubts about a liberal pluralist rationale for a multicultural approach to humanities education deepen. Mura is a *Sansei*, a third generation Japanese-American poet, writer, and political activist. He grew up in Chicago in an assimilationist family: eating American junk food, rooting for the Cubs, and identifying with G.I.s in movies about World War II. He writes: "Much of my life I had insisted on my Americanness, had shunned most connections with Japan, and felt proud I knew no Japanese . . ." (*Turning Japanese* 9).

But Higgins learns that the story of David Mura is the story of his complex evolution and his emergence as a writer for whom "the issues of race were central" ("Secrets" 19). As Mura married, became a father, steeped himself in multicultural literature, traveled to Japan, and established new literary reference groups, his assessments of himself as a Japanese-American changed markedly. As he began his journey to Japan, he questioned whether he had a stable, tangible identity at all. He writes: "I was constantly sinking into the foam of formlessness, a dissolving identity . . ." (*Turning Japanese* 32). As he matured as a multicultural writer and artist, he began an inner journey "to discover myself as a person of color, to discover the rage and pain that had formed my Japanese-American identity" ("Secrets" 21).

In one sense, Mura's multiculturalism claims to be both a world-wide political movement and an historical, although denied, reality of American life. In the American context, it is the story of how and why the dominant white, middle class culture miseducates and distorts the individual and group identities of people of color. In part, Mura's version of multiculturalism is a political movement whose goal is just compensation for property stolen from people of color during the history of the United States ("Strangers").

But in another sense, Mura's multiculturalism is an educational project in which teachers must be skilled at addressing issues of race

and willing to do so. For students, it entails becoming readers who are knowledgeable about race and racism. Higgins begins to realize that becoming a multicultural reader is a more complicated, challenging process than Ravitch seemed to acknowledge. From Mura's arguments, Higgins infers four principles for multicultural curriculum design and pedagogy.

First, one of the virtues of multicultural art is its capacity to "challenge the denials and comforts of being a member of a privileged group, whether that group be whites or men or heterosexuals or middle or upper class." Multicultural texts offer a not very flattering mirror for readers sitting in comfortable social, economic and political positions. To avoid taking on these issues of privilege and denial is to rob multicultural art and literature of its force and power. To avoid the issues of race in multicultural literature and art is to miseducate students about what it means to read intelligently and sensitively.

Second, multicultural literature (and all literature) is political—addressing, tacitly or overtly, the relations between the powerful and powerless, society's elites and the dispossessed. To read multiculturally is not just to begin to study a literary tradition, as Wolf suggests. It is to embark on an arduous investigation of the author's cultural and political circumstances—the local, national and international settings in which the text was conceived, published, read and reviewed.

> Such arguments [that all literature is political] are long and complex; to understand them completely requires numerous close readings of texts, along with forays into biography, sociology, history, economics, and any number of relevant areas. (Mura, "Multiculturalism" 60)

In reply to the charge that such an approach "reduces literature to sociology," Mura replies: "But why should we regard such an approach as a reduction?" Multicultural literature presents white readers with the opportunity to see human suffering and their proximity to it more clearly through the development of what Mura calls an "empathic imagination" ("Multiculturalism" 72).

Third, multicultural art brings readers into a direct confrontation with the anger of the oppressed, and its potentially liberating power. Mura argues that the liberating process is "both long and complicated":

> one must first learn how liberating anger feels, then how intoxicating, then how damaging, and in each of these stages, the reasons for these feelings must be admitted and accurately described. ("Strangers" 21)

Higgins is ill-at-ease with the prospect of her classroom becoming an arena in which students of color vent their rage at their society, white students, and her. But on the other hand she is embarrassed to admit to herself that it never occurred to her to explore the anger of the Younger family as a central theme in *Raisin*. The pages bristle with anger at whites, each other, wealthy blacks, the ways in which their dreams have dried and festered. She wonders: "How will my students read that anger—its expression, and depth? How it is assigned and misplaced? How do I read it?"

Finally, the serious study of multicultural literature should not be read in a narrow context of national literature, since these works "confront lives which bear greater similarity to those in the Third World" (Mura, "Multiculturalism" 75). Higgins realizes that for the most part she had been assuming an American studies approach, even if she rejects Ravitch's democratic experiment framework. But now she pauses, and considers the role and character of Joseph Asagai, the Nigerian student so smitten with Beneatha. She realizes that she can only get at the issues of political hope and despair, historical progress and reaction so central to the play by a close treatment of his character.

There is irony for Higgins in Mura's claim that multicultural literature can fulfill the white liberal need for hope, "the need to find some link with people of color." On the one hand he argues that "whites must exchange a hope based on naiveté and ignorance for one based on knowledge." But on the other, his writings are filled with examples of well-meaning, well-educated white liberals who are unwilling or unable to "face their whiteness" ("Multiculturalism" 64).

Mura's own sense of hope seems very precarious to Higgins. At one moment he has boundless confidence in the power of multicultural literature to rid society of racism. Of the successful political and educational efforts to gain reparations for Japanese-Americans illegally interned during the Second World War, Mura writes: "If every American child had read *Yellow Light* by Garrett Hongo or *No-No Boy* by John Okada or other works by Japanese-American authors, such education would not have had to occur." But in the next moment, he claims that the de facto segregation of American society "keeps whites from having to confront directly and intimately the lives, views and emotions, of people of color" ("Multiculturalism" 75).

Higgins realizes that she can embrace Mura's literary agenda by teaching about the politics in *Raisin* without publicly endorsing his political agenda of compensation. She's uncomfortable with the idea of tying her developing vision for a multicultural curriculum to a specific

political goal. And she anticipates having enough to do by way of unfolding the complexities of Asagai's character and his role in the play.

She writes in her notes: "Re-read Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Fugard's *Master Harold . . . and the boys*. Get a hold of Studs Terkel's *Race: How Blacks and Whites Feel About the American Obsession*."

## The Critical Pedagogy of Maxine Greene

Higgins knows that Maxine Greene is a philosopher of education, but she is trying not to hold that against her. Higgins had several required courses in philosophy of education as both an undergraduate and a graduate student—each more ponderous and pointless than the last. But Greene does not seem to write, think, or even experience in the same way as her colleagues in the profession. Yes, she can ramble on about Plato, Rousseau, and Dewey. But she seems especially skilled and insightful about the poetry of Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore; the novels of Walker Percy and Alice Walker; the prose of Frederick Douglass and Carol Gilligan.

Greene's vision of humanities education goes beyond the study of literary texts to include music, painting, film, and dance. She argues: "they [these art forms] have the capacity to defamiliarize experience; to begin with the overly familiar and transfigure it into something different enough to make those who are awakened hear and see" (*Dialectic* 129). Higgins remembers the battles for the record player in the Younger household and wonders if it would be a good idea to approach some of the identity issues by having her students examine the clash of musical tastes. What attracts Higgins is Greene's audacious commitment to using the humanities to illuminate and clarify issues of educational theory and practice.

Greene's vision for humanities education is informed by her cultural and political critique of American society in the late twentieth century, in what she calls "this peculiar and menacing time." In part her critique addresses systemic problems of corporate capitalism: "there are unwarranted inequities, shattered communities, unfulfilled lives." But she is equally concerned about the ineffective responses to these inequities and oppressions; the failure of our institutions to offer anything but "technical answers." On a personal and community level, she is disturbed by how easily and thoroughly Americans have accommodated themselves to the "Complacency and malaise; upward mobility and despair," that surrounds them. In her words: "no population has ever been so deliberately entertained, amused, and soothed into avoidance, denial, and neglect" ("In Search" 439).

In its simplest expression Greene's critical pedagogy is an education about and for freedom. It is a way of organizing curricula and classrooms, reading texts, initiating and sustaining dialogue which allows students to discover a variety of cultural and political oppressions, and imagine how greater degrees of freedom might be achieved. In Greene's words:

> Perhaps we might begin by releasing our imaginations and summoning up the traditions of freedom in which most of us were reared. We might make audible again the recurrent calls for justice and equality. We might reactivate the resistance to materialism and conformity. We might even try to inform with meaning the desire to educate "all the children" in a legitimately "common school." ("In Search" 441)

Higgins is stirred by these words. Here is a woman after Beneatha's own heart. Critical pedagogy is less a set of principles than an approach—a process of teaching students how to name problems, imagine alternatives, and embrace a commitment to be faithful to their imaginings.

In many places Higgins finds that Greene's critical pedagogy is restrained and self-conscious, inviting students into a process of thinking while protecting them from manipulation—even by their teacher. Greene's memorable teachers "were able to communicate, by the way they handled their materials or gave assignments or spoke with us, the idea that people actually begin to learn when they begin to teach themselves" ("How Do We Think" 59).

Education about freedom begins in the recognition of the myriad ways in which we oppress each other, violate each other's dignity as people. It attempts to convey to innocent students and respond to students who know all too well "what it must be like to be made into an object by another human being" (Greene, *Dialectic* 104). What makes this step so difficult—both politically and educationally—is the fact that this subjugation thrives when the oppressed have internalized the oppressors image of themselves. But this moment of recognition can be made by students who read about literary characters and historical figures who have spoken the truth, named their oppressors, identified the ways in which their self-images have been distorted, their senses of self-esteem disfigured. Higgins finds this framework compelling, but she also has her doubts: "Is every grievance an oppression? Is Mama oppressing Ruth when she meddles in her rearing of Travis? If not, what is a teacher to do with interfamilial tensions and conflicts of 'his sort?'"

Education about freedom ends in praxis in "intentionally organized collaborative action to repair what is felt to be missing, or known to be wrong" ("In Search" 439). This is why reading imaginative literature is so important for Greene. In her words: "The idea is to challenge awed passivity or a merely receptive attitude or a submergence in pleasurable reverie." Literary characters can serve as models for students in that they are both "struggling for moments of wide-awakeness" ("What Happened" 52-53). Greene's critical pedagogy challenges students to name the voids in their lives, imagine a transcendent vision, then move collectively toward the creation of alternatives: "spaces of freedom."

Higgins finds that her reservations about Greene's education for freedom are similar to Gerald Graff's concerns about the ideas of other advocates of critical literacy and pedagogy. The unaddressed question of the cultural left, in Graff's view is this: "what is to be done with those constituencies which do not happen to agree with them that social transformation is the primary goal of education? In a democratic culture, planning a curriculum inevitably means organizing ideas and approaches that you often do not like very much" ("Teach the Conflicts," 70). Higgins thinks that Graff has a good point. She asks: "Even if I embrace critical pedagogy as an individual professional, can I justify it as the organizing principle for the entire humanities curriculum?"

As Higgins sets Greene aside it occurs to her that the culture warriors are really fighting over what, for lack of a better name, she calls value venues. Higgins thinks of value venues as the cultural and political locations in which certain values arise, are maintained, debated, contested, and revised. In her experience there are many different kinds of value venues: intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergenerational, intracultural, intercultural, intraracial and interracial, civic, international and on and on. Ravitch is most concerned about the national, political value venue. Mura is devoted to exploring intercultural and interracial value venues. Greene is more difficult to pin down, but she seems especially concerned with the community value venues, which inform public school theory and practice.

In Higgins view, each of the culture warriors is arguing for the supremacy of their value venue. Each is arguing that humanities curricula should privilege the concepts, issues, and debates of their favorite value venues. But Higgins is wary. She is inching up to the conclusion that a middle school humanities curriculum should be arranged around a multiplicity, rather than a hierarchy of value venues.

## The Brain Race of the Human Resource Educators

One scene from *Raisin* keeps flashing through Higgins' mind. She winces every time she thinks about it. Walter Lee is needling George Murchison, Beneatha's upper middle class suitor, for wasting his time at college. He demands that George tell him what he is learning at college: "How to take over and run the world? They teaching you how to run a rubber plantation or a steel mill? Naw—just to talk proper and read books . . . (Hansberry 85). What was not clear to Walter Lee and many other people, just after World War II is very clear to Higgins in 1993. The opposition between reading and doing, learning and working, studying and producing, knowing about books and running the world has evaporated. Still she knows that some of her students may believe in these oppositions as strenuously as Walter Lee. And with these concerns about the relationship between reading and working in mind, she turns to the writings of the human resource educators.

Higgins finds their relentless listing of various kinds of reading, knowledge, performance and skills gaps rather numbing. First, The National Commission on Excellence in Education conferred status on this group by highlighting reports of the gap between the reading skills of high school graduates and the instruction and safety manuals of corporations and the armed services (*A Nation At Risk* 9).

Then, George Bush's *America 2000* advanced the idea that American taxpayers had financed an expensive performance gap, claiming that between 1981 and 1991, the nation increased its spending on education by 33 percent. He wrote: "and I don't think there's a person anywhere who would say—anywhere in the country—who would say that we've seen a 33 percent improvement in our schools' performance" (3).

Most recently, there is concern about the reading gaps between American and the foreign students who will one day make up the work force of competing economies. Stevenson and Stigler found a disproportionate number of weak readers among American fifth graders. One third of the Americans, as compared to 12 percent of the Chinese and 21 percent of the Japanese were reading at the third grade level (48). Furious, Higgins wonders: "What really is the point of all of this American student and teacher bashing?"

The point, according to Ray Marshall and Marc Tucker, is that the most serious national crisis of the late twentieth century is our lack of economic and educational competitiveness. Unlike many of their competitors, American businesses have been slow or completely unable to move from a mass production to a human-resource form of

capitalism. In *Thinking for a Living: Work, Skills and the Future of the American Economy*, Marshall and Tucker argue that the decline of mass-production economies places a premium on workers, and firms that know how to learn from their competition. In a global economy driven by high technology, productivity, and quality products, the education of the work force becomes a key factor. In their words, "The successful firm is the firm that organizes itself as a learning system in which every part is designed to promote and accelerate both individual learning and collective learning—and to put that learning to productive use." In their estimation only 5% of American firms are responding to this challenge by embracing both high-performance work organization and Total Quality principles (Marshall and Tucker 102, 103).

Higgins has trouble simply dismissing the concerns and arguments of this group. She knows that the parents of some of her students are laid-off routine production workers with marginal literacy skills. She would consider herself a failure if any of her students lost opportunities, or jobs, because of their inability to read in the work place. Higgins asks herself some hard questions. "Will my students read well enough to hold high-skill, high pay jobs in organizations facing international competition? Does that mean I should direct all of my energies to trying to build a better work force for the nation's corporations? If it is true they are spending 200 billion dollars annually on training, why shouldn't I give up on humanities education and go to work for them?" (Eurich 18). She decides she needs to know exactly what they are proposing.

She is not surprised to find ambivalence about humanities education among the human resource educators, but she is frightened by how narrowly some of them have defined reading. In June of 1991, then Secretary of Labor, Lynn Martin issued *What Work Requires of Schools*, the recommendations of The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). Reading is designated in the report as a "basic skill," rather than a "thinking skill" or a "personal quality"—all part of the foundation of a competent worker of the future. But as Higgins sees how reading is described, she decides a more accurate label would be highly specialized sub-skill. Martin informs parents and teachers that "all employees will have to read well enough to understand and interpret diagrams, directories, correspondence, manuals, records, charts, graphs, tables and specifications." Higgins groans, she knows High Tech Business English, when she sees it.

But what Higgins finds most inexplicable and ironic is that Martin's notions of "thinking skills" and "personal qualities" are by no means minimalist and narrow. When employees think, they should do so

creatively, know how to learn, and employ reasoning, so that they make decisions and solve problems. Among their personal qualities, Martin lists "responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management and integrity/honesty." What she does not explain is how young people will achieve any of these lofty skills and qualities, if all they are reading is reams of corporate correspondence. "Integrity/Honesty" is defined as "chooses ethical courses of action." The possibility that students might learn about ethical courses of action by studying the moral quandaries of literary characters seems to be lost on Martin (*What Work Requires of Schools*, xvi, xviii).

But Higgins perseveres and does find two human resource educators who advocate a core curriculum of rather traditional humanities texts. David Kearns, former Chairman and CEO of Xerox, and Denis Doyle, Senior Research Fellow at the Hudson Institute published *Winning the Brain Race: A Bold Plan to Make Our Schools Competitive in 1991*. For Kearns and Doyle, the problem is that "We are producing a generation of young Americans that neither understands nor appreciates our democratic society" (85). As Higgins reads, she realizes that they are never clear about whether they want teachers to emphasize the "understanding" part or the "appreciating" part.

Kearns and Doyle place three sets of values on their curricular agenda—democratic, citizenship and workplace. Workplace values are summed up in three words: "Punctuality, neatness, and civility" (97). The problem, she decides, is that they can't make up their minds whether they want students to "learn values," or learn how to think critically about values. In her experience, critical thinking does not necessarily yield appreciation for the ideas under consideration—or even for critical thinking itself.

Then there is the issue of their curiously self-defeating pedagogy. They write: "To know something about the great documents of citizenship is a prerequisite to assuming one's duties and enjoying the opportunities of citizenship." Later they write: "The key here is exposure" (Kearns and Doyle 100, 102).

"Exposure" makes Higgins gag. "This is the problem with these half-hearted efforts to teach everything. They all aim too low, at a smattering of this and that, as though the whole point was to have students who would hold up their end of a conversation by saying 'Oh yeah, I heard of that.' They are content to raise awareness, sensitize, expose, but not to help students understand." She finds herself siding with Wolf: "Don't expose! Teach fewer works for deeper understanding."

In the end, Higgins is left with two troubling conclusions. On the one hand she is certain that the human resource educators have little to offer someone trying to conceptualize a humanities curriculum. On the other, she worries that they may prevail in their attempts to shape the American curriculum. As she reads Secretary of Labor Robert Reich's *The Work of Nations* she feels a mixture of envy and loathing for America's "symbolic analysts"—"those who solve, identify and broker new problems," and who, unlike the other four-fifths of the American work force, are "succeeding in the world economy" (268).

The education of symbolic analysts consists of the development and refinement of four basic skills: abstraction, system thinking, experimentation and collaboration. These are the skills, so Reich argues, taught at the nation's best schools and colleges to the nation's most affluent young people. He criticizes "the compartmental fallacy" of most schools because it obscures a student's vision of large, complicated systems of problems. The teachers of symbolic analysts do not practice the compartmental fallacy. Symbolic analysts "are taught to examine why the problem arises and how it is connected to other problems" (Reich, 229, 231). Higgins is ambitious for her students; she wants them to have these skills, and she thinks Walter Lee would want them too.

But the other side of Reich's success story evokes no admiration. Higgins learns that it is these same symbolic analysts who are destroying public school systems around the country by retreating into their private residential communities and taking all of their tax dollars with them. In Reich's words:

> symbolic analysts are quietly seceding from the large and diverse publics of America into homogeneous enclaves, within which their earnings need not be redistributed to people less fortunate than themselves (268).

The human resource educators have not provided Higgins with any governing principles or organizational frameworks. But in a curious and circuitous way, they have allowed her to see more deeply into *Raisin*. She returns to the themes of work and underemployment, social class and social mobility, poverty and the trappings of being middle class that are critical to Walter Lee's anger and ambition. She returns to the words of Mama: "My husband always said being any kind of a servant wasn't a fit thing for a man to have to be. . . . And my boy is just like him—he wasn't meant to wait on nobody" (Hansberry, 103). Higgins writes in her notebook: "Reread the testimony of workers in the 'Cleaning Up' section of Studs Terkel's *Working*."

It did not take Higgins long to learn what she had been suspecting that the heat and fury of the "Which values?" debate is matched, if not exceeded by that of the "Which medium?" debate. For Higgins the issue becomes: To what extent should our humanities program make use of film, and television to develop visual literacy at a time when many of our students are reading so infrequently, with such disinterest, and with such weak skills? Higgins answers without hesitancy: "very little." For every single hour of pleasure reading her students do, they watch 10 hours of television. Higgins' dream is to reverse this ratio, not make it worse. "Why should I spend my time indulging the habits of the overindulged?"

The complication is that Higgins loves both the Sidney Poitier and Ruby Dee and the American Playhouse films of *Raisin*, and intends to show parts of one or both of them in class. And so she wonders how she can justify this use of class time to her colleagues, the parents of her students and herself. The last thing she wants is a snide remark from a math or science teacher: "Oh so that's what the humanities are—having a VCR baby-sit your students." And, of course, there are the larger questions of if and how to use the other visual forms of popular culture: political cartoons, music videos, advertisements, magazines, video games?

In her heart of hearts, Higgins thinks that Neil Postman is right. Television has caused the reading crisis by insinuating the criterion of entertainment so deeply into our culture, we are, to use his phrase, "amusing ourselves to death." In his words: "Books, it would appear, have now become an audio-visual aid" (Postman 153). But she also finds herself in agreement with the views of those, such as former Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities Lynne Cheney, who argues that Postman's position is unduly pessimistic. In *Humanities in America*, she expressed confidence that there were a variety of successful programs and approaches that use the "image to increase appreciation for the word" (Cheney 20).

The most successful program, in Higgins' estimation, is the new PBS television series "Ghostwriter." She is very impressed with the work of Colette Daiute, the series' senior educational adviser. She finds little to argue with in Daiute's description of "Ghostwriter's" stories, and their possible benefits for her students:

> They [the episodes] involve plots that center around such problems as injustice, clashing points of view, and

> poverty, and they include such varied interests as comics, video games, and friendship. The characters approach text confidently and resourcefully, while acting pretty much like real kids. Since these mystery stories hinge on reading and writing, viewers become involved with literacy as they become involved in the characters and plots. (Daiute 12)

Higgins wonders why there are so few books and bookcases on the sets of "Ghostwriter," but she is grateful to be able to recommend at least one show to her students and their families. Still she has her own dilemma to work out. She decides she needs a clearer understanding of exactly what visual literacy is.

In their book, *Visual Messages: Integrating Imagery and Instruction*, David Considine and Gail Haley define visual literacy as "the ability to comprehend and create information that is carried and conveyed through imagery" (p. 15). Higgins has reservations about both halves of the definition. On the "comprehension" side, she is not convinced that this is as serious a problem as Considine and Haley suggest. In their view, children and adolescents can be easily manipulated by visual media and have a difficult time distinguishing image from reality. They report the case of a 14-year-old who allegedly poisoned two of her friends after viewing the movie *Heathers*. They conclude:

> Although such instances are rare, they demonstrate how impressionable young people can be. Adults who are trying to help young people deal with the pressures and problems associated with substance abuse, sexual experimentation, and other issues cannot afford to ignore the allure and social sanction often afforded by the silver screen. (Considine and Haley 1991)

But from Higgins' perspective this argument, its implied threat aside, does not add up to an endorsement of a visual literacy approach to the humanities. What it suggests to her is that she needs to continue to see teen movies, not teach them.

She finds the "creation" side of the definition more plausible, but still not convincing. Yes, she agrees that her students need facility with a wide range of communications skills and media. Nor does she have a quarrel with Considine and Haley's list: photographs, cartoons, advertisements, computer programs and videotapes. Yes, she agrees that a humanities curriculum should include them. But still she wonders: Isn't this the responsibility of our art teacher? My business is imagery created

through words, hers is imagery created in other ways. She will make a point of asking the art teacher if she could design an art project connected to the characters, setting, themes or props of *Raisin*.

Higgins is of two minds about Considine and Haley's other ideas and classroom suggestions as well. Yes, she thinks it is important to challenge stereotypes, myths and factual distortions in movies about historical events. No, she will not have the time to show Oliver Stone's *JFK* in order to do that. Yes, having her students write an essay comparing Sidney Poitier's interpretation of Walter Lee with Danny Glover's would qualify as one of Wolf's "performances of thought." No, she does not think this is the kind of culminating project which brings her students to the heart of the play.

*Visual Messages* actually contains analysis and suggestions for teaching the original film version of *Raisin*. Higgins finds this section the most disappointing of all. *Raisin* is described as "essentially a Black film in which Whites are only incidental to the plot." Teachers are instructed to have students "make a list" of the "difficult conditions" the Younger's live in, find evidence of Walter Lee's many prejudices, and discuss what they think the Younger family should do in the face of this [Lindner's] opposition" (Considine and Haley 227–80). As Higgins reads this, Mura's point about how difficult it is for white liberals to face their whiteness becomes more forceful and disturbing.

## Conclusions

As Higgins pauses in her reading, she is filled with misgivings. She is bothered by the question "What have I really learned that will make me a better teacher?" After weeks of reading, she is haunted by a Robert Coles quotation: "the humanities do not begin in a student's reading experience, but in our lives—the moral preparation we bring to school, to our reading experience" (321). Now, halfway through the summer, she has to face the fact that she knows nothing more about the "moral preparation" her students will bring to school than she did back in May.

She also realizes how much she has been taking for granted. She has assumed that once again her new students will find her likable, fair, caring, organized, interesting, smart and clear. In other words, she has assumed that her students, at least at the outset, will give her the benefit of the doubt, follow her lead, give her a chance to teach them. She has temporarily forgotten the warnings in Herbert Kohl's *I Won't Learn From You!* Kohl wrote that many children cope with school through the conscious strategy of "not-learning," convinced as they are that learning the teacher's version of the truth "can sometimes destroy you."

(10) After all of this reading, she does not even know how she will explain and justify her humanities curriculum to her students. What will she say as she introduces *Raisin* on the first day?

She is tempted to adopt the humanities as tools metaphor, and let it go at that. She feels a strong need to put these books behind her, and get to her school, get into the community, and start meeting with colleagues, parents, and students. But she decides that the first step is to try to develop some consensus about a curricular direction among her colleagues. Right from the start she needs to present herself as a well-informed, self-aware leader, who is receptive to good ideas, insightful criticisms, and cogent arguments. Her plan is to present each of the six humanities curriculum frameworks—including her own—for discussion and debate.

She begins to rehearse her introductory speech to her colleagues: "What I would like to do this morning is lay out six different humanities frameworks, which we might adopt to guide us this year. I will be as candid as possible about my likes and dislikes, and it will not take you long to locate my biases, and to recognize my debts. I'm trusting that you will be as critical of the Higgins model, as I am of the others."

"I've spent most of the summer reading and thinking about the frameworks of the culture warriors, various theorists of humanities education. At the outset, I assumed that I would find one best one, or be able to combine the best features of several of each. But then I concluded that the most appropriate framework for our students is one informed, but not overridden by theory. I reached the conclusion that what we need is a vision of our work which arises out of our reading of our humanities texts, rather than descending from on high. At that moment I realized that I was no longer a reading teacher. At that point I knew I had become a humanities professional, on an equal footing with the scholars and policy makers I had been reading. I realized that the culture warriors had won at least one battle. I had become one of them."

In closing I'd like to say that I have tried to think of some way of being fair to George Murchison. But I've decided that I cannot abide his instrumental view of reading. I agree with Beneatha: "Mama, George is a fool—honest."

## Notes

1. To my knowledge, Ms. Higgins first became interested in educational theory in Jencks, "Whom Must We Treat Equally for Educational

Opportunity to Be Equal?" Her dilemmas were frequently on my mind during the University of Minnesota Workshop of the ACLS Elementary and Secondary Schools Teacher Curriculum Development Project. Credit for whatever insights this paper holds is shared with my friends and colleagues from the seminar: Marcia Eaton, Michael Kennedy, Lyn Lacy, Mary Oberg, David Rathbun, John Ouellette-Howitz, Cynthia Rogers and Rohn Stewart. Responsibility for the paper's shortcomings rests entirely with its author.

# History and the Humanities: The Politics of Objectivity and the Promise of Subjectivity

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For those who wish to reflect upon the politics of claims to historical objectivity, the classroom scenes in Luis Puenzo's 1985 film, *The Official Story*, are particularly instructive. The film's heroine, Alicia Marnet Ibañez, is a history teacher in an Argentinian academy in 1983. As the film opens, Alicia is the unquestioning bearer of the official story of Argentina's recent past: at home, she happily mothers as her own a child, Gaby, "found" at birth in 1978 by Alicia's husband, Roberto, a financier and government supporter; at school, she teaches history mechanically according to the official texts. The scenes in Alicia's classroom, which punctuate the story of her reluctance to confront the question of Gaby's parentage, reveal the powerful ways in which Alicia's claims to historical objectivity reinforce her private comfort and blindness.

The first classroom scene shows Alicia greeting a new class with her customary demands for order and discipline. Later, she expresses her disapproval of a teacher of literature (of course!) who uses exuberant role-playing to engage his students' imaginations and to foster freedom and creativity. As her students attempt to question interpretations or to open up issues left firmly closed by the textbook, Alicia silences them by noting that history is not a debate and that she requires them simply to memorize and recite (or at least to summarize) the official texts. In a highly charged scene, her students plaster the classroom with clippings about the "disappeared." Alicia grimly removes this alternative (and impermissible) sort of historical evidence, and moves to discipline the outstanding rebel by reporting him to the authorities. Only the intervention of the literature teacher saves Alicia from this further blind complicity in the repression and disappearance of the Argentinian opposition. Alicia's life, teaching and historical vision are strictly bounded by the official story. Further, the film suggests through brilliant juxtapositions of home and school, it is decidedly in her interest to uphold the boundaries—indeed, not even to recognize their existence. Such are the politics of objectivity.

Very well, we might comment, but that was Argentina at a particularly repressive moment in its recent history. Surely the democratic, multicultural United States of America fosters no such private or public

repressions. Perhaps not in those exaggerated forms. But as the government develops national history standards to be enforced through nationwide "objective" testing of schoolchildren, it is hard to conclude that we are completely free of an official story. As "history wars" rage in public schools and universities around the country, it is difficult to dismiss the power of the myth of historical objectivity. And as advocates of "traditional" historical scholarship and teaching lament the "politicization" of the discipline, it is impossible to ignore the politics of objectivity. This essay seeks to reflect upon these issues in light of recent scholarship on the American historical profession, and to suggest a possible alternative to the fallen myth of historical objectivity, contained in the promise of subjectivity itself.

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In tracing the emergence and ascendancy of the myth of historical objectivity, it is well to note the broader cultural context. Not only did this founding myth of the American historical profession arise in the midst of a general European and American love affair with science (as Peter Novick discusses so well in *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*), but it also found fertile ground in a nation in whose own founding myths that of a neutral, objective "rule of law" figured centrally. American presidents from Thomas Jefferson to George Bush based claims for American exceptionalism or "uniqueness" upon this concept of a rule of law, grounded in objectivity, fairness and impartiality. If this founding myth managed to ignore the fundamental omissions (of women, people of color, the poor) in American constitutions and laws, and to reinforce, legitimize and naturalize the social power of dominant Americans, so much harder to shake were its claims to political objectivity.[1]

Similarly, the myth of historical objectivity was embraced enthusiastically by a profession of elite, white males without an ostensible or acknowledged political agenda. For most historians, this was undoubtedly a myth in which they believed; for some, perhaps, it was a regulative fiction. Still, with all charitable motivations ascribed to these historians as individual scholars and teachers, the politics of objectivity for the group are hard to deny. Certainly the notion of objectivity was very useful for the professionalization of the discipline, and the disciplining of the profession—or, to put this another way, for the repression and disappearance of amateurs and other outsiders. This is apparent in Novick's treatment of the years between 1890 and 1960 (when the myth of objectivity prevailed more often than not), as well as in Jacqueline Goggin's subsequent study of women historians and

the American historical profession between 1890 and 1940. Goggin cites various instances in which women were rejected for professional appointments or research funds on the grounds that they could not be sufficiently objective. For example, when asked to recommend a historian to write about the women's suffrage movement in 1916, J. Franklin Jameson put forward a man, noting that a woman at Smith who was interested in the topic might not be able "to take an entirely broad view of the subject" (Goggin 782). And so it went.

The myth of historical objectivity shaped not only the professional identity of historians, but also the nature of historical evidence. History, the myth held, like all social sciences, could and should operate scientifically. A verifiable hypothesis should be checked against all of the "facts" in all of the archives. Competing bits of written data should be weighed (objectively, of course) and all of the bias of the writers and historical actors emptied out. Then, and only then, could a point-of-viewless story be told: the truth. The supposed congruence of this process with both Western science and American law, as well as its utility in regulating a nascent profession, doubtlessly added to its inherent intellectual attractions of coherence, simplicity and totality.

If the wider cultural context bolstered the rise of the myth of historical objectivity, broader intellectual and social currents also contributed to its decline and fall. In American political culture, one need only mention the jolt from the consensual 1950s to the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, when various groups of social outsiders demanded voice, recognition and rights—and eventually the acknowledgement of separate cultural identities and subjectivities. The objectivity of American law, the neutrality of original intent, and even the fairness of the founders' vision were questioned by scholars and activists alike. The sacred realm of science itself was subjected to critiques of gender and racial bias, as well as its unexamined relations to the power of the state.

Within the historical profession, the same period saw the complex diversification and fragmentation of the profession and the discipline. The entrance into the profession of women, working-class men and people of color combined with the demand of "every group [for] its own historian" to shake the old, easy assumption that a historian from a dominant group could speak for all. As in literature, art, music and other humanistic disciplines, newcomers to the historical profession often brought new perspectives, questions and methods, and challenged the historical canon of great events, great men and great deeds. The canon, some suggested, was less a manifestation of objectivity than a teleological justification of established social hierarchies. Indeed, the (slow)

diversification of the historical profession also raised the political issue, profoundly troubling to many traditionalists, of whether a middle-class, white male historian could speak for outsiders at all, without appropriating and distorting the stories of those whom the canon had traditionally silenced. Echoing developments in the larger culture, the discipline of history suffered separatism and schism into sub-fields, as historians in different areas tended less and less to read each other's work or to value each other's methods and approaches. The unified, "objective" story of the past seemed to slip away forever, leaving only the clamoring voices of former outsiders and the lamentations of former insiders.[2]

At the same moment, the instability of historical evidence was exposed, and the "scientific" assumptions of the founding myth assailed on all sides. First, cognitive and social psychologists challenged the possibility of ever locating an objective observer or historian. Selective perception and subjective judgments were inevitable, they argued, with the greatest gaps developing between individuals inhabiting very different social spaces. If one's life experience prepared one to credit certain stories or "facts" and to discredit others, then an objective stance was an impossible dream. This challenge, coming as it did from a "scientific" discipline with case studies and control groups, was particularly difficult to ignore.[3]

Second, poststructuralists and postmodernists from a variety of humanistic disciplines attacked historians' (and other social scientists') naive views of facticity and narrative. The troubling questions from this quarter came fast and thick: can any "facts" or social "reality" exist without prior construction and interpretation? Can any narrative escape rhetorical strategies and subjective choices? If not, what separates fact from fiction in the archives, or in our historical writing? The belief in the solidity and objectivity of historical narrative, as opposed to slippery, subjective literary interpretation, eroded with each successive question—at least among those historians who heeded the postmodern discussion in the humanities of the politics of narrative.[4]

It is at this critical juncture at which we now stand—if a "we" can still be said to exist. In the midst of this disciplinary confusion and professional schism, is there any hope for the future? In the face of the demise of its founding myth, can the historical profession survive and historical scholarship and teaching be strengthened? In spite of all of the division and lamentations, I believe that we can glimpse the promise of new approaches and intellectual frontiers. But all depends upon historians' willingness to forsake the founding claims of objectivity and social science, and to embrace enthusiastically the possibilities

contained in subjectivity and the humanities. Here I can only suggest three of the many avenues we might pursue: a deliberate shift to interdisciplinary models; the inclusion and emphasis of new types of evidence (especially those traditionally considered too modest, just as popular culture has been seen as too lowly to enter the literary canon); and, perhaps most important for teachers of history, the cultivation and development of our powers of empathy.

The first area of promise might come from the blurring of disciplinary definitions and boundaries themselves. As disciplinary solidity and hubris break down, new interdisciplinary conversations appear more possible and fruitful than ever before. In particular, interdisciplinary connections within the humanities promise to enrich historical texts, which are now seen to be alive with different interpretative possibilities, inner tensions, and intertextuality. Indeed, our very conception of a text might expand considerably. Interdisciplinary work might also further enliven historical contexts, now apparently filled with contestatory individuals and social groups, and previously unrecognized relationships of power. Paradoxically, as historians abandon claims to historical objectivity, our services are increasingly sought by "new historicists" in a variety of humanistic disciplines. Assuming that linguistic gaps can be bridged and methodological tensions contained, interdisciplinary connections might prove more exciting and sophisticated than ever before.

The unexpected pleasures and rewards of interdisciplinary conversations are already becoming apparent in the work of some adventurous historians. For example, out of a long teaching collaboration with the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, Robert Darnton began pressing at the boundaries between history and cultural anthropology (that most humanistic strain of anthropology). Darnton's celebrated book, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, attempts to do "history in the ethnographic grain" (3), as it explores the systems of meaning behind eighteenth century French peasant folktales, artisanal apprentices' jokes and ceremonies, bourgeois urban topography, and intellectuals' epistemological strategies. Sharing the cultural anthropologist's sense of excitement at "capturing otherness," Darnton finds his point of entry to the archives in the unfamiliar: "When we cannot get a proverb, or a joke, or a ritual, or a poem, we know we are on to something. By picking at the document where it is most opaque, we may be able to unravel an alien system of meaning. The thread might even lead into a strange and wonderful world view" (Darnton 5). His anthropological emphases on the interpretation of systems of meaning and on the unfamiliar complement Darnton's historical interest in

change over time and place, as he attempts to historicize the insights of cultural anthropology.[5]

Throughout his book, Darnton's goal is "to show not merely what people thought but how they thought—how they construed the world, invested it with meaning, and infused it with emotion" (3). Everywhere he registers his recognition that "ordinary" people "think with things, or with anything else that their culture makes available to them, such as stories or ceremonies" (4). Therefore his concept of historical "texts" is very broad indeed, including folktales, rituals, ceremonies, role-playing, jokes, proverbs, and popular medicine. But Darnton also insists on the importance of broader contexts for understanding individual maps of social reality. He believes that at all levels "individual expression takes place within a general idiom, that we learn to classify sensations and make sense of things by thinking within a framework provided by our culture" (6).

Darnton's method, then, is to examine "ethnographically" the language and structure of his various texts, and to relate them "to the surrounding world of significance, passing from text to context and back again until one has cleared a way through a foreign mental world" (6). This rather imprecise and subjective method cannot produce a systematic or "objective" account, and Darnton admits as much. He hastens to deny any claim for the typicality of his peasants or artisans, as he readily reveals that his chapters "are meant to interconnect but not to interlock like the parts of a systematic treatise" (262). But his contextualized analyses of texts with disguised symbolic meanings and multiple layers of deference and rebellion yield an intriguing, if undeniably subjective, historical interpretation informed by interdisciplinary perspectives.

A second model for new interdisciplinary connections appears in the recent work of Joan Wallach Scott. Her groundbreaking collection of essays, *Gender and the Politics of History*, was inspired by discusions with literary scholars at the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women. As Scott admits, seminars over the years there virtually forced her to come to terms with poststructuralist theory and its implications for her field of French social history. She found this process of discovery both rewarding and difficult. In transgressing disciplinary boundaries, she encountered "problems of language and translation, of the adaptability of reigning disciplinary paradigms, and of the significance—if any—of supposed oppositions between the methods and projects of history and literature" (Scott 1). Not simply abstract theoretical issues, these problems shook Scott's sense of

professional and political identity. She emerged determined to apply the poststructuralist insights of literary scholars and philosophers to historical study through a series of essays on gender and the politics of historical research and writing.

Like Darnton, Scott examines the construction of meaning rather than facts or causality—the how rather than the what or why. To study the "conflictual processes that establish meanings" or "the ways in which such concepts as gender acquire the appearance of fixity," Scott must pose new questions that upset the basic narratives of traditional history. "The story is no longer about the things that have happened to women and men and how they have reacted to them; instead it is about how the subjective and collective meanings of women and men as categories of identity have been constructed" (Scott 5, 6). Her texts are decidedly not limited to those usually associated with women's history, for she finds gender, the social organization or knowledge of sexual differences, to be centrally present in political and diplomatic history as well as in social history. For Scott, "gender is, in fact, an aspect of social organization generally. It can be found in many places, for the meanings of sexual difference are invoked and contested as part of many kinds of struggles for power. Social and cultural knowledge about sexual difference is therefore produced in the course of most of the events and processes studied as history" (6).

To explore gender in such disparate texts, Scott must also develop a new way of reading, a new historical method. The "literal, thematic reading" typical of history will no longer suffice (6). She turns to the methods of literary deconstruction, to learn from its emphasis on textuality, or "the ways arguments are structured and presented," and its governing assumption "that meaning is conveyed through implicit or explicit contrast, through internal differentiation" (7). Moving a step beyond Darnton, Scott regards contexts themselves as unstable texts, full of contested and shifting meanings. While Darnton uses the work of French social historians as context for his interpretation of peasant folktales and other puzzling texts, Scott subjects the work of French social historians to textual analysis, for it, too, constitutes power through knowledge. Social reality is forever slightly out of focus, as the lens moves from text to text, rather than from text to context.

Despite these methological experiments, however, Scott remains a historian. She attests to her fundamental interest in "historicizing gender by pointing to the variable and contradictory meanings attributed to sexual difference, to the political processes by which those meanings are developed and contested, to the instability and mallea-

bility of the categories 'women' and 'men,' and to the ways those categories are articulated in terms of one another, although not consistently or in the same way every time" (10). Thus Scott, too, offers a daring, if "inevitably partial," attempt to open an interdisciplinary conversation without losing her historical soul (11). Paradoxically, her approach promises to introduce a new epistemological rigor into the historical discipline, by borrowing from that openly subjective neighbor, literature.

Subjectivity also promises us an opportunity to uncover and value new kinds of historical evidence, as old demands for "facts" and objectivity wane. We might follow the pioneers in African-American and women's history in placing greater value on oral histories and personal, subjective lives and letters, without advancing claims of universality, typicality or representativeness for them. An excellent example of this subjectivist stance comes in Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's introduction to *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. Noting that Ballard's diary was long neglected by historians who found it too trivial and subjective, Ulrich argues that it actually restores "a lost substructure of eighteenth-century life" and thus "transforms the nature of the evidence upon which much of the history of the period has been written" (27)

> Martha's diary reaches to the marrow of eighteenth-century life. The trivia that so annoyed earlier readers provide a consistent, daily record of the operation of a female-managed economy. The scandals excised by local historians provide insight into sexual behavior, marital and extramarital, in a time of tumult and change. The remarkable birth records, 814 deliveries in all, allow the first full accounting of delivery practices and of obstetrical mortality in any early American town. The family squabbles that earlier readers (and abridgers) of the diary found almost as embarrassing as the sexual references show how closely related Martha's occupation was to the life cycle of her own family, and reveal the private politics behind public issues like imprisonment for debt. (Ulrich 33)

Ballard's diary is certainly full of trivia and subjectivity, Ulrich concludes, but it is also "an unparalleled document in early American history. It is powerful in part because it is so difficult to use, so unyielding in its dailiness" (33). Rather than obscuring these qualities under a veil of objectivity, Ulrich chooses to emphasize the subjectivity

both of the evidence and of her interpretation, by transcribing 10 long passages of the diary. "In each case," she explains frankly, "the 'important' material, the passage or event highlighted in the accompanying discussion, is submerged in the dense dailiness of the complete excerpt. Juxtaposing the raw diary and the interpretive essay in this way, I have hoped to remind readers of the complexity and subjectivity of historical reconstruction, to give them some sense of both the affinity and the distance between history and source" (34). Thus the personal and subjective became the stuff of an explicitly subjective historical interpretation—and were awarded a Pulitzer Prize!

Finally, the promise of subjectivity might be realized through a new appreciation and cultivation of the power of empathy. One of the most novel approaches to historical understanding, empathy represents a way of knowing that was soundly rejected and despised by objectivists as dangerously subjective. Indeed, the concept was so dangerous that it was gendered: empathic understanding was traditionally associated with women (who could feel intuitively but not judge intellectually, it was said), and was first rescued from academic oblivion by feminist psychologists such as Carol Gilligan and Nancy Chodorow. As they and their followers define it, empathy involves three basic phenomena:

> (1) feeling the emotion of another; (2) understanding the experience or situation of another, both affectively and cognitively, often achieved by imagining oneself to be in the position of the other; and (3) action brought about by experiencing the distress of another (hence the confusion of empathy with sympathy and compassion). The first two forms are ways of knowing, the third form a catalyst for action. (Henderson 157)[7]

Relying upon admittedly subjective feelings and imaginations, then, historical empathy would invite students, teachers and scholars alike to attempt to recreate a fuller range of past human experience than objectivity would ever allow. We might approach this type of historical understanding through primary sources with affective layers, such as music, art, literature, films, diaries, letters, or even court cases, as long as we are careful always to ask questions that elicit empathic responses. Student journals are particularly effective here, as a private prelude to class discussion. Thus, students in a Western Civilization course might ponder Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* and Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*; students of colonial America might respond to the court case of the indentured servant, Charity Dallen, who was beaten "more liken a dogge then a Christian" in Virginia in 1619; students in U.S. History

surveys might compare the depictions of American slavery in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the dramatization of *Solomon Northrup's Odyssey*, the story of a free African-American kidnapped into 12 years of enslavement, and graduate students in an introduction to historical methods might view and reflect upon the portrait of the discipline in Luis Puenzo's *Official Story*. Class discussions might invite students to compare their empathic responses, and to use their new insights to comment upon the historical interpretations that they have been offered.

A complementary approach to developing our powers of empathy might make greater use of oral histories in our research and in our classrooms. We might turn to those major oral history projects that have been collected in libraries and archives around the country, or to those smaller ones that we and our students can create through interviews with grandparents, recent immigrants, migrant workers, or civil rights activists in our local communities. Few other pedagogical methods engage students' emotions and imaginations more directly, or teach them more forcefully that we all make history. Moreover, oral history is especially valuable in our attempts to understand those people who leave few or no written historical records, and are often silent and invisible in traditional histories.

A third approach to empathic understanding—and my personal favorite—comes through historical role-playing, in which students read primary sources and then adopt the views and personalities of historical characters. Settings involving conflict, moral dilemmas, or role-reversal (where a male student plays a woman, or a white student a person of color) often prove most thought-provoking and instructive. Role-playing can be employed in class debates and discussions as well as in papers, a combination of the two over a semester creates a potent empathic learning experience. For example, in my introductory survey of early American history, a student might write an essay in the voice of a seventeenth-century Amerindian slave, offering advice to a new captive. She might then adopt the role of an Antifederalist in a class debate on the desirability of the U.S. Constitution of 1787, and attend a convention of American reformers in the 1840s in the persona of Frederick Douglass, Margaret Fuller, Angelina Grimké, Henry David Thoreau or Ralph Waldo Emerson. In a final paper, she might reflect upon the question of American exceptionalism from the perspective of a new immigrant, a Northern worker, or a former slave following Reconstruction. In each of these exercises, imagination as well as sources guide the process of historical discovery and interpretation.

One excellent example of the promise of this empathic approach for historical scholarship can be found in Natalie Zemon Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre*. Davis's attempt "to make historical sense" of the puzzling case of identity in early modern France was based not only on exhaustive archival research, but also upon her observation of French actors and actresses recreating their characters' emotional, affective lives for the film, *Le Retour de Martin Guerre*. As Davis notes, "Watching Gerard Depardieu feel his way into the role of the false Martin Guerre gave me new ways to think about the accomplishment of the real impostor, Arnaud du Tilh. I felt I had my own historical laboratory, generating not proofs, but historical possibilities" (Davis viii). Once possibilities rather than proofs are considered the stuff of history, empathy becomes a valuable tool for historical research and teaching.

In lesser hands, of course, empathic understanding might not yield quite so stunning a result. Indeed, there are potential pitfalls in this novel approach, including the claim of knowing too easily and possessing the Other, or of ignoring complex historical differences in a search for essential human nature. We must take great care not to allow a new type of intellectual imperialism to be born under the mantle of subjective empathy. But it seems to me that the possible benefits are worth the risks. For developing our powers of empathy seems to promise us a chance to achieve a fuller understanding of history's "inarticulate," who left few traditional written records. Empathy also offers the possibility of breaking through the walls of misunderstanding and mistrust between individuals in different social groups, an essential prerequisite to a juster distribution of social power. For all of its difficulties, empathy might constitute a source of intersubjectivity that we cannot do without

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Such was certainly the case for Alicia Marnet Ibañez. As *The Official Story* unfolds, Alicia's life and historical vision (or blindness) are profoundly disturbed by the power of empathy. Slowly and painfully, as her old friend Anna forces Alicia to listen to the haunting story of her imprisonment and torture for suspected oppositionist sympathies, and as Alicia meets Gaby's real grandmother and learns of the violent "disappearance" and probable torture of Gaby's mother, her perspective widens. Empathizing with these suffering women of several generations who have been rendered silent and invisible by the official story, Alicia finally confronts Roberto's knowing and her own blind complicity in their oppression

In a critical scene in the midst of Alicia's transformation, she encounters an alternative vision of the past in her classroom. Contrary to the express wishes of his teacher and the clear, authoritative account in his textbooks, her most rebellious student, Costa, offers Alicia an alternative narrative in an examination paper. Previously, when Alicia had pressed a nervous student to supply "facts" from the textbook to support his unlicensed reading of Argentina's revolutionary history, Costa had declared in his classmate's defense that one could never find the truth in the textbook, for "history is written by the assassins." Shocked by his lack of respect for her and for historical objectivity, Alicia had promptly silenced and dismissed Costa from the classroom. He had been a thorn in her side for months. Now he writes that the jailors of a republican hero of 1810 cut out his tongue to silence him.

When challenged by Alicia to present the documentary evidence for his contention (from the official texts, of course), Costa replies that texts are not the only sources of knowledge; his sympathy leads him to his conclusions. Alicia protests mildly that without a séance to communicate with history's ghosts, Costa couldn't really know this. Then, to the utter amazement of all, she praises Costa's abilities and awards the paper a high grade. Both the grade and the cautionary comment, which seems by implication to invite the class to ask those martyrs who are still alive for their stories (much as Alicia herself is doing privately), validate a new, broader recreation of Argentina's past. Her students have taught their teacher a fundamental lesson about history and its possibilities. Under their prodding, Alicia admits the power of empathy as a part of her historical pedagogy, and thus begins to rewrite the official story with her students.

## Notes

I delivered an earlier version of this paper under the title, "Historical Evidence and Objectivity," in a lecture series sponsored by the Master of Arts in Liberal Arts program at San Diego State University. I would like to thank the program's director, Howard I. Kushner, and the lively audience at the lecture. I also wish to acknowledge the contributions of my colleagues in the ACLS Elementary and Secondary Schools Teacher Curriculum Development Project in San Diego, and of my students in History 601, the graduate seminar in historical methods at San Diego State University. Finally, I must express my appreciation to my fellow ACLS post-secondary fellows for their generous responses to my work and their support. It is a rare pleasure to collaborate with such thoughtful and dedicated teachers and scholars.

1. Novick, parts I and 3. Appropriately enough for a European historian venturing into American historiography, Novick is often stronger and more insightful about the European intellectual background than the American cultural context. For a fuller discussion of the American "rule of law" and its recent critics, see Kornfeld, "Out of Order."

2. "Every group its own historian" is the title of Novick's fourteenth chapter, which I find to be the most charged and revealing in the book. The chapter's rhetorical strategy in one motion introduces Black history and women's history as unrelievedly separatist (or "lesbian") and dismisses both as self-destructive; Novick suggests that the unintended effect of Black history was to draw attention away from the worsening plight of the African-American family (in reaction against the Moynihan report), and that of women's history was to work against equal opportunity for women (in the Sears case). This structure, as well as the chapter's unusually strident tone and lack of references to (or knowledge of?) women's history, seem to place Novick among the lamenters of the decline of "objectivity", notwithstanding his (curious) desire to stand above the fray. For a sample of the controversy surrounding Novick's own intellectual/political position, see the forum on his book (with contributions by Jill Hexter, Linda Gordon, David A. Hollinger, Allan Megill, Dorothy Ross and Novick himself) in *American Historical Review* 96.3 (June 1991), 675-708. I believe that the rift between social and political historians, or between social and intellectual historians, is deep enough to qualify as a schism, as the ideological confrontations at many historical conventions make clear. See also the forum on "The Old History and the New" in *American Historical Review* 94.3 (June 1989), 654-698.

3. Among the pioneering psychological studies of selective perception and cognitive mapping were Dornbusch et al., Hastorf, Schneider, and Polefka, and Abelson et al.

4. Foremost among those historians who did heed the postmodern challenge and attempted to translate it for their colleagues were European intellectual historians, including Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra. Their efforts in this area include White, *Metahistory*; LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*; and LaCapra, *History and Criticism*. Recently, American intellectual historians have also begun to discuss and respond to "the linguistic turn," even in featured forums in the journal of the American Historical Association. See, for example, the forum on the subject by David Harlan and David Hollinger in *American Historical Review* 94.3 (June 1989), 581-626, and the response by Joyce Appleby in *American Historical Review* 94.5 (December 1989), 1326-

1332, or the forum by Russell Jacoby and Dominick LaCapra in *American Historical Review* 97:2 (April 1992), 405-439.

5. For an introduction to Geertz's approach to cultural anthropology, see *The Interpretation of Cultures.*

6. See also Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* and Gilligan, *In A Different Voice.*

7. For an introduction to the concerns and methods of oral history, see Thompson, *The Voice of the Past.* Dunaway and Baum, *Oral History,* contains essays by historians and scholars in related fields about the interpretation and design of oral history projects, the application of oral history to local, ethnic, family and women's history, and the use of oral history in schools and libraries. The *International Journal of Oral History* and the *Oral History Review* are also valuable guides to ongoing projects and issues; the Oral History Association can provide directories of archives and oral history projects throughout the United States.

8. For a fuller discussion of empathy and its pedagogical possibilities, see Kornfeld, "The Power of Empathy" and "Representations of History."

9. Davis was not without her critics; see the exchange between Robert Finlay and Davis concerning the quality and nature of the scholarship informing *The Return of Martin Guerre* in *American Historical Review* 93:3 (June 1988), 553-603.

# Toward a "Curriculum of Hope": The Essential Role of Humanities Scholarship in Public School Teaching

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> . . . a decent and humane society requires a shared language of the good.
>
> — Michael Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers*

## A Challenge that Requires Scholar/Teachers in our Public Schools

The world outside our school doors and campus gates and its reflection in our classrooms is becoming ever more complicated. Each morning in Brookline, Massachusetts, for instance, students from 58 primary language groups head to school; in New York City the number of languages is double that. Our schools are absorbing the largest influx of immigrants since the early 1900s. And these children represent the vanguard of the cultural melting pot/polyglot that is taking shape for our immediate future. Clearly, we would all be better off if we were able to engage this circumstance thoughtfully in its full dimensions and respond to it with a sense of hope and expanding possibilities.

In this article I propose that current scholarship in the humanities has an indispensable role to play for teachers in facilitating both a deeper understanding of the present and identifying paths of hope and reconciliation from the often divisive and solipsistic forces we encounter in our classrooms.

I take this position not to advocate for the new scholarship, or to attack conventional assumptions, or to take sides in the burgeoning debate surrounding "critical pedagogy." Far more important is that current issues of methodology and perspective are the touch points through which the humanities are engaging and responding to the forces that shape our world and delimit our choices. I will examine aspects of the postmodern critique of modern historiography, the contexts within which this critique developed, and the innovations in scholarship and pedagogy that it suggests. And, after assessing the fragmented and pessimistic tone of our current cultural 'moment,' I will discuss the remedial possibilities in recent scholarship, especially the

calls for more inclusive public discussion and the pursuit of enlarged understanding.

All of us who teach in the humanities, regardless of the grade level, have much to learn from and contribute to this scholarship: it is crucial that we create more opportunities to share our work and develop a sense of responsibility and advocacy for the humanities. I write with even more conviction about these matters now than I might have a year ago. My experience in the 1992-93 ACLS Elementary and Secondary Schools Teacher Curriculum Development Project at Harvard has confirmed my long-held belief that keeping up with current work in an area of knowledge and doing research or practicing an art form, if one is inclined, are crucial nourishment for inspired teaching at all grade levels. Exposure to current scholarship and outstanding practitioners in the humanities had a demonstrably renewing effect on the eight teacher fellows in the program from the Cambridge and Brookline public schools, all ambitious and accomplished teachers in their own right. Throughout the year, they reported that scholarship was deepening their insights into the dynamics of their classrooms and suggesting new instructional issues, materials, and strategies to them. And deep professional bonds developed among the public school and college teachers around the seminar table.

Beyond this, however, to be serious about instituting an education system in which all students reflect deeply on the world as it is, has become, and is becoming will require not only a renewed commitment to the humanities inside our schools and colleges, but outside as well. In spite of the valiant efforts of many, the humanities remain on the margins in the continuing wave of national debate about public education, which was set off by *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. The most widely accepted discourse since then has focused on math and science, job skills, and cultivating national economic competitiveness. No national mandate has appeared calling for humanities funding, research, and teaching to make America ready for the next century. Meanwhile our nation's civic illiteracy and intellectual and spiritual impoverishment proceed apace.

One reason for this is the absence of a common culture among humanities scholar/teachers that cuts across public school and higher education and can argue persuasively and forcefully for the humanities. The estrangement between public school and college and university humanities teachers in our country is deep and has been developing since the turn of the century. In those years prospective teachers began to be sequestered in "schools of education" in the universities;

humanities scholars abandoned their interest in public schools and withdrew into their research; and the proponents of occupational and "life adjustment" training for the expanding numbers of working class and immigrant students defeated "the optimists," who advocated the classical curriculum for all students (Kliebard 3-26; Perrone, *Working Papers* 127; Bestor 104-14, 120-21).

John Dewey, too, noticed early on the need to calibrate the schools to a changing student body and society. But, he was also a legendary optimist, if not in the classics-for-all sense. Dewey's optimism rested in his respect for children as individuals, each with unique interests and capabilities for sustained learning, and his insistence that teachers from primary through university levels be scholars, not technicians. Scholars are "so full of the spirit of inquiry," he wrote, "that no matter what they do, or how they do it" they awaken and inspire "ardent and intense mental activity" in their students (Perrone, *Working Papers* 129).[1] Thus, Dewey's disenchantment with formal teacher education did not have to do with its attention to child development issues, for he was always a careful observer of children. It rested in his assessment that the remaining normal schools and the new university schools of education were not training scholar/teachers who could probe the first principles of the subjects they taught, think independently about what to teach and why, and capture and inspire their students.

Dewey, then, was convinced that teachers, especially in a time of fundamental societal transition as his was (and ours is), must possess the scholarly skills and confidence to be "investigators," teachers able to "change the conception of what constitutes education" if need be. Another great Progressive intellectual, W. E. B. Du Bois, was noteworthy for the natural dialogue he cultivated between his study and the world outside (West, *Race Matters* 40). Central to the lives of both men was this interaction between scholarship and society. It is just such a dialogue that needs to be reconstituted now and undertaken by more and more teachers.

## The Postmodern Critique of Modern Historiography

Admittedly the "culture wars," the debates that have been stirring and sometimes dividing humanities scholarship in recent years, are off-putting to the uninitiated. The arguments seem (and sometimes are) arcane and the manners of the combatants less than welcoming. Nevertheless, the debates are not frivolous and extraneous to our concerns as teachers: they provide essential insight into a range of perceptions and voices that increasingly are informing our society and

our classrooms. After two decades of "*high theory*," according to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the apparent relevance of this humanities scholarship to the lives of fellow citizens is "quite astonishing" (*Loose Canons* xiii). The terrain of the scholarship is too immense and rich to be encompassed, much less distilled, in a relatively brief essay such as this. Consequently, I will be confining myself to tentative and suggestive characterizations of its contours, drawing from historiography generally and more particularly from historical approaches to political philosophy, the lives of the poor and disenfranchised, and literature.

"Modern" historiography, Enlightenment in its spirit, assumes that historians can engage and understand the past rationally and objectively, determine the agency (intentions and degree of independent action) of historical actors, and, if appropriate, explain the process of change over time. It is attracted to large, encompassing meta-narratives of historical change (e.g., the rise of . . . , the transformation of . . . , etc.), often describing amelioration of, or progress on, a certain issue. Verification rests in "documents" (statutes, archival records, official correspondence) which it is believed reflect their environment, rather than in "works" of the imagination (poems, novels, plays, concertos) which do not. Quite often theory from the social sciences is used to help explain individual and cohort behavior. "Structuralists," who overlap modern and postmodern historiography, use the social, economic, intellectual, or cultural environments of historical subjects to explain their behavior and in the process often deprive them of agency.

The terms "postmodernism" and "poststructuralism" are frequently used interchangeably to describe scholarship that seeks to separate itself from "modern" perception, epistemology, and knowledge, Rosenau 3 n.1).[2] Postmodernists assume that the modern perspective derives its rationalism, individualism, and universalism from the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. Furthermore, the hegemonic and progressivist impulses of the Enlightenment led its enthusiasts to privilege this set of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European commitments in the face of all other perspectives. Thus, postmodernists believe the Enlightenment and its heritage, the Enlightenment Project, have to be challenged. In addition to these scholarly values, "postmodern" is also used to refer to the present historical moment, marked by its paradigmless and skeptical tenor.

The postmodern critique of the Enlightenment Project is driven by at least three shifts in perception that have emerged in the last 30 years: a reassessment of the claims of science and philosophy; a turn toward language and its study (linguistics and hermeneutics, or interpretation)

as the central component in the "human sciences"; and the view that thought and behavior in historical eras are shaped by a deep structure of unexamined assumptions.

1. In his landmark study, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Thomas Kuhn argued convincingly that "normal" science in any age relies more on conventions and, even, social control than on logical compulsion. He found that linguistics, politics, and historical context all influenced claims of scientific truth (Kuhn, Bonds). Subsequently Richard Rorty offered a similar appraisal of truth claims in modern philosophy: they typically disguise a "contestable agreement" of a particular community of thinkers (Rorty, *Philosophy*, Borgmann 50). Thus, truths in science and philosophy, far from universal, are embedded in an array of contingencies.

2. The philosopher Charles Taylor is one of numerous proponents of hermeneutics who are convinced that language should be at the center of our study of human nature. He traces the roots of this commitment to the Romantic critics of the Enlightenment and, in this century, such philosophers as Martin Heidegger and Hans Georg Gadamer, who have been very important proponents of the philosophical importance of language. We have come to understand, according to Taylor, that man is above all "the language animal." Although we continue to be attracted to the natural science approach to studying human nature because of the idea of "disengagement" that it conveys, Taylor insists that the model is implausible (1-11). Our ability to disengage is a modern myth that obscures how each of us is "constituted" by the "language" and "culture" which our "community" maintains and renews. What is required, then, for a more sound approach to human nature is a hermeneutical conception of the human sciences, in which language is understood broadly to include music, art, dance, and the range of symbolic forms (Taylor 215-16).

The incorporation of hermeneutics into historiography, the "linguistic turn", has redirected the focus to how languages obscure, filter—in general, mediate—historians' attempts to approach past reality. From this perspective, the past is more an array of obfuscating texts that must be deciphered than social and intellectual realities that can be encountered directly or reconstituted. Thus, the study of history is close to, if not synonymous with, the study of literature. And literary works, typically eschewed by modernists, enjoy equal status with documents: they are all approached as texts that must be treated with skepticism and linguistic ingenuity.[3]

3. Perhaps the boldest and most influential challenge to the Enlightenment notion of a linear, purposive historical process in which the qualities of a universal human nature are demonstrated, has been the work of Michel Foucault. He distinguished between the conscious "epistemological" level of knowledge and the unconscious "archaeological" one in any era. The unconscious level, or episteme, as he called it, is the most important of the two: although never formulated, it is *a priori to* everything else. The episteme provides codes to the theories and concepts in different fields of endeavor contemporary to one another: they will have more in common among themselves than any one would have with its like across time. Thus, to explore an earlier time, the historian, in the manner of an archaeologist, must dig down through the subsequent layers to the appropriate level. Within the context of this "open site" historiography, the outlooks, actions, motives, and intentions of individual agents in the past seem to be less important and structures and patterns more. Furthermore, since history is so many separate ages, or self-referential strata, one on top of another, it defies our search for an overall species goal or purpose; nor can a rational course be attributed to it. Our searching of the past will not yield a coherent and constant human condition or nature either (Foucault ix-xxiv, 367-373).

Foucault's assessment of the Enlightenment rests on his view that "truth is a thing of this world." It is produced by many forms of constraint and endures on the usual manifestations of power. Thus, the Enlightenment, the quintessential age of reason, had spawned through its truth claims for the human sciences an unprecedented degree of ordering, classifying, and regulating of the lives of criminals, madmen, the sick, the old, the delinquent, and the putatively normal (Gordon 131; Philip 74).

The cumulative effects of these challenges—to the objectivity of science and philosophy, to the idea of a universal and rational human nature, to a linear and purposive species history, and to a benign Enlightenment—have called into question long-unexamined assumptions about meaning, method, and proof within all areas of humanities scholarship. As I will point out, they also open new areas of inquiry and possibility as well. Nevertheless, the West seems to be in its deepest episode of skepticism since the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Then, the revival of Academic and Pyrronhist skepticism undermined medieval scholastic assumptions about knowledge. This dilemma ultimately called forth the empirical and rational epistemologies of Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes, the Scientific Revolution, and

the Enlightenment (Popkin; Shapiro; Allen). We in the late twentieth century also share a pervasive stoicism with our turn-of-the-seventeenth-century forbears. Our expectations are limited, and we assume that much in life that will affect us is beyond our control. Contemporary wisdom is to adapt to forces larger than the self. "Change" has replaced "progress" in our discourse.

## The Contexts of Postmodern Innovations in Scholarship

If postmodernism teaches us anything, it is the importance of context in suggesting meaning and the parameters available for human agency. And, of course, our lives, our students' lives, and our schools and universities unfold within contexts. We must be preparing our students to comprehend the world as it is and is becoming (or can be shaped to be). It is important, then, to appreciate that current humanities scholarship has been forged in the recent societal, global, ethnic, gender, intellectual, and spiritual upheavals that continue to jolt our equanimity. To reflect on the changes that have occurred in humanities scholarship and in the shape of American (and Western) institutions and thought since the 1950s is to become aware of startling and parallel transformations. Thus, Cornel West has it just right when he proposes to "historicise and pluralise and contextualise" the postmodern debate ("Decentering" 3). His point is that postmodernism understood most broadly is a set of responses to the decentering of Europe. The world no longer rests upon the European hegemony, which dates from the fifteenth century. Its displacement began with the fracture of the European polity in 1914 and accelerated with the ascendancy of the United States after 1944 and the decolonization of the Third World. West maintains that the last of the three is the most significant for developments in humanities scholarship because it has so much to do with the "dialectical reversal of our normal conception of order," new identity formation and self-perception. Formerly oppressed persons now choose to view themselves as the subjects of history rather than its objects ("Decentering" 13).

Perhaps West exaggerates when he attributes *all* the social turmoil in the United States from the 1950s through the 1970s to decolonized sensibilities. But his larger point cannot be ignored: the post-World War II liberal consensus and its underlying Enlightenment assumptions about the nature of the world, proclaimed in the late 1940s, was short lived. It collapsed under deep questioning and the pervasive consequences of the Cold War, the social, civil rights, and gender struggles;

the war in Vietnam; and the eroded credibility of traditional institutions from the family to the schools to the Presidency.[1]

How has humanities scholarship, especially historiography, been in dialogue with these shattering developments? The one feature of modernist historiography that has been under the most pressure from both postmodern scholarship and the decentering momentum of our postmodern era is meta-narrative. It has become much more difficult to develop one, encompassing, credible story about, let us say, the history of the United States or the progress of human rights. Postmodern historians want to avoid "privileging" one point of view in their narratives, but the alternative of attempting to incorporate all points of view or experiences often proves impractical. The result is often to abandon grand explanations altogether and to cultivate mini-narratives, stories, and descriptions.

Beginning in the 1960s, the attractiveness of the mini-narrative fit well with the deepening concern with social and political justice. What was called the "new" social history developed: it focused particularly on oppressed groups that had left little conventional documentation for historians. Through ingenious methods, historians brought to light the formerly unseen, silent and forgotten cohorts of the past. We learned much about the sex roles and families, child rearing, schooling, and work patterns of women and the poor and disenfranchised. The research was facilitated by the technology then becoming available: microfilm and microfiche made possible the wide distribution of heretofore inaccessible primary materials, and computers could compile and analyze huge data bases from parish, municipal, and census records. Theory from the social and behavioral sciences (anthropology, economics, and psychoanalysis, especially) was applied to crystallize or stretch the historian's perceptions.

The stunning growth in black history, women's history, family history, the history of education, and labor history attests to the vigor of this new history and the degree to which contemporary social concerns have influenced its application. An example of the capabilities of this new social history was Herbert Gutman's reexamination of the black family, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750 to 1925*. Gutman used plantation archives from counties in three southern states, manuscripts from the Freedmen's Bureau, and census records. His resourceful family reconstitutions over several generations and his application of Sidney W. Mintz's theory of mimetic cultures led to important revisions in our understanding of black history. Contrary to the conventional wisdom on the matter, Gutman maintained that the

two-parent black family was viable throughout the punishing ordeal of slavery. And the American slave family was probably the first "Afro-American" institution, a hybrid of African and white American cultures (Gutman 3, 33-37, 151-55).

Mini-narratives have opened to our increasingly diverse student bodies histories closer to their experience and their communities. Besides the issue of privilege, however, postmodernists also object that meta-narrative, or any narrative, assumes the linearity of historical time and thus does not attend sufficiently to distinct linguistic contexts and Foucaultian layers. This has led to history as dialogue or encounter across time, in which care must be taken with contexts on both ends. In social history this often has led to immersion in the everyday life of a particular locality or village for a very restricted period of time with the purpose of developing a "thick description" of a small corner of the world.

This "encounter" approach has also been pursued fruitfully by historians of political thought and scholars of Renaissance literature. Political theorists, stifled by the hegemony of East Bloc materialism and Western positivism and functionalism during the Cold War, declared their discipline "dead" in the mid-1950s (Laslett vii). Soon thereafter ingenious historians like Quentin Skinner and J. G. A. Pocock began language-centered studies of the beginnings of liberal political theory in the European Renaissance and Enlightenment. Abandoning the meta-narrative requirement that the past must produce the present (loosely, the "whig" view of history), Skinner and Pocock were able to let the past be itself. It emerged as more complicated than it would have appeared under the requirements of narrative, but at the same time a richer setting, with much to teach us.[5] For Skinner, this kind of history reveals how languages change in the dialogue between ideas and their historical contexts. Seeing great works of political theory as ideological responses to their local, immediate, and linguistic constraints adds to our understanding of political life itself. And the variety of moral assumptions and political commitments in the past become more evident, consequently we are helped to recognize the intellectual limitations placed on us by our own environment (Skinner 2 Preface). Pocock is convinced that the encounter approach allows the historian to show that political language is multi-disciplined. it addresses all the purposes and ways human beings articulate and communicate their political activity and culture. Complex societies will manifest a number of languages, each with its own biases on the meaning and distribution of authority. Therein lies the "richness of texture" to be found in the history of political thought and the reason for studying it (Pocock 5-7,

12-19, 21-23). Thus, our understanding of the "political" is broadened, not diminished, when encounter replaces meta-narrative. A wide variety of teaching options can be cultivated in this way, especially by focusing on particularly dynamic historical settings in Western or other cultures.

The study of Renaissance literature has been virtually transformed by postmodern scholarship: an interdisciplinary approach called the "new historicism" has emerged. Jean E. Howard, an advocate of this work, views all historical investigations as "interventions" into the past; objectivity is impossible. On the other hand, the late Renaissance environment and our historical moment are similar in their tone. If we can accept the tensions and contradictions that predominate in Renaissance texts, we will appreciate the resonance between our paradigmless ages. And, significantly, in this method literature no longer figures as merely the reflection of its setting: part of a textualized universe, it is a proactive agent, helping to shape the historical process and the political management of reality (Howard, "New Historicism" 15, 33)."

Stephen J. Greenblatt's protean exploration of "self-fashioning" in the English Renaissance is an example of ingenious postmodern scholarship that has spoken strongly to us methodologically and metaphorically. Calling his method anthropological criticism and acknowledging his debt to Clifford Geertz, Foucault, Jurgen Habermas, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, among numerous others, Greenblatt seeks a "poetics of culture." It would investigate the mutual interaction between the text and the world. This approach helps Greenblatt to use the writings of important Renaissance literary figures to see more deeply into their own struggles with self-fashioning, which took place within a cultural field polarized by an authority and its alien (4, 5, 9, 157). The new historicists have been influential: the Renaissance and the present do seem to have certain similarities, and self-fashioning is a compelling issue for students to work with. It requires a summoning of the self, autobiographical clarity, a close investigation of the forces in one's environment, and perhaps a search for other settings and exemplary selves.

There is much in the new scholarship, whether mini-narrative, the pursuit of dialogue and resonance, or autobiography and self-fashioning, to broaden our understanding of the capabilities of the humanities as a way of reflection, study, and teaching. But, I am not suggesting that modern, conventional approaches to history and the humanities should be abandoned. Some issues will lend themselves to modern inquiry, others to postmodern. We become better teachers, it seems to

me, as we enlarge our repertoire of materials and approaches to them. Although too many scholars have done so, we need not see modern-postmodern differences as an abyss or rupture in humanities scholarship. We should see the differences as complementary, expanding our capability to generate questions and devise the most appropriate means to pursue their answers. These are the very scholarly values and abilities that guided Du Bois and that Dewey wanted to encourage in all teachers. And, as Vito Perrone points out, they are crucial to a teacher's ability to develop heuristic instructional topics ("Understanding Up Front" 2-3, 5-6, 10-20, 37-39).

## Postmodern Society: Affinity and Pessimism

Thus far we have glimpsed the great possibilities that postmodern scholarship holds for enabling teachers to hear better the diverse stories their students have to tell and to use the humanities disciplines resourcefully to develop challenging, engaging, and worthwhile instruction for them. But, there is also a downside to the postmodern—in this instance the postmodern condition—that is often attributed to the scholarship. It is difficult to argue with Gates's assessment that our late-twentieth-century world is "fissured by nationality, ethnicity, race, class, and gender" (*Loose Canons* xv). Our myriad divisions are really so many *gemeinschaften*, that wall us off from others while they offer us solidarity and a sense of belonging among similarly-situated and like-mined peers. The problem is the "others." Can we be secure if we do not know them? In our determined pursuit of affinity do we inadvertently diminish our chances for a full life of the mind? Even an enthusiast for scuttling the modern synthesis like the philosopher Albert Borgmann concedes that there are problems with the traverse across the postmodern divide: an increase in dogmatism, ethnic strife, self-righteousness, and censorship (79). Our sense of fragmentation into self-enclosed communities of affinity and discourse is palpable. Certainly in our classrooms we can feel the pull of group identities separating our students along gender, race, sexual orientation, class, and other lines. All of this is matched by a pervasive, yet superficial, relativism whenever discussions move to issues of value, choice, or morality. "Everyone is equal, therefore all opinions are equal!" And the Bosnia metaphors that abound in our attempts to capture these tendencies suggest a situation in which civil war, rather than civil order, prevails.

Probably the biggest fear in developing curricula based on postmodern scholarship is that they actually will foment Balkanization and stand-

off among students. Some measure of plausibility for those fears is provided by the proponents of critical pedagogy. The self-proclaimed radical pedagogues display a range of stances, however. On the one hand, Donaldo P. Macedo has described the American public school system as a sophisticated colonial model, driven by a "pedagogy of lies," which does little more than "manufacture consent" for a corrupt social and political regime (202-204). On the other, Henry A. Giroux seeks to distance himself from the pessimism bred of the customary language of critique and domination and move toward a form of pedagogy that will make "despair unconvincing and hope practical." He calls for reconstructing the "proletarianized" teacher force into transformative intellectuals. He and Peter McLauren would make the schools into truly democratic places that cultivate "critical agency" in students (Giroux 128, 122; Giruox and McLaren 19). As attractive as these goals are, and similar rhetorically to those I am advocating in this essay, the educational vision at the center of critical pedagogy—to use the schools exclusively to fight oppression—remains overly prescriptive nevertheless.

Many teachers, sensing this, remain wary. They will eschew current scholarship if embracing it leads to the hyper-politicization of their classrooms. As I have argued already, this need not and should not be the case. After all, European hegemony is actually diminishing in the world, feminists long since have begun to dismantle male dominance, and racial and ethnic solidarity provide an accessible grounding for identity in a racially sensitive culture such as ours. Students may not even be aware of these circumstances, but they bring their consequences into our classrooms with them. Thus, it behooves us to use any and all scholarship that we can to respond to and move constructively with their energies.

Furthermore, few would deny that *le quotidien* on our postmodern terrain leaves much to be desired. It seems to have taken a heavy toll on our spirit, hope, and political vision. According to West, we have witnessed the disappearance of the spiritual communities that in the past helped Americans to face difficulties and despair. The results are lives filled with "random flows." West is particularly concerned about the hopelessness and absence of meaning in life that is pervasive among poor urban blacks (*Race Matters* 5, 15). But the impression is growing that his concern applies to all our school-age youth and to 18- to 29-year-olds as well. Thus, we may be sliding into a form of hegemonic pessimism. Certainly our students should not be burdened with such a specter in their classrooms. If hopelessness has reached a fever pitch in our urban poverty ghettos and is evident more generally

among our young, much of it is driven by the sense that there is no "place for me" and the belief that "we have no place to go together." As a society we have become imprisoned in the present to an alarming degree, fenced in by an undecipherable future and a fragmented, inaccessible past (Fideler, "Historians"). Postmodern scholarship is very valuable in helping us to understand our entrapment and cultivate scaled-down narratives essential to our stories of self and community. Nevertheless, much of our current situation and the attendant hopelessness that it seems to engender is in the largest sense of the terms, moral, historical, and political. We have to find ways *together* to see farther ahead and back. The best kept secret in postmodern scholarship, the views of the skeptics notwithstanding, is that much of value is there for our ability to do this.

The importance of political thought in our attempt to look ahead is suggested by Tracy B. Strong, who maintains that politics at its most basic seeks answers simultaneously to two questions: Who am I? Who are We? He is convinced that rationalization, in Max Weber's meaning of the term, had dissolved affective status relations and made economic concerns more important than politics long before the postmodern moment. Nevertheless, we now find ourselves immobilized, needing to recognize our failure to live up to a shared vision. That is to say, we need politics more than ever now; but, we are tempted to leave that often difficult "community of discourse" for other easier and more inviting realms (Strong 3-4, 159-60).

We have seen that these temptations have been heightened by the declining fortunes of the European Enlightenment Project and the concomitant encouragement to find one's own community and story. Nevertheless, we have to ask ourselves: How wide is the circle of the we? Perhaps our preoccupations with the local, familiar, and unique, as important as they are, should be reexamined. One way to look at our recent priorities is that we have renounced all, or most, universal or species concerns. According to the historian David Hollinger, the most crucial "event" in intellectual history since World War II has been the expansion of ethnos-centered discourse and the simultaneous shrinking of species-centered discourse. We have foresworn all but our "ethnos," our civic, moral, and epistemic communities of birth. Postmodernism, for its part, has valued affiliation and solidarity over objectivity, and we have forged an age of "anti-universalist historicism" (Hollinger 419-20, 422-23). But, as Gates points out, a mindless celebration of difference is no more viable than nostalgia for an imagined homogeneous past in working to ameliorate what ails us (*Loose Canons* xiii). Clearly we must move forward.

There are not only reasons but ways to overcome the stoicism and skepticism that have been shrinking and immobilizing our collective spirit. The seedlings from which strong trees of hope can grow have long since been planted. We simply have to mark them and nourish them. For example, just over a decade ago, Carol Gilligan expressed the belief that, through her study of women's moral reasoning, women will arrive at an understanding of the "integrity and validity" of their thought, the experiences it "refracts," and the "line of its development" (3-4). Beyond this, however, her goal was "to expand" the understanding of human development itself by supplying the data left out in the earlier construction of theory. The discrepant data on women's experience can provide the foundation for a new "more encompassing view" of the lives of men and women and overall a "more generative view of human life" (174). Gilligan's intention is a simple and elegant guide for moving ahead: validate the experiences and thought of marginalized populations and use the data gained to see our condition and possibilities more fully.

This model encourages us to build outward from affinity toward an enlarged understanding and to draw a wider 'circle of the we'. There is evidence accumulating that this process is under way, even among some of the most redoubtable critics of the Enlightenment. Kuhn, for instance, has attempted to conflate objectivity and solidarity into a "single character"; and Rorty's explanation of solidarity now shuns the strict ethnocentricity with which he had been identified proudly earlier (Hollinger 324, 328).

Nevertheless, with issues facing us of such a distinctly political cast (in the broad, rather than the partisan, sense), it is unfortunate that John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, the work which resurrected political philosophy from its premature "death," receives so little attention beyond the ken of political philosophy in our moment of epistemic transition. Rawls's magisterial study developed the case for an imagined social contract that free, equal, and rational persons could accept to define "the fundamental terms" of their association, or polity. Seeking to establish "justice as fairness," he pushed to a higher level of abstraction the Enlightenment social contract ideas of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant (Rawls 11).[8] Rawls's universalism and North American liberalism have made him an easy target for situation-conscious postmodern critics, and he is dismissed all too easily as yet another unregenerate modern who, in Hollinger's words, has "confused the local with the universal" (317).

The lack of interest in Robert Nozick, an early critic of Rawls, is more puzzling. Perhaps it is because he focuses on individuals and not race, class, and gender cohorts in his theory and his conceptual vocabulary, like Rawls's—state of nature, private interests, minimal state, utopia—seems anachronistic to postmodern historicist/linguistic parlance. Whatever the reasons, his somewhat ironic "framework for utopia" would seem to fit well in other respects with current groping from communities toward a larger sense of solidarity. Nozick argues against Rawls's insistence that the universal principles of justice have to be agreed upon before the just and fair polity can be formed. We are all so different from one another in temperament, interests, abilities, and aspirations, according to Nozick, that, even if there is one ideal pattern for society, it is unlikely that it would be found in Rawls's theoretical fashion. But that does not mean that the search for the perfect society cannot be undertaken starting from scratch. Nozick's alternative is an experimental and experiential process. "Utopia will consist of utopias" (Nozick 311-12, 328-30). Individuals must see themselves as free to establish "communities" of their choice with other like-minded people. They can design communities and remain in them, improve them, or leave them. Some communities will succeed, others will be abandoned or split, and new ones will be undertaken. The framework requires a minimal state to settle disputes between and among communities, to guarantee uncoerced passage into and out of communities, and to insure that children learn of the possibilities of life beyond their immediate communities.

Nozick argues that his utopian process should be substituted for the static "end state" of typical utopias. It is in our particular communities, after all, that we realize our nonimperialistic vision of the good society. And, when the framework is infused with many such compelling visions, it delivers "the best of all possible worlds." What is so current about Nozick, in my judgment, is the immanence, contingency, unpredictiveness, and diversity implicit in his framework. Only a fool or a prophet, he claims, would try to foretell "the range and limits and characters of the communities" that it would yield. And, perhaps most important, if one good society for all does emerge somehow from the process, it will only be because everyone voluntarily chooses it (Nozick 331-34).

In any case, the largely ignored, yet potentially valuable, models of Rawls and Nozick notwithstanding, theory of a more distinctly postmodern pedigree is alive and well and can contribute much to those who seek a road map across the divide. More and more we hear calls to synthesize voices and move on to new ground, and the

postmodern critique of modernism seems to be moderating. For example, Stephen K. White maintains that postmodern political theory has much more to offer than its notable assaults on Enlightenment universalism. One such contribution is its ethic of "responsibility to otherness;" another is its "moral-aesthetic sense" (White 19-21). These contrast markedly with the categorical and universal dimensions of the modernist ethic. White seeks particularly a middle way between Rawls's universalism and Rorty's celebration of group identity. The challenge, of course, is to recognize that the modern and postmodern predispositions can be complementary rather than binary opposites. Of the various paths forward embedded in the current scholarship, the perspectives of the historian Hollinger and the political theorist Seyla Benhabib are particularly interesting. Hollinger is less friendly to postmodernism, and Benhabib's outlook is more deeply rooted in feminism. Both, however, acknowledge and build on postmodernism's celebration of the local and fear of the universal.

Hollinger, unlike Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., for whom ethnocentrism has no redeeming qualities and is inimical to "America as a people" (Schlesinger 15-18), engages the unregenerate historicist/linguistic theories of the likes of Kuhn, Rorty, Geertz, and the historian and political theorist Michael Walzer. We have seen that he identifies the modern with a concern with the species and the postmodern with the ethnos. Diversity has replaced unity as the slogan to encourage respect and equality. And our "alterity-preoccupied, deeply anti-imperialist" generation of intellectuals is unprecedented in its ability to argue for enclosures and circle-drawing. The term ethnic has come to stand for "situatedness" within any bonded community. Yet, Hollinger reminds us that in an age of "deterritorialized communities" just where do we belong anyway? Communities are different in their boundaries, structures, functions, and demands. Although there is much blithe talk about communities of affinity these days, most people are involved in several communities simultaneously and pursue their lives shifting among several "we's." Our habit has been to over-simplify what it means to situate a person or a text (Hollinger 323-24, 328-30).

In light of these complications, Hollinger proposes a "postethnic" disposition toward affiliation in a variety of contexts. Hollinger's postethnicity does not deny, but rather accepts consciously and critically, the many layers of we's. The postethnic challenge is to steer a life's path between cultural universals and the celebration of sheer difference. We must stretch the limits of the epistemic and moral "we" but do so without ignoring postmodern objections to universals. Through such devices as "immanent critique" (Rorty) and "intersubjective

reason" (Habermas, Jeffrey Stout), we have to continue the search for practical dialogue across the boundaries that separate us and for a way to expand the "moral 'we'." The one "field of power" that is available to facilitate compromises and operating arrangements among universalist and particularist impulses, according to Hollinger, is the "nation." In effect, we find ourselves in a veritable 'state of nature' right now; we may have to rediscover or reformulate our understanding of the social compact and the nation (Hollinger 332-33, 335-37).

Whereas Hollinger encourages a *postethnic* political conversation that would move communities toward participation in a broader polity, Benhabib's undertaking is to develop a *post-Enlightenment* defense of universalism. However, her universalism, unlike Rawls's, will be interactive, acknowledging of gender differences, and alert to contexts. Her goal is to find a new way for reason to yield justice with dignity and the promise of happiness. To do this, Benhabib argues, we must move from a "legislative" to an "interactive" rationality (1-5). The latter actually leads to a community of inquirers in the spirit of Charles Sanders Peirce's approach to truth-searching. Benhabib is very much a contextualist: reason and the moral self must be situated in the contexts of gender and community. At the same time, one's context must not be considered closed or a prison. Sounding a bit like Nozick, she insists that individuals have the discursive power to challenge their situatedness in the name of "universalistic principles, future identities and as yet undiscovered communities" (8). And, in the same spirit of avoiding a break with the modern that we have seen in White and Hollinger, Benhabib holds that the seeming opposites, the "generalized" and the "concrete" other, actually exist along a continuum that extends from "universal respect for all as moral persons" to the "care, solidarity, and solicitation" that connects us to those closest to us.

Even though relations of justice occupy the privileged position within the ethical domain, they do not exhaust it. Benhabib is very concerned with challenging the long-held convention in universalist theories of justice that freedom, equality, and reciprocity apply only to the public sphere outside the household. Consequently, the private sphere, left to its own devices, has been "an opaque glass" that has left women and their traditional spheres of activity invisible and inaudible. In the spirit of Gilligan's critique of and remedy for traditional theories of human development, Benhabib observes that this reveals an epistemological deficiency in modern political theory, not merely an omission or a blind spot. And, acknowledging her debt to Hannah Arendt, Benhabib calls us to a "moral conversation" that will enable the art of "enlarged thinking" to develop. This can happen, she maintains,

if we bring "civic friendship" and solidarity to the many perspectives that constitute the political (10-14).

Hollinger and Benhabib offer different, but equally promising, visions of hope and possibility for our ability to move toward an enlarged sense of who we are as a people. They are clearly postmodern in their insistence on the epistemological importance of difference and situatedness and in their discomfort with *a priori* universals. Yet, they admit that their political goals are not irreconcilable with those rooted in the Enlightenment--a polity formed from reasonable discussion, deliberation, and compromise.

I can imagine distilled versions of Hollinger's and Benhabib's outlooks serving as very stimulating vehicles for student projects and discussions about how different communities can live compatibly and productively together or what it means to be part of a community and a polity at the same time. In conjunction with models derived from Rawls and Nozick the mix of possibilities becomes even more exciting. Speculations about the state of nature could be developed, which in turn would inevitably lead to deliberations about the social contract and the differences between nature and polity. What is the social contract? What purposes does it serve? Historical and contemporary examples of social contract-building could be explored. The point is that current scholarship about the polity is not irrelevant; rather, it is essential for our capability to transform the divisive and pessimistic inertia of the moment toward a practical and hopeful sense of where we might be able to take ourselves together.

We must be able to look back with some comprehension as well. One of the sources of our current societal disorientation is our lack of any sense of where we have been. And the devaluing of the Enlightenment has taken much of the luster and interest away from the founding of the United States, our social contract moment. But a new study of American constitutional thought, in a modernist tone, *To Make a Nation: The Rediscovery of American Federalism* by Samuel H. Beer, may reverse some of that. Beer argues that the founders of the republic were not anti-democratic aristocrats seeking to protect the existing hierarchy under another name. They believed in popular sovereignty, but thought that it could be preserved only with rather complicated institutions, e.g., the Constitution of the United States. Particularly important in light of Hollinger's and Benhabib's work is that Beer believes that the founders of the republic explicitly designed a polity that encouraged wide participation and rational deliberation in a

"government by discussion." It was expected that involvement in that discussion would yield "broadened perspectives" for all (Sunstein 38, 39, 41).

Another timely effort to help us look back with more comprehension is Ronald Takaki's new volume, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America.* Takaki works in a postmodern way, but he is attempting to revive the meta-narrative. Perhaps, better said, he is developing a multi-narrative or a pan-narrative of America's ethnic history.[9] This is bottom-up social history, in which Takaki relies heavily on personal stories and works, such as novels, poetry, song lyrics, and the like, to build his narrative fabric. He is convinced that, by sharing their stories, America's diverse groups "are able to see themselves and each other in our common past" (16).

## A "Curriculum of Hope" and the Revival of the Humanities

Looking back with interest and comprehension, looking forward with hope and expectation. These are not the worst starting points for our educational challenges in the next years. A well-grounded "Curriculum of Hope" might even be a distinct possibility. And, were we to become more articulate about how the humanities facilitate the search for a "shared language of the good," we might begin to attract more support from the larger society.

The questioning and evaluating of just what the humanities are and can do and say with credibility to our skeptical and stoical age has been, and continues to be, painful and polarizing. Nevertheless, as I have tried to suggest in these pages, the doubt and pain brought on by this fundamental reappraisal in scholarship is bringing the humanities into a closer engagement with the world. And, beyond the uncertainty, the scholarship is already clearing paths toward the far side of the 'postmodern divide'. If we scholar/teachers can find our voices, the humanities, now of a wider circle and enlarged understanding, will come into their own in our schools.

## Notes

1. For Perrone's discussion of Dewey, see *Working Papers* 127-32. Israel Scheffler has argued similarly that teachers be acknowledged to have "a special dedication to the values of the intellect and the enhancement of the critical powers of the young" (11).

2. Rosenau elaborates on several differences between the two terms. Postmodernists, for example, are "more oriented toward cultural critique." They focus on "the concrete in the form of 'le quotidien', daily life, as an alternative to theory." Some postmodernists even revert to the pre-modern and are "classical empiricists, privileging sense experience, a highly personal, individual, nongeneralized, emotional form of knowledge." Poststructuralists are much more comfortable with theory and are particularly interested in methodological and epistemological matters. They concentrate on deconstruction, language, discourse, meaning, and symbols and "remain uncompromisingly anti-empirical." Another important distinction, according to Rosenau, is that between "skeptical" and "affirmative" postmodernists: the former deny the possibility of truth; the later reconceptualize it within personal, local, and community contexts (chaps. 5, 7). Rosenau's book is a useful and didactic exploration of the assumptions, purposes, and intricacies of the new scholarship. She pays much attention to the humanities, and her discussion is largely transferable to the humanities.

3. Lawrence Stone (189-94), a modernist, and Gabrielle M. Spiegel (194-208), a poststructuralist, offer their views on history as literature in *Past and Present* 135 (1992). Dominick LaCapra has done much to alert historians to developments in the neighboring fields of literary criticism and philosophy (*Rethinking Intellectual History* 14, 29-31, 63-65). Also see John E. Toews on the "lingusitic turn."

4. Rosenau agrees, maintaining that postmodernism's arrival was "no accident" but rather "concurrent with—and perhaps in response to—societal upheaval, cultural transformation, political change, deep philosophical debate over core values, and disciplinary crises" (9).

5. For a brief overview of this new historiography of political thought, see Fideler and Mayer, Introduction.

6. Recently Howard has become more critical of the new historicism; see her "Feminism and the Question of History."

7. For a fuller development of this appraisal of critical pedagogy see Maxine Greene, "Reflections on Postmodernism and Education."

8. For a very compact presentation of his views see Rawls, "Justice as Fairness."

9. At the 1993 National Institute of the ACLS Elementary and Secondary Schools Teacher Curriculum Development Project, approximately one week after I had formulated the term "pan-narrative" in this article to describe Takaki's integrative work, Terry Moreland Henderson, a

Unified School District and a fellow in the UCLA/ACLS workshop, suggested to the assemblage that "pan-culturalism" has a more encompassing and enveloping tone to it than does the now over-used and fragmenting "multiculturalism." Among other things, these examples of the need to invent terms indicate that our curricular practices and commitments have begun to outdistance our conceptual vocabulary.

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