



Dædalus

Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Spring 2006

comment
on
the humanities

David Bromwich	A republic divided 5
Patricia Meyer Spacks	Revolution in the humanities 11
Steven Marcus	From classics to cultural studies 15
Andrew Delbanco	American literature: a vanishing subject? 22
Pauline Yu	Comparative literature in question 38
Anthony Grafton	History's postmodern fates 54
Thomas Crow	The practice of art history in America 70
Gerald Early	The quest for a black humanism 91
Jack M. Balkin & Sanford Levinson	Law & the humanities 105
Dagfinn Føllesdal & Michael Friedman	The rise of American philosophy 116

poetry

Peg Boyers	Unsent Dedication 127
------------	-----------------------

fiction

Adam Braver	A death in the family 130
-------------	---------------------------

notes

William B. Quandt	on Israel & Palestine 133
Norbert Schwarz	on judgments of truth & beauty 136

letters

on scientists as professionals, Social Security & the aging of America &c. 139	
--	--







Inside front cover: Detail from Raphael's *The School of Athens*, the most famous of his frescoes in the Vatican. This detail is an image of the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Heraclitus, nicknamed "the riddler" for his opaque aphorisms ("It is not possible to step into the same river twice"), represented by Raphael with the face of the painter Michelangelo. The humanism of the High Renaissance revolved around a resurrection of classical culture, quite unlike contemporary notions of "the humanities." See Steven Marcus on *From classics to cultural studies*, pages 15 – 21: "The humanities are essentially a modern invention, not the legacy of a longstanding tradition." Photograph © Scala/Art Resource, NY.

James Miller, Editor of *Dædalus*

Patricia Meyer Spacks, Consulting Editor
for essays on the humanities

Phyllis S. Bendell, Managing Editor
and Director of Publications

Esther Yoo, Assistant Editor

Board of editors

Steven Marcus, Editor of the Academy

Russell Banks, Fiction Adviser

Rosanna Warren, Poetry Adviser

Joyce Appleby (U.S. history, UCLA), Stanley Hoffmann (government, Harvard), Donald Kennedy (environmental science, Stanford), Martha C. Nussbaum (law and philosophy, Chicago), Neil J. Smelser (sociology, Berkeley), Steven Weinberg (physics, University of Texas at Austin); *ex officio*: Patricia Meyer Spacks (President of the Academy), Leslie Cohen Berlowitz (Chief Executive Officer)

Editorial advisers

Daniel Bell (sociology, Harvard), Michael Boudin (law, U.S. Court of Appeals), Wendy Doniger (religion, Chicago), Howard Gardner (education, Harvard), Clifford Geertz (anthropology, Institute for Advanced Study), Carol Gluck (Asian history, Columbia), Stephen Greenblatt (English, Harvard), Thomas Laqueur (European history, Berkeley), Alan Lightman (English and physics, MIT), Steven Pinker (psychology, Harvard), Diane Ravitch (education, NYU), Amartya Sen (economics, Harvard), Richard Shweder (human development, Chicago), Frank Wilczek (physics, MIT)

Contributing Editors

Robert S. Boynton, D. Graham Burnett, Peter Pesic, Danny Postel

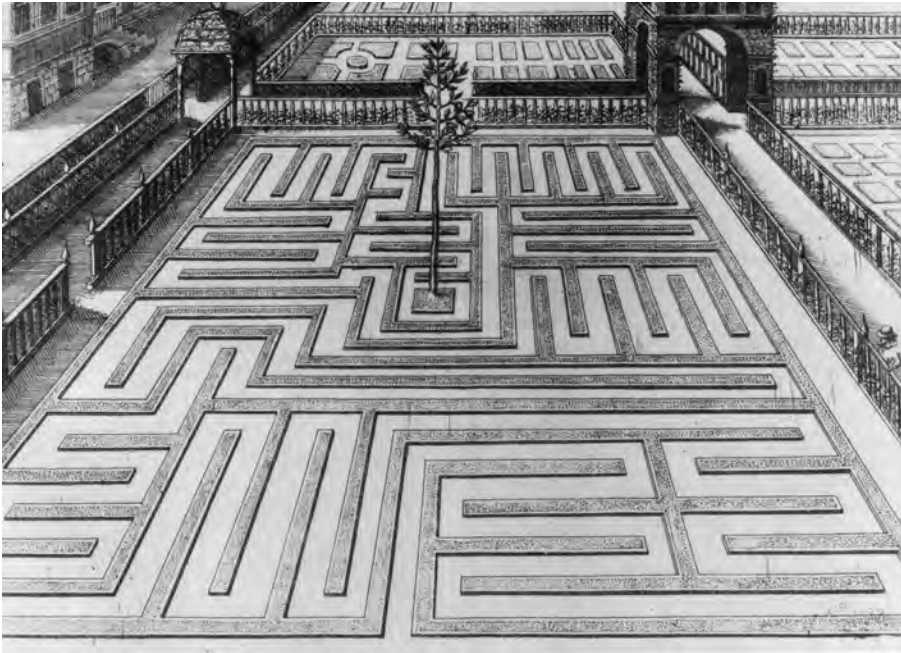
Announcement

Robert Coover's story, "Grandmother's nose," published in the Summer 2005 issue, was selected for inclusion in the 2006 *Best American Short Stories* anthology.

Dædalus is designed by Alvin Eisenman

Dædalus

Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences



Design for the hedge maze is by Johan Vredeman de Vries, from *Hortorum viridariorumque elegantes et multiplicis artis normam affabre delineatae* (Cologne, 1615).

Dædalus was founded in 1955 and established as a quarterly in 1958. The journal's namesake was renowned in ancient Greece as an inventor, scientist, and unriddler of riddles. Its emblem, a maze seen from above, symbolizes the aspiration of its founders to “lift each of us above his cell in the labyrinth of learning in order that he may see the entire structure as if from above, where each separate part loses its comfortable separateness.”

The American Academy of Arts & Sciences, like its journal, brings together distinguished individuals from every field of human endeavor. It was chartered in 1780 as a forum “to cultivate every art and science which may tend to advance the interest, honour, dignity, and happiness of a free, independent, and virtuous people.” Now in its third century, the Academy, with its more than four thousand elected members, continues to provide intellectual leadership to meet the critical challenges facing our world.

Dædalus Spring 2006
Issued as Volume 135, Number 2

© 2006 by the American Academy
of Arts & Sciences

Law & the humanities: an uneasy relationship

© 2006 by Jack M. Balkin
& Sanford Levinson

Unsent Dedication

© 2006 by Peg Boyers

A death in the family

© 2006 by Adam Braver

Editorial offices: *Dædalus*, Norton's Woods,
136 Irving Street, Cambridge MA 02138.
Phone: 617 491 2600. Fax: 617 576 5088.
Email: daedalus@amacad.org.

Library of Congress Catalog No. 12-30299

ISBN 0-87724-054-X

Dædalus publishes by invitation only and assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. The views expressed are those of the author of each article, and not necessarily of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.

Dædalus (ISSN 0011-5266; E-ISSN 1548-6192) is published quarterly (winter, spring, summer, fall) by The MIT Press, Cambridge MA 02142, for the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. An electronic full-text version of *Dædalus* is available from The MIT Press. Subscription and address changes should be addressed to MIT Press Journals, 238 Main Street, Suite 500, Cambridge MA 02142. Phone: 617 253 2889. Fax: 617 577 1545. Email: journals-orders@mit.edu.

Printed in the United States of America by Cadmus Professional Communications, Science Press Division, 300 West Chestnut Street, Ephrata PA 17522.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Dædalus*, 238 Main Street, Suite 500, Cambridge MA 02142. Periodicals postage paid at Boston MA and at additional mailing offices.

Newsstand distribution by Ingram Periodicals Inc., 18 Ingram Blvd., La Vergne TN 37086. Phone: 800 627 6247.

Subscription rates: Electronic only for non-member individuals – \$38; institutions – \$86. Canadians add 7% GST. Print and electronic for nonmember individuals – \$42; institutions – \$96. Canadians add 7% GST. Outside the United States and Canada add \$20 for postage and handling. Prices subject to change without notice.

Institutional subscriptions are on a volume-year basis. All other subscriptions begin with the next available issue.

Single issues: current issues – \$13; back issues for individuals – \$13; back issues for institutions – \$26. Outside the United States and Canada add \$5 per issue for postage and handling. Prices subject to change without notice.

Claims for missing issues will be honored free of charge if made within three months of the publication date of the issue. Claims may be submitted to journals-claims@mit.edu. Members of the American Academy please direct all questions and claims to daedalus@amacad.org.

Advertising and mailing-list inquiries may be addressed to Marketing Department, MIT Press Journals, 238 Main Street, Suite 500, Cambridge MA 02142. Phone: 617 253 2866. Fax: 617 258 5028. Email: journals-info@mit.edu.

Permission to photocopy articles for internal or personal use is granted by the copyright owner for users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) Transactional Reporting Service, provided that the per copy fee of \$10 per article is paid directly to the CCC, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers MA 01923. The fee code for users of the Transactional Reporting Service is 0011-5266/06. Address all other inquiries to the Subsidiary Rights Manager, MIT Press Journals, 238 Main Street, Suite 500, Cambridge MA 02142. Phone: 617 253 2864. Fax: 617 258 5028. Email: journals-rights@mit.edu.

The typeface is Cycles, designed by Sumner Stone at the Stone Type Foundry of Guinda CA. Each size of Cycles has been separately designed in the tradition of metal types.

Comment by David Bromwich

A republic divided

Abraham Lincoln said in the House Divided speech that this nation could not endure half slave and half free. It would become all one thing or all the other – all free or all slave. Then he asked, “Have we no tendency to the latter condition?”

Americans face a similar question today. We cannot endure as an empire feared and distrusted throughout the world and as a constitutional republic founded on liberty and governed by consent.

Lincoln, in his speeches of the 1850s and his debates with Stephen Douglas, pointed to symptoms of a degeneration of public opinion. He believed that the reason for the change was a growing passivity to the expansion of slavery. He had carefully laid the groundwork for his criticism, speaking out against the Mexican War, against the opening of the Nebraska Territory to slaveholders, and against Chief Justice Taney’s opinion in the *Dred Scott* decision, which held that the Negro was a form of property whose

possessor was guaranteed the rights due to owners of other forms of property.

A remedy might come, Lincoln believed, from law-abiding resistance to decisions like *Dred Scott*, and from electing officials determined to put slavery back on its old footing. Slavery would then become an institution confined to a limited section of the country and treated not as a social blessing but a temporary necessity, a practice “in course of ultimate extinction.” The program was radical, in that it envisaged an end of slavery, but it was also conservative, for it aimed to return liberty to the central place it once had held in the feelings of Americans.

One difference in our present situation is obvious. We have no party of opposition in matters of constitutional liberty. No politician of national standing has offered an analysis of the loss of liberty to which many Americans in the past five years have resigned themselves – the kind of analysis that Lincoln initiated with the question, “Don’t you find yourself making arguments in support of these measures, which you never would have made before?”

Instead, we have had piecemeal demurrals and episodic complaints about measures that range from barely legal to bluntly unconstitutional.

If we hope to revive public concern with the fate of constitutional liberty, it is instructive to remember Lincoln’s courageous response to events of the 1850s that carry distinct reverberations today.

David Bromwich, a Fellow of the American Academy since 1998, is Bird White Housum Professor of English at Yale University. His publications include “Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic” (1983), “A Choice of Inheritance” (1989), “Politics by Other Means” (1992), and “Skeptical Music: Essays on Modern Poetry” (2001). He is currently working on a study of Edmund Burke.

© 2006 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

In a six-year campaign of persuasion that began in 1854 with the speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act and ended in 1860 with the Cooper Union speech, Lincoln argued that the nation's founders had considered slavery an embarrassment to the Constitution, an "excrescence." Though this was a controversial view, Lincoln insisted on its veracity; and Americans came to know the evidence better through his teaching. He liked to remind his listeners that the word 'slavery' appeared nowhere in the Constitution. As Lincoln saw it, the record of public acts hostile to slavery that the founders supported in the years after 1788 demonstrated the significance of this omission. Those acts included a law of 1798 that prohibited bringing slaves from Africa into the Mississippi Territory, and the passage in 1807 of a measure that outlawed all African slave trade.

Propagandists today for an expanded American empire or the global spread of democracy – different names for the same thing – agree in citing as a precursor neither Washington nor Lincoln (impossible models for empire builders) but the international 'idealist' Woodrow Wilson. And it is Wilsonian enthusiasm for a permanent peace achieved through war, combined with a flattering and nostalgic interpretation of the cold war, that has underwritten the Bush administration's pursuit of a foreign policy based on intimidation, war, and the threat of war.

Of the scattered reasons offered by James Polk to justify the Mexican War, Lincoln observed: "First he takes up one, and in attempting to argue us into it, he argues himself out of it; then seizes another, and goes through the same process; and then, confused at being able to think of nothing new, he snatches up the old one again . . . His mind, tasked

beyond its power, is running hither and thither, like some tortured creature." A dissenter from the Mexican War, Lincoln thought the United States should be exemplary in its practice of freedom: we should epitomize a political ideal rather than impose our practices on others. He agreed with John Quincy Adams, a president who was later to join Lincoln's own Whig Party, that America "goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own." Adams's warning suggests a truth he did not live to see confirmed. Eagerness for foreign entanglements always stands in inverse proportion to a regard for liberty at home.

Lincoln noticed in the early 1850s that arguments for slavery had grown bolder. A new species of religious apologetics had arisen, and he called it "pro-slavery theology." There was likewise a new shamelessness in avowing the opinion that the Declaration of Independence had set the standard of equality too high. When John Pettit, a Democrat from Indiana, remarked on the floor of the Senate that the maxim "all men are created equal" was "a self-evident lie," nobody challenged the imputation. To Lincoln, this silence was scandalous. The coarsening of political speech was bound to produce, even as it was a product of, a new and reckless brutality of conduct. Had Pettit uttered those words in Independence Hall in 1776, he would have been thrown into the street.

One need not search far to discover a resonance with the present crisis. We have heard a president boast almost casually of his unprecedented power to legalize the assassination of persons abroad. "Put it this way," he said of the targets of secret killings he authorized:

“They are no longer a problem.” Had any earlier president boasted of such acts, the insolence would not have gone unrebuked. But today we lack a public figure willing to take up the burden Lincoln took up in the 1850s: to record, respond, reiterate, and sear the offenses into the public mind.

From 1850 to 1857, the national morale regarding slavery passed from compromise to retrogression. The first great step backward was the repeal of the Missouri Compromise included in the Kansas-Nebraska Act – an action that effectively permitted slavery in new territories north of the Missouri line. The *Dred Scott* decision took the next step. The Court gave legal sanction to the bringing of slaves to the territories when it argued that slaveholders had rights under the Constitution whereas Negroes did not.

Compare the disastrous slide of 2001 – 2006. Once again, we find ourselves making arguments we would never have made before. Our version of pro-slavery theology is pro-torture sophistry. We deplore the atrocities at Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib, yet we refuse to acknowledge that they were a result of directives by officials of our government, which approved forbidden methods of humiliation and deliberate cruelty. As in the 1850s, the change has been accomplished by degrees, through encroachment on an old policy. This has required considerable rhetorical and legal sleight-of-hand. Formerly discountenanced methods therefore were not inculcated as doctrine all at once. Rather, the Bush administration introduced them as emergency measures – backed by Justice Department memorandums that redefined the war in Iraq so as to exclude the United States from the Geneva Conventions, and by memorandums that narrowed the definition of torture so as to permit

all abuse that did not openly intend maiming or killing.

When Lincoln asked whether the United States had no tendency to the condition of a slave republic, he was inviting his listeners to consider the machinery put in place by recent legislation and court decisions. Behind the Kansas-Nebraska Act lay a tacit determination that power and influence and sheer numbers were going to decide the admission or exclusion of slavery in new states. Lincoln believed it needed only a second *Dred Scott* decision to expand the new permissiveness toward slavery from the territories to the states.

Why did he call the *Dred Scott* decision “an astonisher in legal history”? Because it nullified rights that the Constitution implied and gave cash value to rights about which the Constitution said nothing. A similar contempt for the common understanding of basic rights appears in a recent claim by Alberto Gonzales, the former White House counsel and now attorney general. Gonzales asserts that the president has an “inherent right” to authorize warrantless searches of Americans. In assuming such a prerogative – acting outside the law and abridging the Bill of Rights for the declared purpose of protecting Americans – this president and his attorney general have produced an astonisher in legal history.

All of Bush’s and Gonzales’s innovations in justice obey this maxim: change the law if possible; if visible change is thwarted, change the law invisibly; if both tactics fail, break the law and find a justification afterward. Like President Polk in the Mexican War, President Bush was able to change the law visibly to authorize the war he wanted in Iraq. To effect a demoralization of the law on torture, he had to solicit counsel to

change the law invisibly. In the case of domestic spying, he circumvented the existing machinery and, when discovered, claimed authorization from expanded emergency powers.

Of all the equivocal utterances of the 1850s, the one that drew Lincoln's deepest scorn was Stephen Douglas's remark that he did not care whether the people in the territories voted slavery up or down. This may seem almost a predictable feature of Douglas's argument that the popular will is the highest value of democracy. But no event of the time seems to have shocked Lincoln more than this expression of indifference. It may have done as much as any other circumstance to convince him to run for president.

Lincoln had assumed that Americans agreed that slavery was wrong – a necessity, perhaps, but wrong in itself. And yet if slavery was wrong, how could anyone not care whether the people voted it up or down? This looked like saying it was right not to care whether people chose right or wrong. Yet it ought to be morally impossible to feel that something is wrong while supporting a result that makes it legally right. By this way of thinking, the “miners and sappers” against equality – apologists for slavery as well as indifferent conciliators like Douglas – cheapened the value and meaning of life for all people in all sections of the country.

A comparable sign of degeneration today is our growing indifference to torture. How many have gone from believing that torture is simply wrong to conceding that the president may declare it right against certain persons in certain situations, as determined by officials he has chosen? What president before has presumed himself virtuous enough to deserve such power?

We used to suppose that a person arrested for a crime has a right to confront the charges against him. Without quite surrendering this idea, we have allowed ourselves to entertain a new suggestion: that by dictate of the president, certain persons may be picked out and imprisoned without charges. In Lincoln's day, the miners and sappers excused themselves by saying they did it to avoid a war. Now they say they do it to prevent an attack.

“My obligation to protect you” – in recent weeks President Bush has uttered these words again and again. But with these words, he both misquotes and misinterprets his oath of office. As specified in Article II, Section 1 of the Constitution, the presidential oath commits the holder of the office to “preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.” A king protects his people. A president of the United States swears to protect the Constitution, for a free people do not imagine they need any protector better than laws. To address the people as if they required a personal protector is to speak the language of kings.

In the House Divided speech, Lincoln said that he thought he could see the elements of a conspiracy to nationalize slavery. He did not have in mind an organization that met in secret, but rather an unavowed design shared by well-placed persons:

When we see a lot of framed timbers, different portions of which we know have been gotten out at different times and places and by different workmen – Stephen, Franklin, Roger and James, for instance – and when we see these timbers joined together, and see they exactly make the frame of a house or a mill, all the tenons and mortices exactly fitting, and all the lengths and proportions of the differ-

ent pieces exactly adapted to their respective places, and not a piece too many or too few – not omitting even scaffolding – or, if a single piece be lacking, we can see the place in the frame exactly fitted and prepared to yet bring such piece in – in such a case, we find it impossible to not believe that Stephen and Franklin and Roger and James all understood one another from the beginning and all worked upon a common plan or draft drawn up before the first lick was struck.

Included in Lincoln's suspicious and cogent surmise were Stephen Douglas, who by opening the Nebraska Territory created a legislative crisis that gave urgency to the *Dred Scott* case; Roger Taney, the chief justice who wrote a constitutionally improbable majority opinion profoundly comforting to slaveholders; Franklin Pierce, the outgoing president, who said that the courts would soon solve the slavery issue in the territories; and James Buchanan, the incoming president, who welcomed the decision when it arrived.

Compare their efforts to the present-day collaboration of the president, the director of the CIA, and the secretary of defense, together with certain reporters, in making the case for war with Iraq. Consider the joined timbers and fitted tenons and mortices of the president, the CIA, and the Department of Defense in working out the policy of "extraordinary rendition," the legalized kidnapping and transportation of foreign nationals for interrogation at hidden sites. Look at the collusion of the office of the vice president and journalists in leaking the name of a CIA agent whom the vice president and his circle had determined to put out of action.

A conspiracy is seldom a group of people acting in concert according to a settled plan. All that need be aligned are

their interests – both overt and tacit interests – and their knowledge of each other's presence and power. As Lincoln knew, the word 'conspiracy' means literally 'a breathing together,' but in few conspiracies are the actors found in a huddle. It is more accurate to picture a group of people standing far apart but singing a tune with parts that nicely harmonize. They may catch their cues from different places in a very large auditorium.

Lincoln diagnosed in the new acceptance of slavery a "debauching" of public opinion. In his speech of July 4, 1861, he accused Southern propagandists of having "sugar-coated" rebellion, so that they exposed the country to the one peril worse than civil war: destruction of the sentiments that form the basis of civil liberty.

The Patriot Act, hurried through Congress in the panic of 2001, gave the FISA courts a broad scope to authorize undeclared searches and wiretaps. Now we find that even as Congress was passing that law, the president was secretly arrogating to himself the power to instigate warrantless searches. Some Americans, sufficiently drugged by the mystique of the war on terror, appear to believe that there are two sides to this question; that it is right not to care much whether we vote up or down the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendments. It may need only the passage of a second Patriot Act to produce silent consent to the continuous warrantless monitoring of Americans.

Eventually, through the publicity from his debates with Douglas and patient explanation of the emergent Republican doctrine on the expansion of slavery, Lincoln in 1858, 1859, and 1860 gave a character to the party whose candidate he would become. Without that

record and without the national understanding it set in motion, he could not have assumed the strong position he occupied in 1861. Without those earlier steps, his speech of July 4, 1861, which drew thousands of young men to enlist in the Union army, would have been inconceivable. There had been a long work of preparation in the years when he educated the public mind on the political necessity of a constitutional opposition. A campaign of moral resistance had preceded his campaign for the presidency.

To follow Lincoln's pattern in this respect is to place a tremendous burden on the statesman as a reformer of public opinion. Such a leader does not suppose himself either a protector or a follower of the people. Instead, he is their interpreter, and there is hardly a moment when he is not explaining the choices they face. Nor does the task stop there. Lincoln believed – and his life illustrates the principle – that a true statesman is also concerned with the moral constitution of man; a work that goes beyond interpreting the fluctuating opinions held by the majority. Accordingly, Lincoln could not have been any sort of populist, just as, to remain a true republican, he could not have been any sort of imperialist. He supported the American experiment as limited and exemplary. He did not regard democracy, the idea or the political arrangement, as a charm against the violence of misery and oppression.

What would an opposition party look like today if it could emulate the resistance of the Republican Party in 1860? We are a long way from that. In 2002, the Democratic Party in Congress chose a fast authorization of war over a serious debate that might have discharged its obligation to educate the public. In 2004, the Democrats chose to dispute the tactical conduct of the war, and not the lies

and forgeries that launched it. At present, the opposition leaders and its probable candidates for 2008 endorse an escalation of the war. They urge the addition of more soldiers and more armor, and have backed away from a plan for disengagement that came from their own ranks. These acts of tactical leverage have been pusillanimous: the weakness, almost bankruptcy, of principle that underlies them is patent and easily exposed.

Though we have an opposition party in name, we are now close to the condition of the United States after the collapse of the Whigs in the mid-1850s. Where, then, do we find ourselves?

After the fall of Communism, there was an opening that passed. The United States never fully entered the world of nations. The burden of a constitutional opposition today must include education in the significance of this fact. For the sound part of the balance-of-power doctrine always lay in the idea that no one nation can control the world. We may still be the world's best hope; it should be a comfort that we are no longer its last hope. But we cannot endure half empire and half republic. We will become all one thing or all the other: an empire that expands by the permanent threat of war, and invents power after power to enlarge the authority and reach of the state; or the oldest of modern republics, vigilant against the reappearance of tyranny and firm in repelling any leader who sets himself above the law.

– February 23, 2006

Patricia Meyer Spacks

Revolution in the humanities

Successive revolutions during the past century have energized the sciences in often thrilling ways. Given the evidence for dramatic change apparent in new discoveries, new inventions, and new solutions to recognizable problems, the educated public understands that recurrent transformations only corroborate the importance of science as an intellectual endeavor.

Corresponding transmutations of the humanities, in contrast, prove both less recognizable and less readily acceptable, not only to the public but even to academics professing the sciences and the social sciences. Nevertheless, seismic shifts have altered individual disciplines

in the humanities in the course of the twentieth century. Such alterations generate no new understanding of the brain or the biosphere, but they can change our ways of comprehending our cultural heritage and thus our grasp of what it means to live in the world – a shift of consciousness potentially as consequential as mapping the human genome.

Mapping the humanities involves selecting individual stories from among the many available. The seven disciplines represented in this issue of *Dædalus* suggest but by no means exhaust the range of concerns that the humanities explore. Comparative literature, American literature (both offshoots of that vast area of study called “English”), art history, and African American studies have made relatively recent entrances onto the academic scene, whereas philosophy, an ancient branch of study, and history, less ancient but well-established, belong to a longer tradition. Placing law among the humanities (as the authorizing legislation of the National Endowment for the Humanities placed it) hints at both how law has changed as an academic discipline and how our understanding of the meaning of the humanities has changed. Together, investigations of these fields sketch characteristic ways that the humanistic disciplines

Patricia Meyer Spacks, a Fellow of the American Academy since 1994, is Edgar F. Shannon Professor of English, Emerita, at the University of Virginia. She has also served as President of the American Academy since 2001. Spacks has published numerous books, including “The Female Imagination” (1975), for which she received a National Book Award nomination, “Gossip” (1985), “Desire and Truth” (1990), “Boredom” (1995), “Privacy” (2003), and “Novel Beginnings” (2006).

© 2006 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

in the United States have reimagined and reorganized themselves, and indicate some consequences of these shifts in consciousness.

No group of seven disciplines, however, can begin to suggest the entire range of development and transmutation that has brought new concerns, new ways of seeing, and new concepts to the humanities. Four years ago, under the auspices of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and with generous support from the Rockefeller, Sara Lee, and William and Flora Hewlett Foundations, I convened a group of scholars in the humanities to explore large patterns of developments in their individual areas of concentration, with the hope that a collective inquiry would produce fresh insights and raise further questions. The essays in this issue of *Dædalus* are one fruit of this Humanities Initiative. Another is a recent book of essays, edited by David Hollinger, which surveys the specific effects on the humanities of demographic changes during the twentieth century.¹ Subsequent volumes, we anticipate, will investigate such subjects as the relations between the humanities and the arts, the international humanities, interdisciplinarity, the development of museums and libraries, and the dynamics of individual fields – especially new fields – not previously explored in the context of broad questions about the humanities.

The narratives gathered in this issue of *Dædalus* have a narrower focus: They recount the evolution of seven different disciplines over the course of the twentieth century. Accounts of the birth of a discipline, as in the cases of American

literature, African American studies, and comparative literature, provide special illumination because they clarify the perceived needs addressed by the invention and consolidation of an academic field. Academic disciplines, this volume makes clear, do not take shape because some professor creates them from nothing for the sake of ego gratification. On the contrary, they address needs experienced in the world at large. African American studies spoke to an urgent desire to articulate the historical and current situation of a race and to achieve a fuller self-definition. American literature as a verbal manifestation of a new country evolved tentatively at first; only slowly did it gain recognition as a thing in itself. American literature as an academic subject acknowledged an important fact in the nation's history and both created and solidified ways of thinking about it. Comparative literature responded initially to the fresh realities of a world raising questions about the ultimate value of nationalism.

To trace such disciplines from their nineteenth-century beginnings through their maturation in the late twentieth century provides dramatic evidence of how academic fields register shifts in consciousness. Disciplines change much as people change, this collection suggests. They grow in their self-imaginings. They define their own identities, at first tentatively, then with greater certainty. They may make false starts – comparative literature was not destined to fulfill itself as a science – but such misdirections often help to clarify ultimate purposes. They develop increasing self-awareness. They may quarrel with or draw on neighboring fields; most often, they do both. Typically, they absorb new ideas and new concerns as they develop, enlarging their purviews for reasons far more

1 David A. Hollinger, ed., *The Humanities and the Dynamics of Inclusion since World War II* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

productive than the ‘empire building’ of which especially successful academic departments are often accused. ‘Programs’ turn into ‘departments’; small departments become larger. Such facts signal growth in more than the number of faculty.

Each of these stories has inherent interest in itself. As a group, though, they are more than the sum of their parts. Together, they demonstrate, for instance, the extraordinary responsiveness of the American culture of higher education. The notion of the academy as an ivory tower, if ever accurate, has not remained apposite in the twentieth century. On the contrary, colleges and universities in this country have reflected as well as reflected on changes in population and in popular assumption. The enlarging of anthologies of American literature has corresponded to the enlarging of the country’s sense of itself, the nation’s growing realization of its own multiplicity. The shifting techniques employed by historians have echoed questions about what kinds of knowledge are dependable. Art history has moved beyond connoisseurship, as a world faced with urgent economic, social, and political problems has tended to reject the significance of aesthetic objects considered in isolation from such problems. Universities as institutions have worked to survive in ever-changing circumstances, and the humanistic disciplines, as part of those institutions, have performed their own shares of the endeavor.

To read these individual stories in conjunction with one another reveals similarities among diverse disciplines. An important one involves the ways in which disciplines have reached out to one another in recent years – not only by means of formal ‘interdisciplinary’ undertakings, but by responding to

provocations and incorporating techniques from other fields. Thus law, a profession and an academic discipline intensely concerned with rhetoric, has made use of insights from literary theory. So have art history and philosophy. Historians have learned from anthropologists, particularly from Clifford Geertz and his notion of “thick description.” African American studies, interdisciplinary from the outset, has changed its methods in response to changes in the disciplines that inform it. This kind of drawing together constitutes an intellectually powerful trend.

The histories of these seven fields demonstrate ingenious, strenuous, and often remarkable ways of linking past and present. Consistently concerning themselves with what the past can teach us, the areas of study that we label ‘humanistic’ preserve the past for the present and the future. Even when events and artifacts of the past remain constant (new things and happenings, of course, may always be discovered), the disciplines that study them find and promulgate ever-new ways of confronting them. If your daughter’s American lit course – even if she were studying the same works that you read – precisely duplicated yours, that fact would suggest inadequacy in the teacher or in the field. Although certain truths about *Moby Dick* remain unchanged from one generation to the next, new truths also emerge under the pressure and the stimulus of new circumstance. Even general accounts of how fields have modified themselves over time can reveal the value of their constant reconstruction.

Of course, the value of contemplating histories of the humanities must depend finally on the value of the humanities. The writers whose contributions comprise this volume have not attempted to make grand claims for their own disci-

plines or for the humanities as a whole. In the specificity of their accounts, though, one may glimpse reasons for taking the humanities seriously. Steven Marcus reminds us of the tradition – one that may now seem rather quaint – that the humanities provide moral uplift. In difficult economic periods, that tradition has declined into the view that humanistic study, unlike more ‘practical,’ vocationally oriented fields like economics or organic chemistry, is essentially decorative, offering the kind of knowledge that may declare one a cultivated person without having much to do with the rigors of ordinary existence.

The individual essays here make it apparent that the disciplines under consideration, although hardly dedicated to ‘moral uplift,’ do in fact concern themselves centrally with our culture’s constitutive convictions: about justice and law; about right and wrong, good and evil, truth and falsehood; about what to value in works of art, both verbal and visual. These convictions vary over time, as do our understandings of them. Always, though, the humanities demand our alert attention to what we as a culture care about and why, to how our assumptions compare to those of earlier or different cultures, to why what we value matters, to how we can and why we must defend it.

Such large enterprises necessarily assume many forms. This group of essays examines some of them.

Steven Marcus

*Humanities from classics to cultural studies:
notes toward the history of an idea*

Those intellectual pursuits and academic organizations that we think of as constituting the humanities are today undergoing a course of change that is entirely in consonance with their history. The idea of the humanities, in point of fact, first appeared in the United States early in the twentieth century and has altered greatly in meaning ever since, thanks to the intellectual, social, cultural, and educational developments that have taken place over the last hundred years.

These alterations are to be understood, in the first instance, as parts of the evolution of the American university and

Steven Marcus is George Delacorte Professor of the Humanities, Emeritus, at Columbia University. A specialist in nineteenth-century literature and criticism, he has published works such as "Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey" (1965), "The Other Victorians" (1966), "Engels, Manchester, and the Working Class" (1975), and "Freud and the Culture of Psychoanalysis" (1984). He was also instrumental in founding the National Humanities Center. Elected a Fellow of the American Academy in 1974, Marcus currently serves as Editor of the American Academy.

© 2006 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

college system beginning after the end of the Civil War and accelerating steadily as the century ended. At the macro-level of ideal-typical structure, that set of institutions in its historical formation borrowed something from each of the three great European systems from which it also departed. From the nineteenth-century German universities, it adapted Humboldt's animating conception of dedication to original research, combined (often secondarily) with instruction. From Oxford and Cambridge, it secured the notion of the undergraduate residential college, in which teaching included, ideally, educating the social and elevating the moral character of privileged young men, and where, in a community of learning, community often counted for as much as, if not more than, learning. And from the universities of France, the American institutions imported the idea of training young, middle-class men to be officials of the state and servants of society: in America, the land-grant colleges, numerous state universities, and even some normal schools took over the functions that bore upon the formation of middle- and upper-middle-level elites at regional, state, and, occasionally, national levels.

This three-part system that began to evolve in the latter half of the nineteenth

century combined in a spectrum of configurations a hierarchy of undergraduate colleges, graduate research schools and institutes, and technical training centers. Its fully developed form, attained in the second half of the twentieth century, is most distinctly visible in the pyramidal system of institutional distinctions and interchanges that occur among the different elements of the California state system of postsecondary education. At the top are the eight or nine grand university campuses – comprehensive research universities – of which at least two, Berkeley and UCLA, are of the highest standing. Beneath them is the state university (formerly the state college) system, doing its own multifarious academic and cultural work, and sustaining a variety of relations with both the great campuses and the institutions of the third level, the community colleges, which exist throughout the state and aspire to an astonishing range of functions.

A century or more ago, most institutions of higher education rested on religious foundations, and they served, among other things, to reproduce specific social and cultural governing groups. Pressure to change the internal structure of these institutions came from multiple sources. Prominent among them was the intractably growing importance of the natural sciences, which were modifying the shape of the world, intellectually and materially. Spiritually as well, the natural sciences represented a challenge: at worst, they seemed morally subversive; at best, morally indifferent. There was also the increasingly secular character of American institutional, civic, and cultural life, fueled, in part, by the pragmatic demands of a boisterous economy and a clamorous society. In addition, there was, as a substantial corollary to such

practical alterations, an undeniable general decline in the intellectual authority of religion.

At the same time, a widespread movement away from the mandated study of the classical languages and literatures took place: first, classics was no longer a requirement for entrance into the more established undergraduate colleges; likewise, required courses at the lower collegiate level in Greek and Latin began to erode. In short, the classics, along with the classicists, were losing their authority. Second, there was a similar decline in the teaching of ‘moral philosophy.’ Traditionally, this course had been a capstone requirement for graduating seniors; it was also something of a tradition that it was taught by the president of the college, who had customarily, if not universally, been a clergyman. And third, there was the growing consequence in the last quarter of the century of a new undergraduate curriculum: a course of study based more on the idea of free electives than on the notion of a prescribed sequence of courses or even of a distribution of courses among a group of stipulated fields.

The result was a widely felt need for some secular substitute for the religion-based moral education that had heretofore been a central ideological charge of institutions of higher education. It was within this fraught context that the notion of ‘the humanities’ first began to circulate within America’s institutions of higher education.

The humanities as we think of them today – the formal, organized study of language and literature, philosophy and history, art and music – did not exist in the late nineteenth century. Of course, all of these subjects were taught at the time, but each was considered an independent domain, properly organized as

its own department of knowledge. It was in these years that the first specialized departments of philosophy and of religion appeared. Revealing how rapidly the specialization of knowledge was taking place was the phenomenal growth throughout the 1890s of new scientific and professional organizations, with new journals for newly organized studies (with hitherto unheard-of nomenclatures), as well as the equally speedy expansion of the newer social sciences, which achieved autonomy during the same decade (the first department of anthropology in America was founded at Columbia in 1896).

When the term *humanities* was used in these years, as it occasionally was, it referred to the organized study of Greek and Latin classics. But even here, specialization was the order of the day. Under the influence of the dominant German paradigm, classicists, especially the younger members of the profession, began to undertake new kinds of research, observe new standards of scholarly exactitude and expertness, and honor newly 'scientific' goals and methods in the study of philology.

As a result, some senior classicists began to think of themselves as members of an embattled cultural patriciate – which they in fact were. Distrustful of democracy, resentful of scientific method, made anxious by the secular spirit of a crescent modernity, indifferent or hostile to the immigrant millions disembarking on what they regarded as rightfully their native shores, they conceived of themselves as the custodians of a civilization under siege from alien, if not extraterrestrial, forms of life.

In a period of headlong change, the older classicists represented continuity, for they were almost uniformly oriented toward the past. Such a circumstance is particularly salient if unremitting social

and cultural flux brings about not only growth but also dislocation, fragmentation, an increasingly rarefied and abstruse intellectual division of labor, and specialization without a palpable sense of a conceptual whole. Hence there arose a tendency to look to what was occasionally called 'the humanist tradition' (with virtually no one quite knowing what it was) for cultural orientation and guidance. The historical past of Greek, Roman, and Renaissance 'greats,' the classical record of these men and their deeds, seemed to embody a moral as well as an intellectual set of assurances. In the name of Culture, these older classicists promoted the humanist tradition as an educational ideal of gentlemanliness, a rather genial spirituality and anti-materialism. But their influence was limited. Younger philologists, and most students of philosophy, literature, and art, pledged allegiance, not to a bygone ideal of cultivation, but rather to the eminently modern ideals of science and systematic research.

Consequently, few scholars were giving much thought to 'the humanities' as the twentieth century began. The eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1910 – 1911), for example, does not contain any article on 'the Humanities.' There is, however, an entry on "Humanism," which it defined as a Renaissance movement opposed to the "medieval tradition of scholastic theology and philosophy" and involved in the rediscovery of the Greek and Latin classics. One will also find in the relevant tertiary literature of the period mentions of "Litterae Humaniores," the Oxford curriculum in Latin and Greek literature and philosophy. There are also stray references here and there to the curious fact that at Scottish universities the professorship of Latin bore (and still bears) the title "Pro-

fessor of Humanity.” And enquiry into dictionaries of the period yields the finding that they defined the plural form of the noun *humanity* as “the generic term for the classics.”

How uncertain and precarious was the usage of the term *humanities* is evident in a passage from a Phi Beta Kappa address, delivered at the University of Pennsylvania in 1902:

The humanities . . . I suppose that these words call up to the minds of many of us who are not wholly unlettered, a thing in some manner connected with the study of the classics, a something opposed to science and to the study of nature, a something very impractical and very desirable to possess, you do not lose bread and butter by it; a thing much talked of at commencements, and, happily, for the most part, forgotten meanwhile. Indeed, the popular conception of the humanities is . . . not so much a definite conception as an ineffaceable impression that there really are such tongues, and that it is a very disagreeable thing to have much to do with them. The humanities! The very term is redolent of times long gone and smacking of generations before the last. Beside glittering, new-minted epithets like “sociology,” “criminology,” and “degeneracy,” the very word “humanities” looks dim and faded in this new century.

This is a telling passage – and it raises an obvious question. How did ‘the humanities’ lose its association with the conservatism of old-fashioned classicists, and become instead a comprehensive term that described a group of academic disciplines distinguished in content and method from the physical, biological, and social sciences?

The change began early in the twentieth century, when younger scholars of classical literature, together with their colleagues in philology, philosophy, lit-

erature, history, art, and music, began to use the word *humanities* as a general term to refer to what bound their inquiries loosely together. Still, up until 1930, the use of this term in this way was intermittent and inconsistent. Sometimes it implied everything that was *not a science* (but that understanding would exclude a good deal of important humanistic scholarship itself), and sometimes it meant any study that had no immediate *utility*. Only gradually did it take on the sense that we accept and assume today.

From the outset, the term was loosely inclusive – as when, in 1919, the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) included in its titular self-description the words “devoted to humanistic fields.” Four years later, the range of relevant fields was dramatically narrowed when a number of disciplinary organizations seceded from the ACLS in order to found the separate and autonomous organization, the Social Science Research Council.

The term *humanities* effectively enters the academic taxonomy only after 1930, when at the University of Chicago a general reorganization replaced the Faculties of Arts and Letters with the Division of the Humanities. Similarly, in 1936, Princeton initiated an undergraduate interdisciplinary “Special Program in the Humanities.” Meanwhile, in 1936 – 1937, Columbia instituted the path-breaking freshman sequence in the humanities, a mandatory and interdepartmentally taught curriculum, which grew out of its predecessor in contemporary civilization and offered a reading list of literary, philosophical, and religious texts from Homer to Goethe. And at Yale and Harvard, the humanities appeared a few years later as one of the subject groups in their distribution requirements. These courses, sequences, groupings of subjects, and registries of

requirements (and there were similar curricular arrangements being installed at Stanford, Berkeley, and then by both simultaneous inspiration and rapid percolation at many other institutions) were the instructional infrastructure of what was to become a new institutional and intellectual context, linking the work in languages and literature, history, philosophy, linguistics, religion, art and music history, and the so-called softer side of the social sciences. In other words, only in the 1930s and 1940s does the idea of, as well as the term, 'the humanities' begin to be deployed with regular frequency and with the relative specificity of reference to the disciplines that we apply it to today.

Does this history imply that the humanities were, by and large, a residual and merely organizational (not to say administrative) category? Does it imply that the humanities were what were left standing after the social sciences hived themselves off and swarmed off to meet their manifest destiny? Are the humanities the funeral baked meats coldly furnishing forth the marriage tables for other, more up-to-date intellectual undertakings?

Well, yes and no. But mostly no.

What this history *does* show is that the humanities are essentially a modern invention, not the legacy of a longstanding tradition. Thus, when the authors of *General Education in a Free Society*, a Harvard Red Book published in 1945, confidently claimed, "Tradition points to a separation of learning into the three areas of natural science, social studies, and the humanities," they were talking nonsense, for they were summoning forth a tradition that did not exist before the 1930s.

Moreover, the tradition thus conjured up proved to be relatively short-lived.

The war years had brought an influx of European refugee scholars and such paradigmatic achievements as Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* – a magisterial synthesis that made the modern idea of the humanities plausible. At the same time, the experience of the war years underlined the fragility of the humanist ideal. By the 1950s, scholars like Lionel Trilling and journals like *Partisan Review* had rallied to the defense of the humanities, understood now as an imperiled but essential bulwark against barbarism.

As cultural studies began to emerge in the 1960s and after as a broad, reshaping tendency within the humanities, the organizational model customarily pursued was that of the interdisciplinary programs of American studies, many of which had gotten underway themselves in the late 1940s and 1950s. Such innovations began frequently as movements within disciplines and departments. They then typically branched out into interdepartmental explorations, faculty seminars, interdisciplinary team-taught seminars, and then largely undergraduate courses of study. Including literature, history, art history, law, sociology, anthropology, and whatever else has seemed appropriate, such programs have regularly been the organizational paradigm and umbrella for cultural studies. The titles and interests of such programs are now too numerous to list, but they include prominently African American studies, women's studies, ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, New Historicist studies, and gay and lesbian studies. They are, as the saying goes, where the action has been, and it isn't difficult to see why – they are doing something intrinsically right, however much one may want to hold concretely and specifically in reserve.

Two large influences are present in the family history of this latest development. First is the untimely return of Marxism, a particularly awkward matter in a post-Marxist world. The reaffirmation of Marxism as a program in the humanistic academy, when it is for the historical moment dormant or in an expired state almost everywhere else, creates a difficult situation for its more perceptive adherents (and tends as well to make some of their avowed radicalism appear quaint rather than subversive). In addition, the Marxian universalist perspective does not accord comfortably with those anti-Enlightenment, anti-Eurocentric, anti-American, and anti-University sentiments that often seem to drive certain of these recent academic cultural subgroupings.

The second such flow of influence is in some measure connected with the first, though it is not immediately or solely derived from it. I am referring to the general notion of the cultural construction of knowledge. This is a powerful and useful conception both in theory and application. It has itself a diversity of affiliative roots: it has originary leadings in certain Marxist dealings with ideology, in cultural anthropology as a whole, in a number of the larger motions of nineteenth-century historicist modes of thought, and in the sociology of knowledge. Precisely because it is so strong an instrument of analysis, it has to be employed with considerable tact and urbanity – which, unfortunately, it often is not. For it is only one moderately short intellectual step from the measured historical relativism of this perspective to the lamentable reductionism of a considerable portion of identity politics, the assertion that one's personal or group situation – class, race, or gender – determines the substance of one's thoughts and beliefs. And from this

point it is merely one step again to the claim that 'everything is political' – that one's position, location, or site determines all arguments and convictions, and that genuine contentious discussion is, in effect, pointless. Or, rotated to yet another side, the belief that the political bearing of a work of literature is the most important thing about it, or that such a work is foremost merely another text in some historical negotiation over power, is equally ruinous. Just as stifling is the constructionist argument in an extreme form – that since all knowledge is socially or culturally constructed, no transcontextual validity is possible. That remark is as axiomatic as the claims it condemns. How damaging such arguments can be are visible in certain quarters of some American law schools.

Yet despite such serious drawbacks and dubious intellectual groundings, I believe we are undergoing another shift in the internal configuration of the disciplines that constitute the humanities. History, culture, literary analysis, and other thick pursuits, now that grand theory has receded, have been let in again – through the back door, so to speak. It will not, I suspect, be ultimately fatal that the impulses that first moved some of the designers of these new initiatives and programs were overtly political in ways that allowed ideological leanings and purposes to compromise the scholarly studies that they undertook. What is important in this connection is that a new range of topics and themes has been legitimately started, that new cultural and historical materials are being brought forward for discussion and analysis. To be sure, we are not out of the ideological woods yet; some of the more heated opposing groups are still having it out, ensuring more unpleasant

scenes and consequences. (Think of what might happen in legal studies.) But there is a sense abroad that the most intense moments of acrimony may be past, that some settling is taking place, and that pitched battle has given way, if not to peace, then to smaller guerilla actions and even, here and there, to armed, if exhausted, truce. Most of all, there is a growing sense of need for new intellectual departures and an intuition as well that the connections and discontinuities between generations of teachers and scholars need attention and repair, that we may have lost generations of academics as well as of writers and artists, and that this reckoning has yet to be made.

We may hence in this spacious context choose to regard what are known as cultural studies largely as residues of ideological movements, but residues that have been progressively assimilated, in the customary American way, into the general intellectual life of the academy, a life that is more than ever before intimately bound up with changes in the culture at large. Or, alternatively, we may regard such developments as *emergent processes*, carrying their history along with them, to be sure, but resuming with modified perspectives certain projects that have been suspended for a time – for example, revisionary readings of the old ‘new critics’ and historians by some of the younger cultural critics. These latest scholars have less history behind them, but considering the nature of much recent history, that may not be an entirely bad thing. Equally cogent, however, is the sense they communicate of an awareness of intellectual and disciplinary *fragmentation* of both perspective and knowledge and of the need for new shapes of intellectual *integration*.

My own intuition of the current situation is that we must take such projects as

they come, one by one. For the present, it is sufficient to commit oneself to the notion that the intellectual excellence of the individual scholar or program is the basis for judgment. We must regard cultural projects with overtly political purposes or principally ideological ends as suspicious, if not outrightly dangerous, objects. The inner reconfiguration of the humanistic disciplines of study at the end of the twentieth century will take place whether we want it to or not. Our responsibility at this time, it seems to me, is to make that transition to new purposes and perspectives as honest and open, as flexible and inclusive, as possible. If we turn ourselves to this work, we will be doing what it is appropriate for scholars and critics at any time to do.

Andrew Delbanco

American literature: a vanishing subject?

Some fifty years after the political establishment of the United States, the concept of an American literature barely existed – an absence acknowledged with satisfaction in Sydney Smith’s famous question posed in 1820 in the *Edinburgh Review*: “Who in the four corners of the globe reads an American book?” The implied answer was no one. Another twenty years would pass before this question was seriously reopened, along with the more fundamental question that lay behind it: whether a provincial democracy that had inherited its language and institutions from the motherland did or should have a literature of its own. Visiting in 1831, Tocqueville could still remark on “the small num-

ber of men in the United States who are engaged in the composition of literary works,” and he added justifiably that most of these are “English in substance and still more so in form.”¹

Yet in every settled region of the new nation voices were raised to make the case that a distinctive national literature was desirable and, indeed, essential to the prospects of American civilization. Literary production and learning were conceived as an antidote to, or at least a moderating influence on, the utilitarian values of a young society where, as Jefferson put the matter in 1825, “the first object . . . is bread and covering.” By 1837, the most notable of the many calls for literary nationalism, Emerson’s Phi Beta Kappa oration at Harvard, with its famous charge that “we have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe,” was already a stock statement. By 1850, when Herman Melville weighed in against “literary flunkeyism toward England,” the complaint was a hackneyed one.

During this first phase of national self-consciousness, there arose a corollary critique of those few New World writers, such as Washington Irving,

Andrew Delbanco, Julian Clarence Levi Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University, has been a Fellow of the American Academy since 2001. He has written extensively on American history and culture, including books such as “The Puritan Ordeal” (1989), “The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil” (1995), and “Required Reading: Why Our American Classics Matter Now” (1997). His latest publication is “Melville: His World and Work” (2005).

© 2006 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2 (New York: Vintage, 1990), 55–56.

who had achieved international recognition by copying Old World models – writers who, according to belligerent democrats like Walt Whitman, imitated authors who “had their birth in courts” and “smelled of princes’ favors.” These outbursts of nascent cultural pride tended to take the form of shouts and slurs (Whitman spoke sneeringly of “the copious dribble” of poets he deemed less genuinely American than himself) rather than reasoned debate. They were analogous to, and sometimes part of, the nasty quarrels between Democrats and Whigs in which the former accused the latter of being British-loving sycophants, and the latter accused the former of being demagogues and cheats.

Literary versions of these political disputes played themselves out in the pages of such journals as *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine* and *The Literary World* (New York), *The Dial* and *The North American Review* (Boston), *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* (first Washington, then New York), and *The Southern Literary Messenger* (Richmond) – magazines that sometimes attained high literary quality (in 1855, Thackeray called *Putnam’s* “much the best Mag. in the world”). Most contributors to these magazines had nothing to do with academic life, such as it was in the antebellum United States. The literary cadres to which they belonged developed first in Boston; slightly later in New York; and, more modestly, in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Richmond, and Charleston. Only a very few writers or critics, such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, whom Harvard appointed to a professorship in 1834, maintained more than a tangential connection to any college. There were as yet no universities.²

2 Several mid-twentieth-century literary historians, notably William Charvat in *The Profession*

Then, as now, the chief business of literary journalism was the construction and destruction of individual reputations, though at stake throughout the nineteenth century were also more general claims about how and what American writers should be writing. The essays of William Dean Howells, for instance, published as columns in *The Atlantic* and *Harper’s* and later selected for his volume *Criticism and Fiction* (1892), amounted to a brief for what Howells called “realism,” as exemplified by his own fiction. Frank Norris (*The Responsibilities of the Novelist* [1903]) and Hamlin Garland (*Crumbling Idols* [1894]) proclaimed as universal the principles of whatever ‘school’ – “veritism” for Garland and “naturalism” for Norris – they were committed to at the time. Perhaps the only disinterested critic still worth reading from this period is John Jay Chapman (1862 – 1933), whose work belongs to the genre of the moral essay in the tradition of Hazlitt and Arnold.

But even such minor novelists as the Norwegian-born H. H. Boyesen (1848 – 1895) contributed occasional criticism that helped to enlarge the literary horizon. In Boyesen’s slight book of 1893, *Literary and Social Silhouettes*, for example,

of Authorship in America, 1800 – 1870 (a collection of essays written between 1937 and 1962), Perry Miller in *The Raven and the Whale* (1956), and Benjamin T. Spencer in *The Quest for Nationality* (1957), have sketched the emergence of the literary profession in these years as part of the larger construction of American nationalism in the age of territorial expansion. More recent scholars, such as James D. Wallace in *Early Cooper and his Audience* (1985) and Meredith McGill in *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834 – 1853* (2003), have deepened our understanding of the economic difficulties that writers without patronage, and without much protection by copyright law, had to overcome.

he approved such now-forgotten writers as Edgar Fawcett and H. C. Bunner for portraying “the physiognomy of New York – the Bowery, Great Jones Street, and all the labyrinthine tangle of malodorous streets and lanes, inhabited by the tribes of Israel, the swarthy Italian, the wily Chinaman, and all the other alien hordes from all the corners of the earth.” Novelist-critics like Boyesen and James Gibbons Huneker (1860 – 1921), an advocate of impressionism in painting and music, were among many who tried, with a mixture of anxiety and approval, to come to terms with the impact of modernity on American life. Their critical writing, like their fiction, was more descriptive than prescriptive, more inquiring than inquisitorial – and therefore incipiently modern.

In short, forward-looking proponents of American literary ideals tended to be outside the academy. This has been so from the era dominated by the Duyckinck brothers, whose *Cyclopedia of American Literature* (1855) helped establish a canon of major writers, through E. C. Stedman’s *Poets of America* (1885), W. C. Brownell’s *American Prose Masters* (published in 1909 by Scribners, for whom Brownell served for forty years as literary advisor), and Alfred Kazin’s *On Native Grounds* (1942), a revelatory book by a young freelance book reviewer who, like his contemporary Irving Howe, did not take a permanent academic job until late in his career. The author who emerged in the twentieth century as the central figure of nineteenth-century American literature, Herman Melville, was championed mainly by critics working outside the academy, such as Lewis Mumford, Charles Olson, and, in Britain, D. H. Lawrence. And a good number of major twentieth-century critics – notably Edmund Wilson, whose *Patriotic Gore* (1962) did much to revise our un-

derstanding of Civil War literature – expressed frank hostility toward academics as hopelessly straitened and petty.

Probably the most significant body of American critical writing to date is that of a novelist, Henry James, in the prefaces to the New York edition (1907 – 1909) of his fiction as well as in his considerable body of literary journalism. “The Art of Fiction” (1888) – James’s riposte to the English critic Walter Besant’s prescriptive essay about the Do’s and Don’ts of fiction-writing – still has tonic power for young writers who feel hampered by prevailing norms and taste. And James’s 1879 study of Nathaniel Hawthorne, the first significant critical biography of an American writer, brings into view in a few pages the whole moral history of nineteenth-century American culture. In that remarkable book, we see how theological ideas were being displaced and how the artist-observer could take pleasure in witnessing their displacement:

It was a necessary condition for a man of Hawthorne’s stock that if his imagination should take licence to amuse itself, it should at least select this grim precinct of the Puritan morality for its play ground The old Puritan moral sense, the consciousness of sin and hell, of the fearful nature of our responsibilities and the savage character of our Taskmaster – these things had been lodged in the mind of a man of Fancy, whose fancy had straightway begun to take liberties and play tricks with them – to judge them (Heaven forgive him!) from the poetic and aesthetic point of view, the point of view of entertainment and irony. This absence of conviction makes the difference; but the difference is great.

The American-born T. S. Eliot once expressed the view that “the *only* critics worth reading were the critics who

practiced, and practiced well, the art of which they wrote” – a statement that has been almost universally true in America.

At the turn of the twentieth century, however, American writing was beginning to become a ‘field’ in the academic institutions that earlier practitioners had, by and large, avoided. As early as the 1880s, Dartmouth, Wellesley, and Brown were offering, at least sporadically, courses on American authors, though the subject remained dispensable enough that NYU, which ran an American literature course from 1885 to 1888, allowed it to fall into abeyance until 1914.³ The scholar who first installed the subject in one of the new research universities was Moses Coit Tyler, the child of Connecticut Congregationalists. While a professor at the University of Michigan, he wrote the first serious history of colonial American writing, *A History of American Literature, 1607 – 1765* (1878), based on close study of virtually all published primary texts. In 1881, Tyler moved to Cornell, where he assumed the first university chair devoted wholly to American literature and produced his *Literary History of the American Revolution* (1897).

It is worth noting that Tyler began teaching at a midwestern state university and concluded his career at the quasi-public Cornell, founded in 1865 with a combination of private benefactions and public subsidies. Older, more tradition-bound private institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, all of which originated in the colonial period as seminaries allied with one or another Protestant denomination, em-

braced American writing as a plausible field of study more slowly. Once its legitimacy had been established, though, professors of American literature settled into defending the virtues of the (mainly New England) ancients against what Boyesen had called the “alien hordes.” In his *Literary History of America* (1900), Barrett Wendell, of Harvard, devoted virtually all of its first 450 pages to New England writers, followed by a closing chapter entitled “The Rest of the Story.” In a preface to his new anthology of American literature (1901), Brander Matthews, Columbia’s specialist in dramatic literature, followed Johann Gottfried Herder and Hippolyte Taine in insisting that a national literature must be understood as the expression of the “race-characteristics” of the people who produce it. Writing nearly ten years after the death of Walt Whitman, Matthews confidently declared that the United States had “not yet produced any poet even of the second rank.”⁴

With the consent of such figures as Wendell at Harvard and Matthews at Columbia, the subject of American literature became an instrument by which the sons of the Anglo-Saxon ‘race’ could get better acquainted with their heritage and, presumably, protect it from the interloping hordes who were threatening to debase it. Here was the literary equivalent of the ‘Teutonic germ theory’ of American history: the idea that democratic ideas and institutions had germinated in the German forests, from which restless tribes carried them to England, where they sprouted again (against the resistance of the Celtic ancestors of the modern Irish) and from which Puritan emigrants eventually transplanted them

3 Kermit Vanderbilt, *American Literature and the Academy: The Roots, Growth, and Maturity of a Profession* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 110.

4 Brander Matthews, “Suggestions for Teachers of American Literature,” *Educational Review* 21 (January – May 1901): 12.

to the New World.⁵ Seen as a branch of this kind of race thinking, the academic study of American literature arose, at least in part, as a defensive maneuver by Anglophile gentlemen who felt their country slipping out of their control into the hands of inferiors.

As a more miscellaneous blend of students began passing through the universities, these gentlemen hoped that the study of American literature could be a means of sweetening and enlightening them before they presented themselves for positions of power no longer reserved exclusively for the Brahmins. Some professors went further, claiming for themselves the moral authority once reserved for the clergy. Consider Irving Babbitt, who specialized at Harvard not in American but in French literature, and who became a public commentator on issues of the day by waging war in general-circulation magazines against what he considered the American tendency toward vulgarity and self-indulgence. Here, in a 1928 essay on H. L. Mencken, with a nod to Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt writes his own version of how Americans had fallen away from the moral realism of their forebears. James had told the tale as the story of Hawthorne liberating himself from the suppressive weight of his ancestors, but Babbitt tells it as a moral descent from self-knowledge into self-deception, as exemplified by Mencken:

If the Protestant Church is at present threatened with bankruptcy, it is not because it has produced an occasional Elmer Gantry. The true reproach it has incurred is that, in its drift toward modernism, it has lost its grip not merely on

certain dogmas but, simultaneously, on the facts of human nature. It has failed above all to carry over in some modern and critical form the truth of a dogma that unfortunately received much support from these facts – the dogma of original sin. At first sight Mr. Mencken would appear to have a conviction of evil . . . [but] the appearance . . . is deceptive. The Christian is conscious above all of the “old Adam” in himself: hence his humility. The effect of Mr. Mencken’s writing, on the other hand, is to produce pride rather than humility . . . [as he] conceived of himself as a sort of morose and sardonic divinity surveying from some superior altitude an immeasurable expanse of “boobs.”

Yet even as it served social ends, the study of American literature remained a secondary or even tertiary (after classics and English) part of the program for making boys into gentlemen. To read through the first scholarly history, *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (1917) – a book more encyclopedic than discriminating – is to be reminded, as Richard Poirier has remarked, that into the third decade of the twentieth century, American literature “was still up for grabs.”⁶ As classics departments continued to shrink and English departments to grow, even books by the New England worthies were still treated with condescension. As late as the 1950s, Harvard graduate students in English could propose American literature as a doctoral examination field only as a substitute for medieval literature, which was coming to seem arcane and archaic, even to traditionalists.

With the continued decline of philology and of Latin and Greek as college pre-

5 See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 87–88.

6 Richard Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1987), 19.

requisites in the 1930s and 1940s, the study of American literature finally attained a certain academic respectability. Yet the Harvard English department, which preserves in its name, “Department of English and American Literature and Language,” a trace of its origins in philological studies, did not add the phrase ‘and American’ until the 1970s. My own department at Columbia, the “Department of English and Comparative Literature,” to this day does not include in its official name the term ‘American’ – and, as far as I know, has no plans to add it.

Today, though some professors of American literature still feel outnumbered and even beleaguered, the field is populous. Since the founding of the American Literature Section of the Modern Language Association in 1921, the professional status of American literature has been secure, and members of the guild now designate themselves by the term ‘Americanist’ – a word that, like ‘orthopedist’ or ‘taxidermist,’ implies an arduously acquired training for a useful trade.

It is an unfortunate word for various reasons, not least because it obscures the fact that for many years after their subject achieved academic acceptance, Americanists were among the least professionalized of professors. Especially at a time when English departments still devoted themselves mostly to philological research and to the recovery of reliable texts, the field of American literary studies was something of a misfit. It attracted students with current political and cultural problems much on their minds and scholars who seemed unable to rid themselves of what detractors regarded as chronic presentism. For example, the immensely influential *Main Currents of American Thought* (1927–1930), by

V. L. Parrington, an English professor at the University of Washington, was an effort, as tendentious as it was ambitious, to trace the genealogy of democratic populism all the way back to dissident Puritans. Perry Miller’s great revisionary works on the Puritan mind, conceived in the 1930s partly in response to Parrington, ran parallel to the writings of such neo-Calvinist theologians as Reinhold Niebuhr, who retrieved from deep in the past an account of human psychology that might still serve as a competent description of contemporary reality as the horror of fascism engulfed Europe.

As American literary studies gained in prestige, it became apparent that its leading scholars did not trust, and were not to be trusted with, the ways and means of the English department. Many of the vanguard figures were openly and overtly concerned with the world outside the college gates. Some forged at least a tacit partnership with such historians as the senior Arthur M. Schlesinger, who, as early as 1922, had insisted in *New Viewpoints in American History* that no serious history could be written without attention to the experience of women and that “contrary to a widespread belief, even the people of the thirteen English colonies were a mixture of ethnic breeds.”⁷

Yet the originating figures of American literary studies have been described in recent years as narrow-minded men (until the 1970s and 1980s, they were almost all men) with retrograde minds occluded by the sexual and racial prejudices of their time. This is, at best, a caricature and, at worst, a slander. F. O. Matthiessen’s first published book was a

⁷ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *New Viewpoints in American History* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 3, 126–127.

study of the fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett (1929). In *The New England Mind* (1939 – 1952), Miller showed, long before the ‘New Historicists,’ how close scrutiny of what most of his colleagues considered subliterate forms could reveal an alien culture. Constance Rourke, who never held an academic post but exerted formidable influence on academic literary studies, anticipated in her *American Humor* (1931) the ‘anthropological turn’ of forty years later by breaking down the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture and reveling in the mix.

American literary studies in these formative years was emphatically un- or even anti-academic. There was a natural affinity between professors interested in the history of their own literature – a short history, after all – and undergraduate writers who hoped to make a place for themselves in the literary histories of the future. Richard Wilbur, who was a Junior Fellow at Harvard in the 1940s, recalls that F. O. Matthiessen was always alert to “any stirrings of the creative spirit” in his students (he taught undergraduates almost exclusively) and made himself available to read manuscripts by the hopeful young poets and playwrights who passed through his courses.⁸ Lionel Trilling, though he never carried a portfolio as an Americanist, wrote extensively about American writers past and present – Fitzgerald, Twain, Dreiser, Hemingway, and Frost, among others – and took a special interest in his gifted and eccentric Columbia College student Allen Ginsberg. When Trilling’s colleague Mark Van Doren wrote his exuberant critical biography of Hawthorne in 1948, it was as if he had just heard the

8 Richard Wilbur in *F. O. Matthiessen (1902 – 1950): A Collective Portrait*, ed. Paul M. Sweezy and Leo Huberman (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950), 145.

young Hawthorne reading in a college common room and had rushed away to report his discovery of a new talent.

Professionalization, of course, was inevitable. By the 1940s, New Criticism was the reigning orthodoxy in literary studies. Among Americanists, it was deployed to best effect in Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance* (1941) and in the books and essays of Newton Arvin, who spent his career at Smith College. The techniques of New Critical analysis revealed that at least a few American works had a density and complexity comparable to the most difficult, and therefore (according to the criteria of the New Criticism) most rewarding, modernist poems. Matthiessen made his case for Melville by setting Ahab’s speeches in verse and presenting them as every bit as intricate as the soliloquies of Hamlet or Lear. He brought to his writing the kind of formal scrupulosity associated with F. R. Leavis and William Empson in England, and along with fellow travelers Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks (who eventually converged at Yale), he inaugurated a tradition that continues today in the work of such adept close readers as Richard Poirier and William Pritchard.

Although Matthiessen and the best of his followers were never doctrinaire (fifty years after its publication, Daniel Aaron described *American Renaissance* as “fully cognizant of the social context” of its subject), the vogue of *explication de texte* threatened to become a formalist dogma.⁹ Matthiessen himself was never

9 Daniel Aaron, review of H. Lark Hall, *V. L. Parrington: Through the Avenue of Art in the New Republic*, September 5, 1994. By the early 1960s, one of Matthiessen’s successors at Harvard, Howard Mumford Jones, faulted Ralph Waldo Emerson for writing essays that amounted to “paragraphs on a string” and thereby failed the New Critical test of formal coherence. H. M.

narrowly a 'New Critic.' He was a man of the Left, who after the war was to write a naïve report, *From the Heart of Europe* (1948), about how impressed he was with life and spirit in the solidifying Soviet bloc. And in his preface to *American Renaissance*, he declared that what linked his five authors (Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Hawthorne, and Whitman) was their "common devotion to the possibilities of democracy" – an odd assertion about Hawthorne, though one that helps explain the absence of Edgar Allan Poe from Matthiessen's book. By the 1950s, the turn inward away from politics was in full swing, and testing an author's literary significance by any political standard was coming to seem eccentric.

One dissenter from the aesthetic turn, Henry Nash Smith, who was among the first recipients of the Ph.D. from the Harvard Committee on the History of American Civilization – and whose dissertation became a remarkable book, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950), a study of the frontier myth in pulp fiction, James Fenimore Cooper's novels, Wild West shows, and the writings of Jefferson and Twain – complained in 1957 that "the effect of the New Criticism in practice has been to establish an apparently impassable chasm between the facts of our existence in contemporary society and the values of art." Smith, who by then held a professorship in the Berkeley English department, lodged his objection not on behalf of a historicist understanding of

the context in which works of the past had been produced, but on behalf of what would soon come to be known as 'relevance' to the present. Here was the keynote of the American studies movement, which flourished in the post-war years as an eclectic alternative to both English and history at a number of universities, including Pennsylvania, George Washington, and Case Western Reserve, as well as at Yale, Harvard, and Berkeley.

On many campuses, American studies seceded, in fact if not always in name, from the English department. American studies scholars sometimes clustered within English as a quasi-independent subdepartment or broke away into departments or programs of their own. They were impatient with the parochialism of what they regarded as Anglophile literary studies, but also, as Smith went on to suggest, with the empiricism of traditional historians: "We are no better off if we turn to the social sciences for help in seeing the culture as a whole. We merely find society without art instead of art without society."¹⁰ At its best, American studies was a hugely ambitious enterprise that aimed to lay bare the heart of "the culture as a whole" by exposing myths and metaphors that operate below the level of consciousness and by which, according to Smith's definition of culture, "subjective experience is organized." To these ends, it assumed a wide mandate, taking into its purview not just literary monuments but monuments of all kinds – there is a direct line from Lewis Mumford's *Sticks and Stones: A Study of American Architecture and Civilization* (1924) to Alan Trachtenberg's *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* (1965).

10 Henry Nash Smith, "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?" *American Quarterly* 9 (Summer 1957): 203.

Jones, introduction to a new edition of W. C. Brownell, *American Prose Masters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), vii. This sort of opinion mongering in the guise of objective judgment was not a healthy development for the field.

Even in its more strictly literary manifestations, such as R. W. B. Lewis's *The American Adam* (1955), the American studies method was to look through and beyond particular literary texts to find what Lewis called the "recurring pattern of images – ways of seeing and sensing experience" by which Americans apprehend meaning in their lives.¹¹ Leo Marx, in *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), showed how writers such as Thoreau and Twain tried to chart a path between rapacious capitalism and radical utopianism – a *via media* that Marx described as a uniquely American version of pastoral. Smith's *Virgin Land* and Lewis's *The American Adam* disclosed a national dream of recovering a prelapsarian condition in which the world could begin anew – a dream painfully lost when the dreamer awakes.

The patterns that interested American studies scholars tended to be expressions of progressive hope, and it is perhaps a measure of their intense personal investment in the promise of America that a striking number of leading figures in the field fell into disappointment and even despair. Like Matthiessen, John William Ward, a leading member of the 'myth and symbol' school (who, during the Vietnam era, became an outspokenly antiwar president of Amherst College and later a political activist on behalf of public housing), died by suicide. Perry Miller hastened his own death at age fifty-eight

11 A cogent critique of the 'myth and symbol' school is Bruce Kuklick, "Myth and Symbol in American Studies," *American Quarterly* 24 (4) (October 1972): 435–450. Kuklick doubts that we can apprehend anything so vague as 'popular consciousness' by elucidating the structure of artifacts, such as books or paintings, or even political events, such as speeches or elections.

by poisoning himself with alcohol a few weeks after the assassination of President Kennedy.

The range and imagination of these scholars were far-reaching, but their intellectual force was centripetal. They wanted to penetrate through a great variety of texts to some unitary core of *Americanness*. (They construed broadly the word 'text' long before the 'cultural studies' movement of the 1980s and 1990s discovered the semiotics of fashion, advertising, or sports.) The titles of their books commonly included what today's scholars would dismiss as 'totalizing' or 'reifying' phrases, like 'American character' (the subtitle of Constance Rourke's book on humor was "A Study of the National Character") or 'American mind,' as in Alan Heimert's *Religion and the American Mind* (1966) or Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1968).

Recently, their movement has come under sharp attack as a collection of insouciant dreamers – men who elided ethnic, racial, class, and gender differences and confused the fantasies of elites with the experiences of ordinary people. In a recent retrospective essay, Leo Marx, now in his eighties, vigorously defends the American studies movement as having always acknowledged discontinuities between America's claims to egalitarian democracy and the realities of life in a brutally competitive society, where equality of opportunity, much less equality of condition, has never been fully achieved. There was always, Marx insists, an emphasis on the 'unfinishedness' of American society as well as a sense that scholar-teachers could contribute to the tradition of "dissident social movements, including, for example, the transcendentalist, feminist, and abolitionist movements of the antebellum era; the populist movement of

the 1880s and 1890s; the pre-World War I progressive movement [of which Partridge's *Main Currents* was a belated expression], and . . . the left-labor, anti-fascist movements (and Cultural front) of the 1930s . . ." By and large, American studies scholars looked for inspiration not to the mainstream academy, but to what Marx calls an "uncategorizable cohort" of "deviant professors, independent scholars, public intellectuals, and wide-ranging journalists and poets" – among them, Constance Rourke, Thorstein Veblen, Alexis de Tocqueville, D. H. Lawrence, and W. E. B. Du Bois.¹²

Amid the enormous upheaval of the 1960s to which Steven Marcus alludes in his overview essay in the present issue of *Dædalus*, American literary studies, like virtually every other activity in America's universities, was profoundly transformed. A series of traumatic assassinations (John Kennedy, Medger Evers, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Kennedy, Malcolm X) and the spiraling disaster of the Vietnam War inevitably darkened the myths and symbols that drew Americanists. The individualist frontiersman of Smith and Lewis became the marauding Indian-killer of Richard Slotkin in his *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600 – 1860* (1973) – a book that read the Vietnam War back into the nineteenth-century Indian wars. Henry Nash Smith issued a *mea culpa* in a late essay (1986) in which he wrote that when he had composed *Virgin Land* as a young man, he had been under the spell of Frederick Jackson Turner and had already "lost the capacity for facing up to the tragic dimensions of the Westward Move-

ment."¹³ By the 1970s, Perry Miller's protoexistentialist Puritans, who had struggled to preserve their Calvinist piety in the face of Arminian rationalism, were giving way to Sacvan Bercovitch's Puritans in his *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (1975) and *The American Jeremiad* (1978) – millenarian crusaders who proclaimed themselves a chosen people charged by God to seize the "wilderness" from the heathens and erect in it a New Jerusalem.

A leader of what might be called second-wave American studies, Bercovitch tried to come to terms with the first wave by dissociating himself from the "tribal totem feast" at which a new generation of scholars was feeding on Miller's corpus. In 1986, having moved from Columbia to Harvard, he dedicated to Miller and Matthiessen an edited collection of essays by a number of younger scholars whom Frederick Crews, in an unfriendly essay-review, grouped under the rubric "New Americanists."¹⁴ But reconciliation was elusive. The New Americanists accused Matthiessen of "silencing dissenting political opinions,"¹⁵ by which they seemed to mean that he had been locked into a binary

13 Henry Nash Smith, "Symbol and Idea in Virgin Land," in Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen, eds., *Ideology and Classic American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 28.

14 Sacvan Bercovitch, ed., *Reconstructing American Literary History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986). Crews coined the term in "Whose American Renaissance?" *New York Review of Books*, October 27, 1988, and carried his critique further in "The New Americanists," *New York Review of Books*, September 24, 1992.

15 Donald Pease, "Moby-Dick and the Cold War," in *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*, ed., Walter Benn Michaels and Donald Pease (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 119.

12 Leo Marx, "Believing in America," *Boston Review* 28 (6) (December 2003 – January 2004): 28 – 31.

view of the world that pitted American individualism (of which Whitman's poetry and the free consciousness of Melville's Ishmael were his prime examples) against repressive totalitarianism (as exemplified in Captain Ahab). Bercovitch himself made a potent argument, similar to that of Louis Hartz in *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955), that America lacked any political alternative to a property-oriented, individualist liberalism. His implication was that Americans were peculiarly impoverished in the realm of political ideas, and were condemned, by their inheritance from the millenarian Protestantism of the Puritan founders, to live with the illusion that the American Way is God's Way.

For the generation of New Americanists who followed Bercovitch, the failure of earlier critics such as Matthiessen (who was often dubbed a 'cold-war intellectual' even though he did his major work before the United States entered World War II) was in having erased "potentially disruptive political opinions" from what amounted to a sanitized account of American culture. Matthiessen and his ilk had left conflict out of the story – or so the charge went. As Crews put it, the New Americanists repudiated their predecessors as "timidly moralizing" scholars in thrall to a "genially democratic idea of the American dream and its gradual fulfillment in history."¹⁶

The patricidal assault took place on two fronts: by trying to show how the major (according to Matthiessen & Co.) works of American literature obscured the oppression of racial minorities as well as America's history of imperialist expansion, and by recovering from the putative prejudice of the Matthiessen school what Crews called "an ethnic-

and gender-based anticanon" – literary works by racial minorities and women, who had been ignored and who revealed in their writing that the American dream had always been an American nightmare.

By the late 1990s, the heat of the polemics was subsiding, and the New Americanists were starting to sound old. They fought with their predecessors, after all, mainly over texts whose significance both parties assumed. After the sound and fury of the 1980s – the decade in which the 1960s college generation came into tenured positions and Ronald Reagan came into the White House – a heightened awareness of sexual as well as racial and ethnic difference now almost universally informed American literary criticism. A number of new anthologies, notably the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* (first edition, 1989), edited by Paul Lauter, and well-researched literary histories, such as Eric Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (1993), synthesized the work of the preceding two decades and presented a new narrative of American literary history. Previously marginal writers (Martin Delany, Ann Petry, Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen) were now key figures in the story; writers who had long been central, such as Cooper and Melville, were revealed as struggling with unresolved racial and sexual preoccupations.

In 1983, while the *Heath Anthology* was still in progress, Lauter could write that "only a few syllabi meaningfully integrate the work of Hispanic-American, Asian-American, or American Indian writers."¹⁷ His choice of verb was tell-

16 Crews, "New Americanists," 32 – 34.

17 Paul Lauter, ed., *Reconstructing American Literature: Courses, Syllabi, Issues* (Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1983), xiv.

ing. Representation is one thing, but integration is another. The confines of what had once been regarded as American literature had been exploded. There had once been a more or less official literature, in which writers from John Pendleton Kennedy (*Swallow Barn* [1832]) to Margaret Mitchell (*Gone with the Wind* [1936]) portrayed black people chiefly as plantation darkies. And most critics had passed over such representations of the serving-class – the sort of people whom Edith Wharton blithely referred to in *The House of Mirth* (1905) as “dull and ugly people” who must, “in some mysterious way, have been sacrificed to produce” her delicately bred heroine, Lily Bart. But now the reviled and exploited moved to the center of the story – and their voices were heard strongly in the classroom for the first time.

“The changes in our profession,” Lauter wrote, “... are rooted in the movements for racial justice and sex equity. Those who worked in the movements came to see that to sustain hope for a future, people needed to grasp a meaningful past.” In this sense, the revision of the American literary canon was what the Yale cultural critic David Bromwich, playing on Clausewitz’s famous definition of war, has called “politics by other means.” The good news was the enlargement of the canon – an expansion that was, in fact, consistent with the spirit of openness characteristic of American studies from its beginnings. The bad news was the implication that progressive-minded people – people committed to diversity and inclusiveness – could find nothing ‘meaningful’ in what had once been the mainstream American tradition.

But even the changes that made reading lists unrecognizable to students who had attended college just twenty years earlier did not tell the full story of what

had happened. Leslie Fiedler, a prolific critic who participated in both waves of the American studies movement, issued, in 1982, what amounted to a farewell to the whole business of academic literary study. “Literary criticism,” he wrote, “flourishes best in societies theoretically committed to transforming all magic into explained illusion, all nighttime mystery into daylight explication: alchemy to chemistry, astrology to astronomy.”¹⁸ This was a restatement of the call for the “grass-roots anti-hierarchical criticism” (Fiedler’s phrase) that Susan Sontag had made in the famous title essay of her book *Against Interpretation* (1967), where she proclaimed an end to pleasure-deadening literary analysis and called for an “erotics of art.”¹⁹

Fiedler went further. Always a marginal figure with respect to the academic power centers – his teaching posts were at Montana State University and the State University of New York at Buffalo – he had his finger on the pulse of the larger culture. In the age of television and video, he saw that literature was being permanently demoted, at least as a category to which only certain academically certified books were allowed to belong. (Consider the valedictory title he gave to his 1982 collection, *What Was Literature?*) In *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), Fiedler had long ago ventured into sexual and racial themes that previous critics had evaded; for him, popular culture was where one heard the heartbeat of America. If one were to pay attention to novels, it was

18 Leslie Fiedler, *What was Literature?: Class Culture and Mass Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 37.

19 Ibid., 117. Sontag’s essay was itself a restatement of an argument against argument put forth around the same time by Roland Barthes.

best to focus on such disrespected (by academics) books as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or George Lippard's Gothic potboiler *The Quaker City* – in which sadism and secret cravings are unmodified by literary refinement. Fiedler was interested in prose fiction not for the modernist virtues of intricacy or allusiveness but for its democratizing power as an early form of mass art. The popular novel, he saw, was the precursor to Hollywood movies and TV soap operas; it had, he thought, a power of democratic leveling comparable to the 'ready-made garments' that, in the early twentieth century, "made it impossible to tell an aristocrat from a commoner."²⁰

While younger Americanists were settling scores with their predecessors over such issues as the proper interpretation of *Moby-Dick* or *The Scarlet Letter*, or whether Margaret Fuller should be rescued from Emerson's shadow, Fiedler recognized that the commercial productions of popular culture – mass-market movies and television, but also comic books, advertising, and fashion – were entering academia as legitimate subjects, and that the old academic disputes over literary classics were devolving into quibbles. It was not surprising that by the 1980s there had arrived onto course syllabi such nineteenth-century best-sellers as Susan Warner's *Wide, Wide World* (1850) and Maria Cummins's *The Lamplighter* (1854) – now championed by feminist critics such as Jane Tompkins (in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction* [1985]), who made the case for exactly those books that Nathaniel Hawthorne had dismissed more than a century earlier as drivel by a "damned mob of scribbling women."

²⁰ Ibid., 99.

Today, students of American literature are still working out these issues: What kinds of cultural artifacts allow access to the inner life of the culture? What role, if any, should aesthetic judgment (and according to what criteria) play in the study of written texts? New lines of internal relations within American literature have lately emerged with the rise of a movement known as 'ecocriticism' – lines that run, for instance, from Thoreau through Aldo Leopold to Rachel Carson and up to Barry Lopez.²¹ The histrionics and name calling of the 'culture wars' are gone if not entirely forgotten – yet literary studies seem likely to remain divided for a while between those who follow the Frankfurt School critics Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin in regarding mass culture as a kind of soft propaganda by which the public degenerates into the mob, and those who celebrate popular culture as a roiling scene of imaginative liberation – as does University of Pennsylvania Americanist Janice Radway in her influential book *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984), and, more recently, in her *Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month-Club, Literary Taste, and Middle Class Desire* (1997).

Today, the situation seems strikingly symmetrical with that with which this essay began. In the early nineteenth century, a case had to be made for the existence – not to mention the significance –

²¹ The impact of environmentalism in American literary studies is well represented in two books by Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), and Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

of American literature. In the early years of the twenty-first century, this case has to be made again.

There is reason to feel a certain sense of déjà vu. For one thing, the legitimacy of the very idea of the nation-state is under siege in academic circles, where perhaps the most cited book of the last three decades is Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). Shocked by the resurgence of nationalism in a century when Marxist intellectuals expected it to decline before the advance of international worker solidarity, Anderson defined nationalism as a kind of atavism for which deluded millions have been willing to kill and die. In this context, the idea of a national literature seems, at best, to furnish an opportunity to expose the mechanisms (such as the literary creation of patriotic myth) by which the nation-state maintains itself and, at worst, to be complicit with the criminality of the nation-state itself.

Another way to see what has happened is to recall Robert Bellah's famous *Dædalus* essay written in 1967, in which Bellah accurately predicted that the American nation would split apart into factions of "liberal alienation" and "fundamentalist ossification" with respect to the "set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals" that he called "civil religion."²² Among academic humanists, who are overwhelmingly liberal and alienated from religion in both its civil and fundamentalist forms, it is hardly possible today to use the term 'American' without irony or embarrassment.

We all recognize the gestures of disavowal. Scholars in many fields are going through the same motions; here is

22 Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," in *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 183.

an example from a recent book on a subject that once would have been called Chinese art:

This book is very deliberately called *Art in China*, and not Chinese Art, because it is written out of a distrust of the existence of any unifying principles or essences linking such a wide range of made things, things of very different types, having very different dates, very different materials, and very different makers, audiences, and contexts of use.²³

In 1999, Janice Radway, in her inaugural address as president of the American Studies Association, suggested that the phrase 'American studies' be deleted from the name of the organization in favor of the term 'United States studies' – an act of purification that would save its members from implicitly endorsing the hegemonic ambitions of the United States to dominate (at least) the north and south 'American' continents.

Without embracing the strategies of self-acquittal these scholars propose, one may share their wariness toward the nation-state as an object of veneration. Quasi-genetic ideas of race solidarity have always polluted feelings of nationalness (as late as 1934, one finds Edith Wharton blithely remarking on the "boyish love of pure nonsense only to be found in Anglo-Saxons"²⁴), and no one who has come of age since World War II can dissociate such ideas from the hideous consequences that have sometimes followed from them.

Moreover, there is no blinking the fact that American literary studies must now make their way in a postcolonial

23 Craig Clunas, *Art in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 10.

24 Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (New York: Scribners, 1934), 157.

world in which we are perforce conscious that nations are fragile works of artifice; we have lately witnessed bloody struggles over just what sort of nation is (or was) Kuwait, Israel, the former Yugoslavia, a future Palestine, Iraq, and Ukraine, to name just a few – and Americans, as citizens of the sole superpower, must continually consider what sort of obligation these and other nations exert upon us to preserve what used to be called their ‘right of self-determination.’

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the legitimacy of American literary studies, narrowly – that is, nationally – construed, is under skeptical scrutiny. Ever since the Vietnam War, many American intellectuals have been more or less ashamed of America, and the recent Iraq War, with its unilateralist and messianic rhetoric, has only made matters worse. In 1963, the Voice of America organized a series of radio lectures on American literature in which the scholarly authorities of the day, including some who held strong Left views, participated: Henry Nash Smith, Wallace Stegner, Daniel Aaron, Carlos Baker, Irving Howe, Kay House, David Levin, Richard Poirier, John Berryman, among others. It is simply impossible to imagine such a collaboration between the government and the academy today.

Nor is it surprising that what is sometimes called America-centrism has become an embarrassment to today’s Americanists. To use a prevalent term, the field is being ‘decentered’ through study and translation of texts written in America in languages other than English (one doubts how far this movement can go, since our educational system is almost entirely monolingual) by such scholars as Lisa Sanchez Gonzalez, Lawrence Rosenwald, Werner Sollors, and Marc Shell. In 2000, Sollors’s and Shell’s *Multilingual Anthology of American*

Literature presented a host of hitherto unknown texts in more than a dozen Native American, European, and Asian languages, with English translations on facing pages. There is, as well, a movement afoot – inaugurated some twenty years ago by Bell Gale Chevigny and Gari Laguardia, the editors of *Reinventing the Americas: Comparative Studies of Literature of the United States and Spanish America* (1986), and lately forwarded in such books as Anne Goldman’s *Continental Divides: Revisioning American Literature* (2000) – to reject the nation’s borders as impermeable lines dividing ‘American’ literature from the literature of adjacent and overlapping cultures.

In January 2003, a special issue of *PMLA*, devoted in a skeptical mood to “America: The Idea, the Literature,” included an essay asserting that “American literature should be seen as no longer bound to the inner workings of any particular country or imagined organic community but instead as interwoven systematically with traversals between national territory and intercontinental space.”²⁵ And there are efforts under way to ‘redraw the map of American literature’ by pushing back its boundaries in time as well as space. The Yale Americanist Wai Chee Dimock has proposed a new set of coordinates by which she would redraw Emerson’s literary affiliations and see him in relation not so much, say, to Bronson Alcott, as to the Vishnu Parana or the Koran. “Deep time” is Dimock’s name for this temporal reorganization, and, she adds, “deep time is denationalized space.”²⁶

25 Paul Giles, “Transnationalism and Classic American Literature,” *PMLA* 118 (1) (January 2003): 63.

26 Wai Chee Dimock, “Deep Time: American Literature and World History,” *American Literary History* 13 (4) (2001): 760.

So far, these attempts to develop post-national ideas of American literature are too diffuse to bear much weight. And, as is often the case, transformations in the academic humanities tend to be secondary to more basic transformations in the world. Once a province of Europe, America has become the power center of a planet convulsed by a variety of resistance movements – armed and otherwise – against it. Yet accompanying the sense of America as a center of consolidated power is a sense that any coherent notion of American identity is coming apart. Can we call American a business corporation whose employees work in factories in Sri Lanka and whose assets are deposited in Caribbean banks? Is an illegal immigrant who crosses from Mexico into Texas in order to find menial work an American? With such questions in the air, why should the idea of an American literature escape interrogation?

As for what kind of answers might emerge, the old ones will clearly no longer do. At the beginning of our story, the proponents of an American literature proclaimed its distinctiveness chiefly with respect to the burdensome precedent of the literature of England – but to dwell on that distinction today would seem to participate in what Freud called the “narcissism of minor differences.” Matthew Arnold’s point is again oddly pertinent: “I see advertised *The Primer of American Literature*,” he wrote in 1874. “I imagine the face of Philip or Alexander at hearing of a *Primer of Macedonian Literature*! . . . We are all contributors to one great literature – English literature.” These sentences, quoted by Marcus Cunliffe at the opening of his *The Literature of the United States* (1954), would have once pleased only culturally conservative Anglophiles; but today, Arnold’s words (if not his tone) are per-

fectly consonant with the view from the cultural Left, for whom the hyphen in ‘Anglo-American’ marks a trivial division between two barely distinguishable nations driven by the same imperialist aims. The idea of an American literature has come to seem provincial again.

Yet if one looks beyond the insular academy to a new generation of young American writers, one encounters a salient – and historically recurrent – difference in tone and attitude that continues to divide academic critics from actual practitioners. To read, say, Gish Jen’s novel *Typical American* (1991) or Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker* (1995) is to be struck by how a few changes in the scenic incidentals, or a few substitutions of Yiddish for Chinese or Korean phrases, would render these works, with their historically recurrent tale of Old World parents versus New World children, almost indistinguishable in plot and structure from the Jewish immigrant novels of Abraham Cahan (*Yekl*, 1896) or Anzia Yezierska (*The Bread Givers*, 1925). Writers present have always felt the parental presence of writers past. They register their debts with large acts of homage, as when Ralph Ellison honors the man after whom he was named, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in *Invisible Man* (1951), or with small allusive gestures, as when Philip Roth opens *The Great American Novel* (1973) with a Melvillean sentence: “Call me Smitty.”

The work of redefining, and thereby sustaining, American literature has always been mainly carried on by writers who aspire to become part of it, not by professors who dismiss its validity or doubt its existence. In that respect, not much has changed.

Pauline Yu

Comparative literature in question

Comparative literature is at once a subject of study, a general approach to literature, a series of specific methods of literary history, a return to a medieval way of thought, a methodological credo for the day, an administrative annoyance, a new wrinkle in university organization, a *recherche* academic pursuit, a recognition that even the humanities have a role to play in the affairs of the world, close-held by a cabal, invitingly open to all¹

So begins the foreword to Herbert Weisinger's and Georges Joyaux's translation of René Etiemble's *The Crisis in Comparative Literature*, published in 1966 and itself one of many polemical contri-

Pauline Yu, a Fellow of the American Academy since 1998, is president of the American Council of Learned Societies. She is the author or editor of five books and dozens of articles on classical Chinese poetry, literary theory, comparative poetics, and issues in the humanities. Formerly professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures and Dean of Humanities in the College of Letters and Science at University of California, Los Angeles, she is currently an adjunct senior research scholar and a visiting professor in East Asian Languages and Cultures at Columbia University.

© 2006 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

butions to a substantial body of writings on the nature of comparative literature.

As Weisinger and Joyaux suggest, there has been scant consensus about the definition and purpose of the field from its very inception. Debates have been waged about its name and what to call those who practice it. Disputes have swirled about whether or not their task is one of comparison. Questions have been raised about whether or not whatever it is they do constitutes a discipline, producing delight, consternation, or despair in the hearts of those who care. Like the humanities as a whole, comparative literature seems to face one 'challenge' after another and to exist in a state of perpetual 'crisis,' as even a quick glance at the titles of numerous works on the subject can confirm.

Is it, as one critic describes it, "a house with many mansions," or should we regard it as "permanently under construction"?² Perhaps this is why Charles

1 Herbert Weisinger and Georges Joyaux, foreword to their translation of René Etiemble, *The Crisis in Comparative Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1966), vii – viii.

2 S. S. Praver, *Comparative Literary Studies* (London: Dudworth, 1973), 166, and Roland Greene, "American Comparative Literature: Reticence and Articulation," *World Literature Today* 69 (Spring 1995): 297.

Mills Gayley, a professor of English at Berkeley, writing in 1894, believed that the members of his proposed new Society of Comparative Literature “must be hewers of wood and drawers of water. Even though they cannot hope to see the completion of a temple of criticism, they may have the joy of construction”³ Joyful or not, the hewers and drawers have toiled for more than a century, struggling to define an enterprise that – at once chameleon and chimera – has defied such attempts by mirroring the shifting political climate and intellectual predilections of each successive age. In comparative literature’s history, then, we can witness a series of contests that have shaped the past two centuries, between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, scientism and humanism, literature and theory, and within the very notion of disciplinarity itself.

In an *Outline of Comparative Literature from Dante Alighieri to Eugene O’Neill*, first published in 1954, the Swiss émigré Werner P. Friederich traced the roots of comparative literature to the influences of Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures on ancient Greece and of the latter, in turn, on Rome, although for him the real activity began during the Renaissance. His history of the discipline set out to demonstrate “the essential oneness of Western culture and the stultifying shortsightedness of political or literary nationalism,” a unifying impulse shared by many other scholars writing after the ravages of World War II. All national literatures, he argued, have incurred “foreign obligations,” for “even

the greatest among our poets have borrowed, and borrowed gladly, from values given by other lands. In the words of a witty Frenchman: we all feed on others, though we must properly digest what we thus receive. Even the lion is nothing but assimilated mutton.”⁴

Friederich’s study exemplifies on a grand scale what had become by the middle of the twentieth century a signature method of comparative literature, the study of literary influence. Viewed from such a transnational perspective, literary reputations could shift in interesting ways, with some individuals neglected by historians of the national literature vaulting to surprising prominence abroad, and some locally eminent luminaries finding their significance in the international arena eclipsed. What is important here is the light Friederich’s history casts on a fundamental tension within the founding impulse of the discipline: the relative priority of the transnational versus the national.

Cosmopolitanism, comparison, and a transcendence of strictly national interests and characteristics presuppose an awareness of what the latter in fact might be. Just as contemporary exhortations toward interdisciplinarity require thriving disciplinary bases, so the tracing of relationships across national traditions depends on a strong sense of what they separately are. Comparative literature’s early forebears were thus as inclined to focus on the local and particular as they were on moving beyond them, but the oscillation between these two alternatives left the question of precedence unclear.

3 Charles Mills Gayley, “A Society of Comparative Literature,” *The Dial*, August 1, 1894, 57, reprinted in Hans-Joachim Schulz and Phillip M. Rhein, eds., *Comparative Literature: The Early Years. An Anthology of Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 85.

4 Werner P. Friederich, preface to *Outline of Comparative Literature from Dante Alighieri to Eugene O’Neill* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954). The “witty Frenchman” was Paul Valéry.

Consider two pioneers in comparative literature, Herder and Goethe. Johann Gottfried Herder urged German writers to study foreign literatures in order to learn how others had succeeded in “expressing their natural character in literary works,” not for the purposes of emulation but rather to understand their differences and “develop along their own lines.”⁵ His research into and revival of interest in German folklore was central to this process of national identity formation, which, he hoped, could help to ameliorate the “dismal state of German literature.”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, by contrast, shifted the balance toward the cosmopolitan, urging writers to eschew an easy provincialism and recognize the larger literary community to which they belonged, the home of *Weltpoesie* (world poetry), the common property of humankind, and of *Weltliteratur* (world literature): “National literature means little now, the age of *Weltliteratur* has begun; and everyone should further its course.” Having learned much from various foreign perspectives on his own writings, Goethe proposed the concept of world literature not as a canon of works to be studied and imitated but rather, anticipating the world of a David Lodge novel, as “the marketplace of international literary traffic: translations, criticism, journals devoted to foreign literatures, the foreign receptions of one’s own works, letters, journeys, meetings, circles.”⁶

5 Robert Mayo, *Herder and the Beginnings of Comparative Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 107.

6 J. P. Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe*, January 31, 1827, trans. Joel Spingarn and reprinted in Schulz and Rhein, eds., *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*, 6, 3.

Goethe’s views would be echoed at various points over the next two centuries as scholars called upon literary study – and specifically comparative literature – to exercise a form of cultural diplomacy that would affirm a shared heritage of aesthetic excellence as an antidote to parochial political animosities. For some this would be interpreted as a return to the world of the Middle Ages, “a universal culture expressed in a universal language and comprehended in a universal mode of thought.”⁷ For others, Goethe’s ideal provided rather a cultural mirror for the anticipated withering away of capitalism and the nation-state, as Marx and Engels declared in the *Communist Manifesto*: “National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.”⁸ In any event, most scholars agree that while Goethe’s notion of world literature – a term that would resurface later – was not coterminous with what was to become comparative literature, we can reasonably regard it as comparative literature’s logical prerequisite. As François Jost observed, one provides the “raw materials and information” for the other, which then groups them “according to critical and historical principles. Comparative literature, therefore, may be defined as an organic *Weltliteratur*; it is an articulated account, historical and critical, of the literary phenomenon considered as a whole.”

Having provided this concise definition, however, Jost was almost imme-

7 Weisinger and Joyaux, foreword to *The Crisis in Comparative Literature*, xii.

8 Cited in David Damrosch, “Comparative Literature?” *PMLA* 118 (2) (March 2003): 327.

diately forced to concede that the very term ‘comparative literature’ has long been a “source of confusion,” for it “affirms the idea that literature is to be compared, but does not indicate the terms of comparison.”⁹ What, then, has it meant to different critics? In an authoritative essay on this question, René Wellek has recounted in detail the history and variety of meanings attached to a term that may have occurred in English for the first time in a letter written by Matthew Arnold to his sister in 1848 – though Arnold played no role in the birth of the discipline. Meanwhile, in France, ‘*littérature comparée*’ had already appeared without explanation on the title page of a series of textbook anthologies of French, classical, and English literature compiled by Jean-François-Michel Noël and two collaborators in 1816. Ten years later Charles Pougens lamented the absence of a course on the subject, a lacuna that Abel-François Villemain addressed in a series of lectures at the Sorbonne in 1828 – 1830 that offered *amateurs de la littérature comparée* a comparative analysis of several modern literatures.¹⁰ When one of the

founders of modern criticism, Sainte-Beuve, referred to “*l’histoire littéraire comparée*” and “*littérature comparée*” in two articles on Jean-Jacques Ampère published in 1840 and 1868, comparative literature appears to have achieved recognition as both an academic discipline and a critical system.¹¹

Wellek and others have noted that its most important model was likely the new field of comparative anatomy; Georges Cuvier’s *Anatomie comparée* had been published in 1800. As practiced by natural scientists like Cuvier and subsequently in such disciplines as philology, linguistics, religion, and law, the comparative method introduced an historical dimension to the cosmopolitan impulses that motivated Goethe. Haun Saussy has observed that they “all began as what one might call tree-shaped disciplines, organizing historical and typological diversity into a common historical narrative with many parallel branches,” but that in most of the human sciences this methodology was difficult to sustain “without begging too many questions about the universal reach of the categories employed,” and in the case of comparative literature, “the typological tree of written culture was never more than a vestige anyway.”¹² Still, the conviction that the existence of a common ground for the major European literatures could and should be demonstrated was shared with proponents of the notion of world literature and was to inspire the work of many great comparatists until well into the twentieth century.

9 François Jost, *Introduction to Comparative Literature* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), 21 – 22. In a footnote here, Jost recounts some of the variations in terminology that have been employed in various languages. In French one finds *littérature* both ‘comparative’ and ‘comparée’; Germans switched from ‘*vergleichende Literaturgeschichte*’ to ‘*vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*,’ and then from ‘*Komparativistik*’ to ‘*Komparatistik*.’ In English both ‘comparatist’ and ‘comparativist’ are used; Jost states that the former has replaced the latter, though the evidence does not support this. He introduces the term “comparatistics” as a substitute for terms that have not gained wide acceptance – ‘comparatism’ and ‘comparativism.’

10 René Wellek, “The Name and Nature of Comparative Literature,” in Stephen G. Nichols, Jr., and Richard B. Vowles, eds., *Compara-*

tists at Work: Studies in Comparative Literature (Waltham, Mass.: Blaisdell, 1968), 8 – 9.

11 Jost, *Introduction to Comparative Literature*, 10.

12 Haun Saussy, “Comparative Literature?” *PMLA* 118 (2) (March 2003): 337 – 338.

Although Wellek credited Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, an Irish barrister who became a professor of classics in New Zealand, with the first “decisive” use of the term ‘comparative literature’ in English in 1886, it appears to have been discussed even earlier by a professor of English at Cornell, Charles Chauncey Shackford, who delivered a lecture on the subject at the university in 1871. Clearly influenced by Cuvier’s work, Shackford argued that the comparative method provides a means of analyzing, classifying, and relating the numerous facts and details that histories only collect, revealing thereby “universal laws of mental, social and moral development.” Comparative literature, he declared,

traces out the analogies that exist between the literary productions of remotest nations, the peculiarities which distinguish each as belonging to a particular period of social and mental development, the variations in type with the causes, thus bringing together related points of excellence and power, with the exceptional results produced by peculiarities of climate, race, and surrounding institutions.

Working back from individual branches to a common trunk not only affords a deeper understanding of each national literature, he claimed, it also provides a proper understanding of literature “not in the isolated works of different ages, but as the production of the same great laws, and the embodiment of the same universal principles in all times.”¹³

Shackford’s contribution to the literature was never published outside of local university records and thus went largely

13 Charles Chauncey Shackford, “Comparative Literature,” *Proceedings of the University Convocation* (Albany: New York [State] University, Albany, 1876), reprinted in Schulz and Rhein, eds., *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*, 42, 46.

unnoticed in favor of Posnett’s more visible intervention, both in a book he published in 1886 and an equally influential article published fifteen years later on “The Science of Comparative Literature.” There Posnett made the audacious claim “to have first stated and illustrated the method and principles of the new science.” These principles, according to Posnett, were simply “social evolution, individual evolution, and the influence of the environment on the social and individual life of man.”¹⁴ Here Posnett acknowledged the influence of Ferdinand Brunetière, a powerful and prolific French scholar who had applied Darwinian theories to the study of literature, arguing, for example, that genres grew, declined, and evolved into new ones just as animal species did. Concepts drawn from comparative anatomy and evolution were thus instrumental in shaping the emerging field of comparative literature, as the nineteenth-century literary comparatists shared the presumption of both sciences that unitary principles linked disparate phenomena.

Other American pioneers followed Posnett’s lead in embracing evolutionary principles as models for the practice of comparative literature. Charles Mills Gayley, who introduced a course on the topic into the curriculum at Berkeley, believed that “trustworthy principles of literary criticism depend upon the substantiation of aesthetic theory by scientific inquiry,” which, given the vastness of the subject, requires systematic collaboration within the scholarly community. He therefore proposed the creation of the “Society of Comparative Literature (or of Literary Evolution),” whose

14 Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, “The Science of Comparative Literature,” *The Contemporary Review* LXXIX (1901): 855–872, reprinted in Schulz and Rhein, eds., *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*, 188.

members would each specialize in the study of a given literary type or movement, pooling their findings in a systematic way to achieve “an induction to the common and therefore essential characteristics of the phenomenon, to the laws governing its origin, growth, and differentiation.”¹⁵

Gayley’s contemporary Arthur Richmond Marsh, a professor of comparative literature at Harvard, also recognized his discipline’s debt to the comparative method in the natural sciences. Rejecting the notion that the point of comparing literary works is to determine “their relative excellence,” Marsh argued for a less subjective and more scientific goal: “To examine, then, the phenomena of literature as a whole, to compare them, to group them, to classify them, to enquire into the causes of them, to determine the results of them – this is the true task of comparative literature.”¹⁶ However, both Posnett and Gayley acknowledged that the very term ‘comparative literature’ did not appear to make grammatical sense, a point that both critics and adherents would reiterate. In the 1920s, Lane Cooper of Cornell insisted on calling the department he headed “The Comparative Study of Literature.” Otherwise, he pointed out, “You might as well permit yourself to say ‘comparative potatoes’ or ‘comparative husks.’”¹⁷ In any case, the gram-

matical infelicity was reason enough for many to wonder not only what the term meant but also what the activity it denoted was aiming to achieve.

Undaunted by continuous uncertainty about the name and nature of the field, universities established professorships in comparative literature during the second half of the nineteenth century in both Europe and the United States. Journals began publishing from the 1870s on in Romania and Germany, and from the turn of the century in the United States. Louis Paul Betz, a lecturer at Zurich, published the first comprehensive bibliography of the field in 1896; enlarged in 1904, it contained some six thousand entries. A sequel published by Fernand Baldensperger and Werner P. Friederich in 1950 contained over thirty-three thousand items.¹⁸

Betz’s bibliography, in particular, was instrumental in stabilizing the use of the term ‘comparative literature.’ The majority of the works he included, and this is even truer of Baldensperger and Friederich’s compilation, reflected the dominant principle in the field, established by French scholars and thus referred to as ‘the French school’: comparison was to engage in analysis of at least two national literary and linguistic traditions between which actual *rapports de faits*, i.e., factual relations or his-

15 Gayley, “A Society of Comparative Literature,” in Schulz and Rhein, eds., *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*, 84.

16 Arthur Richmond Marsh, “The Comparative Study of Literature,” *PMLA* XI (2) (1896): 151–70, reprinted in Schulz and Rhein, eds., *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*, 128.

17 Lane Cooper, *Experiments in Education* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1943), 75; cited by René Wellek, “The Name and Nature of Comparative Literature,” in Nichols,

Jr., and Vowles, eds., *Comparatists at Work*, 4–5.

18 See Schulz and Rhein, eds., *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*, 133–151; Robert J. Clements, *Comparative Literature as Academic Discipline: A Statement of Principles, Praxis, Standards* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1978), 4; and David Malone, introduction to Werner P. Friederich, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature and Other Addresses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), xi.

torical contact, could be demonstrated. One could focus on either terminus of the traffic across national boundaries (Goethe in France, the French impact on Goethe) and shift the labeling of 'emitter,' 'intermediary,' and 'receiver' accordingly. Influence studies shaded naturally into those examining imitation and reception, and from there it was but a natural step to considering the role translations played in literary relations.

In addition to studies of sources and influence, comparative scholarship up through the middle of the twentieth century typically examined literature across national frontiers and centuries with a focus on one of three levels: movements and trends (e.g., romanticism or naturalism); genres and forms (e.g., the short lyric); and motifs, types, or themes (e.g., the image of the shrew). All these approaches sought to make the study of literature more systematic and objective, achieving for comparative literature, in Gayley's words, "the transition from stylistic to a science of literature which shall still find room for aesthetics, but for aesthetics properly so called, developed, checked, and corrected by scientific procedure and by history."¹⁹

But if by this time a virtual consensus had been reached regarding the practice of comparative literature, its inspirational power was limited. The first generations of comparative scholars were largely European and predominantly French. Indeed, François Jost has suggested that comparative literature in France was "mainly an ancillary discipline within the field of French literary history." Its major figures employed the historicist and positivist assumptions and methods of the new field to demonstrate how French literature "formed

19 Charles Mill Gayley, "What Is Comparative Literature?" in Schulz and Rhein, eds., *Comparative Literature: The Early Years*, 102.

the backbone of the universal literary system, and the task of the comparatist consisted in examining how and why the English, German, Spanish, Italian, and Russian ribs were attached to it."²⁰ Whether or not such nationalistic impulses were always discernible, it was clear by mid-century that the method had ceased to flourish across the Atlantic. In the United States after the war, Werner P. Friederich tried with some success to revive the field through various institution-building efforts – newsletters, journals, the creation of a special section for comparative literature in the Modern Language Association, etc. But it was René Wellek, a Czech émigré and doyen of literary and critical studies as professor of comparative literature at Yale, who diagnosed the malaise and prescribed a cure that took.

Wellek attributed what he described as a "crisis" in comparative literature to the baleful positivistic legacy of influence studies in a calcified French school, which had

saddled comparative literature with an obsolete methodology and have laid on it the dead hand of nineteenth-century factualism, scientism, and historical relativism . . . They believe in causal explanation . . . [and] have accumulated an enormous mass of parallels, similarities, and sometimes identities, but they have rarely asked what these relationships are supposed to show except possibly the fact of one writer's knowledge and reading of another writer.

As a consequence, comparative literature had become but "a stagnant backwater."²¹ Wellek based his objection

20 Jost, *Introduction to Comparative Literature*, 25.

21 René Wellek, "The Crisis of Comparative Literature," in *Proceedings of the Second Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*.

to the obsessive focus on causality not only on his belief that any individual example was at best only plausible and rarely generalizable, but also on his conviction that the entire positivist project of nineteenth-century scholarship – the scientific model – had been discredited as well. Croce, Dilthey, and others had challenged it already, but the destabilization of the political order wrought by World War I had sealed the case: “The world (or rather our world) has been in a state of permanent crisis since, at least, the year 1914. Literary scholarship, in its less violent, muted ways, has been torn by conflicts of methods since about the same time.” Wellek bemoaned as well the fact that comparative literature seemed to have lost its early inspiration as a truly cosmopolitan enterprise. Having arisen, often in the hands of worldly émigrés, “as a reaction against the narrow nationalism of much nineteenth-century scholarship, as a protest against the isolationism of many historians of French, German, Italian, English, etc., literature,” it appeared to have been recaptured and corrupted by the revival of patriotic political sentiments, which had “led to a strange system of cultural bookkeeping, a desire to accumulate credits for one’s nation by proving as many influences as possible on other nations or, more subtly, by proving that one’s own nation has assimilated and ‘understood’ a foreign master more fully than any other.”²²

If comparative literature had forgotten its cosmopolitan roots, in Wellek’s eyes equally serious was the risk that it had

ciation (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), I, reprinted in Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism*, ed. Stephen J. Nichols (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1963), 282, 285, 292.

22 Ibid., 282, 287 – 289.

lost sight of fundamental questions of aesthetic value as well. He therefore recommended moving beyond all such demarcations – of language, country, history, theory, and methodology – to recognize “literary scholarship as a unified discipline.” Moreover, if comparative literature had “become an established term for any study of literature transcending the limits of one national literature,”²³ it was time to acknowledge that it “can and will flourish only if it shakes off artificial limitations and becomes simply the study of literature.”²⁴

Wellek fired this salvo across the bow of the French school at the second congress of the recently established International Comparative Literature Association in 1958. Out of the subsequent brouhaha emerged what became known as the ‘American school’ of comparatists, who were less exclusively positivist and historicist in their orientation and more interested in comparative literature as a broadly critical and humanistic enterprise.

Still, many Americans were less willing than Wellek to shed the adjective ‘comparative,’ even as they sought to expand its definition. In addition to being less nationalistic (indeed, American literature was and is still often not included in the discipline’s purview) and more open to a multiplicity of theoretical and methodological models, these scholars introduced to the field a new term – ‘affinity’ – that did not require any documented historical contact at all. As A. Owen Aldridge put it, “Affinity consists in resemblances in style, structure, mood, or idea between two works which

23 Ibid., 290.

24 Wellek, “The Name and Nature of Comparative Literature,” in Nichols, Jr., and Vowles, eds., *Comparatists at Work*, 13.

have no other connection.” He also argued strongly for the discipline to move beyond its European frontiers: rather than being “confined to the wares of a single nation,” the comparatist “shops in a literary department store,”²⁵ which includes not just the European tradition but those of the rest of the world as well.

Equally important in the development of an American school was an expansion of the discipline’s definition that took comparative literature beyond the bounds of the strictly literary. Henry H. H. Remak is generally credited with this innovation, evident in the opening statement of his essay, “Comparative Literature, Its Definition and Function”:

Comparative literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (e.g., painting, sculpture, architecture, music), philosophy, history, the social sciences (e.g., politics, economics, sociology), the sciences, religion, etc., on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression.”²⁶

25 A. Owen Aldridge, *Comparative Literature: Matter and Method* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 3, 1. At the Sorbonne, René Etiemble’s essay, “Littérature comparée ou comparaison n’est pas raison,” published upon his 1958 election to the chair in comparative literature, also called for a “different conception of our discipline,” a truly international comparative literature that would not be dependent on the demonstration of *rapports de faits*, and thereby rattled the positivistic foundation of the French school as well. See Etiemble, *The Crisis in Comparative Literature*, an English translation of a longer version of the essay published in 1963, 4 and *passim*.

26 Henry H. H. Remak, “Comparative Literature, Its Definition and Function,” in New-

While this extension of the domain of comparative literature did not meet with universal approbation, some version of it gradually worked its way into most descriptions of comparative literature programs in universities today and into UNESCO’s definition of the field as well.²⁷

However controversial, Remak’s addition to comparative literature’s agenda reflected a continuing degree of fluidity in articulating its distinctive features. Whether positivist or literary-critical in orientation, some of its practitioners worried about how in fact they could be differentiated from scholars working in a single literature who might also be interested in exploring larger questions of genre, theme, motif, and influence. Bean counters wondered whether or not ‘disciplinarily valid’ comparisons could take place between literatures of two countries written in the same language, or with examples from a country within which more than one language was used. Boundaries began to dissolve, with Aldridge writing that “the study of comparative literature is fundamentally not any different from the study of national literatures except that its subject matter is much vaster, taken as it is from more than one literature and excluding none which the student has the capacity to read,”²⁸ and Remak flatly declaring that “geographically speaking, an air-tight distinction between national literature and comparative literature is sometimes

ton P. Stallknecht and Horst Frenz, eds., *Comparative Literature, Method and Perspective* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), 3.

27 Clements, *Comparative Literature as Academic Discipline*, 8.

28 Stallknecht and Frenz, eds., *Comparative Literature, Method and Perspective*, 1.

difficult,” and “there is no fundamental difference between methods of research in national literature and comparative literature.”²⁹

Attempting to shore up some vanishing distinctions, others asked whether a comparison should require examples from more than two different traditions: should a ‘rule of three’ be invoked? Haun Saussy recalled that when he began graduate studies in the 1970s,

The three-language rule identified the discipline as something apart from English, national-language studies, or studies of literature in translation; it set up a criterion of eligibility for new entrants, thus laying a basis for the discipline’s continued social reproduction; but it did not always specify the three languages or dictate the substance of what was to be done in them.

As he went on to note, the point of the “magical third element” was “elusive,” and it “defined the social membership of comparative literature better than it did the object of study.”³⁰

In 2002, when stepping down as president of the International Comparative Literature Association, Jean Bessière confided to his constituents that he was “in the process of abandoning the idea of comparison.”³¹ Many of his colleagues over the years had already remarked upon the paucity of actual comparisons undertaken by scholars in the field, some with alarm, but others with approbation. As if bracketing the first

half of comparative literature’s name were not enough, questions about its second half have also been raised in recent decades as programs previously dedicated to the study of literature have opened their doors to theory and to postcolonial and cultural studies. Following the establishment of a first beachhead in a 1966 conference at Johns Hopkins on “The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man,” successive waves of new approaches to literary texts, informed by methods and arguments developed outside the domain of literature in fields like anthropology, linguistics, and philosophy, began to wash across the shores of American universities from the early 1970s on. They found their most hospitable moorings in comparative literature departments and programs, both because the foundational texts of these approaches were still being translated from French and German, and also because comparative literature’s methodology inclined it, however variously, to transnational and often ahistorical conceptualizations of the literary, in contrast to the chronological march through the centuries typically mandated by English and foreign language curricula.

Some departments – like those of Yale, Cornell, Hopkins, Irvine, and Emory – embraced European theory with special fervor, but across the country students began to sort themselves out, choosing between the study of a national literature and comparative literature often in relation to their degree of interest in theoretical approaches. Some national literature departments quite happily ceded responsibility for teaching theory to their comparative literature colleagues; others began to note with some alarm that the best graduate students then seemed to be applying to those very neighbors. Comparative literature’s fas-

29 Remak, “Comparative Literature, Its Definition and Function,” in Stallknecht and Frenz, eds., *Comparative Literature, Method and Perspective*, 10 – 11.

30 Saussy, “Comparative Literature?” 336.

31 Jean Bessière, “Retiring President’s Address,” *ICLA Bulletin XXI* (1) (2002): 11.

cination with theory thus exacerbated the longstanding tension between the national and the transnational as institutionalized in university departmental structures. It also, in some eyes, obscured what some thought was their reason for being. Should students care more about what de Man thought about Derrida's reading of Rousseau than about reading Rousseau himself? Theorists would quickly respond, of course, that one needed to ask their questions to understand both the conditions and the possibility of such a reading, but those nostalgic for a more humanistic and less jargon-clogged past began to wonder where the literature had gone.

This question became even more salient as the interdisciplinarity that Remak and others had proclaimed as intrinsic to comparative literature's mission also made it a congenial home for cultural studies approaches that rejected literature's privileged position as a window on the human condition. The call for comparisons of literature to other 'spheres of human expression' has, in extending the critical purview to film, media, and other forms of popular culture studies, often succeeded in pushing literature off the stage entirely. And as postcolonial studies have found a home in comparative literature departments as well, the geographical field has expanded and, in many departments, marginalized its old-world center. The perceived monolingualism of these emerging fields also eroded, in some eyes, the discipline's time-honored expectation that students would study several literatures in the original languages.

The gradual extension and revision of comparative literature's territory did not, therefore, come without controversy. Commission reports mandated by the by-laws of the American Comparative Literature Association sought to de-

fine the field's "professional standards" in 1965 and 1975, with the second generally upholding the recommendation of the first to sustain rigorous, "arduous," even "elitist" expectations for work in multiple languages. In 1985 enough dissonance and dissatisfaction had evidently developed that the committee's chair never submitted its findings. The 1993 effort, consisting of a committee report proposing a significant reorientation of comparative literature away from its traditional roots in studies of European literature and toward multiculturalism, postcolonialism, and cultural studies, provoked enough commentary – three 'responses' and eleven 'position papers' – to fill a volume. Some disgruntled scholars resigned their memberships in the American Comparative Literature Association in protest. Small wonder, then, that the committee's chair, Charles Bernheimer, characterized the discipline as "anxiogenic" and titled his introduction to the volume "The Anxieties of Comparison."³² In his 2003 report, Haun Saussy sought to invoke the "power and attractiveness of a concept of 'literariness,' however variously put to work, for comparative literature," but flanked his arguments with thirteen other opinions from the members of his committee.³³

32 Charles Bernheimer, ed., *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 1. Bernheimer recounts the history of the earlier commissions in his preface, ix, and includes the first two reports of the commissions, chaired by Harry Levin and Thomas Greene, respectively, in the volume.

33 Haun Saussy, *ACLA Report 2003* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming), 14. I am grateful to Haun for sharing the manuscripts with me.

Whatever the anxieties and disagreements, comparative literature has managed to maintain a modest but surprisingly stable profile in the landscape of American higher education. What does a comparatist look like? Chances are that she will have begun her formal study in comparative literature as a graduate student rather than as an undergraduate. While some eight hundred B.A.s were awarded in the field last year, the relative proportion of Ph.D.s to B.A.s is six times greater in comparative literature than in other humanities disciplines.³⁴ In many institutions, the undergraduate degree in the field is a relatively recent innovation, owing to the typically demanding language requirements. Chances are about equal that an interdepartmental program rather than a department will have offered her course of study, a fact that has been both defended for its flexibility and contended for its instability. Whatever the case, she has been part of a relatively flourishing cohort within the humanities: undergraduate degrees have increased modestly over the past three decades, with doctoral degrees awarded rising by approximately 50 percent. Chances are that she will have done coursework in at least one written tradition comprehensively and intensively enough to be located, at least for some portion of her professional appointment, in a national language and literature department, even though she will probably also work with materials from other languages. Chances are that she will have studied works of literature, while acquiring as well a substantial background in literary and cultural theory. It is less likely than was the case a few decades ago that her focus will be exclusively European.

34 Data in this section provided by Benjamin Schmidt of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.

When I applied to graduate school in 1971, Harry Levin regarded the notion of doing a comparative literature degree using French, German, and Chinese with considerable skepticism. While he admitted me to Harvard's program, I not unsurprisingly decided to go where people thought it was, in fact, a good idea. The other departments to which I applied were also willing to give me a chance, but only the newly minted program at Stanford expressed enthusiasm about the prospect. Now, some three decades later, such a combination would be unexceptional, along with engagement in what Wlad Godzich has referred to as "emergent literatures," which "cannot be readily comprehended with the hegemonic view of literature that has been dominant in our discipline."³⁵

Yet some scholars remain concerned about the implications of such an expansion. In his 2001 presidential address to the American Comparative Literature Association, for example, Jonathan Culler observed that "comparative literature seems always to have been a discipline in crisis, but simultaneously going global and going cultural, as we have been doing, has created special problems. We don't know what we are supposed to teach." Although Culler went on to attribute this uncertainty to the faculty's inability to assume that students can work in original languages,³⁶ others have argued that language competence remains remarkably strong, in no small

35 Wlad Godzich, "Emergent Literature and Comparative Literature," in Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes, eds., *The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 35.

36 Jonathan Culler, "Comparing Poetry," *Comparative Literature* 53 (3) (Summer 2001): xvi.

measure owing to a more richly multi-lingual immigrant population in the United States and to the high numbers of foreign students in American graduate programs. Jean Bessière's presidential remarks to the International Comparative Literature Association in 2002 situated this transformation in a different and broader context, the "crisis of the humanities," which is "nothing other than the progressive erasure of the model of literary study established during the nineteenth century in Europe. This model was symbolically and ideologically a mixture of tradition, universalism, nation, and positivism." Comparative literature participates in the crisis, but it is also, he hoped, "the step beyond all of that."³⁷

Where that step might take us should be reviewed in the context of the path taken thus far. As Claudio Guillén observed, in what should now be a very familiar refrain, "a peculiar trait of comparativism, for good or for ill, is the problematical awareness of its own identity, and the resulting inclination to rely on its own history."³⁸

Two aspects of this history are particularly worth recalling as we consider the situation of comparative literature today. First, if we have called into question the universalism that inspired Goethe's promulgation of the notion of world literature because of the European hegemonic presumptions that it could all too easily conceal, it is also the case that some arguably less sinister impulses have motivated this obsession with universals. As has been noted, com-

parative literature's origins coincided with the rise of European nationalism, which, on the one hand, it presupposed and to which, on the other, it also represented an oppositional response, an attempt to reunify a Europe divided by the Napoleonic wars through the salutary consideration of native traditions in a larger and cosmopolitan context. More than one historian has noted that subsequent revivals of interest in the discipline have occurred at similar moments in world history, and we might then consider the field as part of a larger and periodically renewed effort to emphasize humankind's possible commonalities. As Werner Friederich commented,

It is one of the ironies and the tragedies of Comparative Literature that it seems to flourish only after the catastrophes of World Wars, when men are sufficiently aroused to denounce the folly of political or cultural chauvinism and to advocate a far more tolerant program of literary internationalism instead.³⁹

A twenty-first-century version of this phenomenon, Vilashini Cooppan has suggested, is the linkage of comparative literature with globalization. Arguing that "globalization is by no means reducible to the universal reign of commodification" and is, rather, "an inherently mixed phenomenon, a process that encompasses both sameness and difference, compression and expansion, convergence and divergence, nationalism and internationalism, universalism and particularism," Cooppan declared that "the history of comparative literature is also to some degree the history of glob-

37 Bessière, "Retiring President's Address," 17.

38 Claudio Guillén, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*, trans. Cola Franzen (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 93.

39 Werner P. Friederich, "The First Ten Years of Our Comparative Literature Section in the MLA," in Friederich, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature and Other Addresses*, 11.

alization.” While cautioning against “reanimating” Goethe as a “globalization theorist before his time,” Cooppan nonetheless credited him with “the unmistakable shattering of the national paradigm that is one of the hallmarks of our own moment” and comparative literature’s “foundational aspirations to a broadly imagined, incipiently global knowledge of literature.”⁴⁰

So Goethe’s ideal of *Weltliteratur* has returned, having traveled many paths over the years. Most recently associated with survey courses on great books in translation, it has resurfaced in connection with examples of comparative literature at its most ambitious, resolutely multilateral, nonhegemonic, and non-hierarchical. Some recent proponents of a new world literature, like Franco Moretti, have argued that only “distant reading” works in this cosmopolitan literary universe, whereas others, like David Damrosch, have insisted on the continuing validity of close readings that move dynamically across contexts and translations.⁴¹ Whatever the case, world literature embraces a body of texts “that, even as they represent particular national spirits . . . , also manage to traverse, even to transcend, their national, linguistic, and temporal origins, effectively deterritorializing themselves.”⁴²

40 Vilashini Cooppan, “Ghosts in the Disciplinary Machine: The Uncanny Life of World Literature,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 41 (1) (2004): 12–16.

41 See Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” *New Left Review* 1 (January–February 2000): 54–68, and David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

42 Cooppan, “Ghosts in the Disciplinary Machine,” 13–14.

This reference to deterritorialization brings us to a second distinctive feature of comparative literature’s disciplinary history, its association with scholars who share a personal history of emigration, if not exile, associated with war. If, as Cooppan suggested, Leo Spitzer and Erich Auerbach are to be counted among the “patron saints” of the discipline, the path to canonization was laid for both scholars during their escape from Nazi depredations to Istanbul. As Emily Apter put it, comparative literature “is unthinkable without the historical circumstances of exile,”⁴³ and she has traced in fascinating detail the ways in which a seminar Spitzer offered while in Istanbul that granted equal time to the study of Turkish literature “furnished the blueprint” for post-war departments of comparative literature. These continue to bear the “traces of the city in which it took disciplinary form – a place where East-West boundaries were culturally blurry and where layers of colonial history obfuscated the outlines of indigenous cultures.”⁴⁴ Among those instrumental in building the field in the United States, both Weltek and Friederich, as already noted, were European émigrés, along with Renato Poggioli and Claudio Guillén, and the list goes on. Indeed, two-thirds of the contributors to a recent collection of essays chronicling the beginnings of the field in the United States are immigrants, including the volume’s editors, who observed that “an experience of uprootedness and exile occasioned by

43 Emily Apter, “Comparative Exile: Competing Margins in the History of Comparative Literature,” in Bernheimer, ed., *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, 86.

44 Emily Apter, “Global Translation: The ‘Invention’ of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933,” *Critical Inquiry* 29 (Winter 2003): 271.

war lies at the basis of the very being of many of the contributors.”⁴⁵ Remarkably apt in this context, therefore, is Claudio Guillén’s invocation of a passage from Hugh of St. Victor’s twelfth-century educational program, the *Didascalicon*, in his conclusion to a history of comparative literature: “That mind is still tender for whom the homeland is sweet, but brave for whom the whole world is a homeland, and truly mature for whom the entire world is a place of exile.”⁴⁶

If most historians of the discipline have, as Guillén believes, tended ‘problematically’ to rely on its history, others have chosen to advocate that the past be rewritten, if not interred. In her obituary for the discipline, for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak seeks to “undo” comparative literature’s own version of its European provenance to reveal an “unacknowledged prehistory” in a Muslim Europe and Arabic-Persian cosmopolitanism familiar to scholars of Middle Eastern studies and history, if not to comparatists. And she urges us to “redo Comparative Literature” as a truly “planetary” discipline that will “collaborate with and transform Area Studies,” sharing with it a respect for serious study of languages but moving beyond

45 Lionel Gossman and Mihai I. Spariosu, foreword to Gossman and Spariosu, eds., *Building a Profession: Autobiographical Perspectives on the Beginnings of Comparative Literature in the United States* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), ix.

46 Book Three, Chapter 19, cited in Guillén, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*, 334. Guillén’s reference (erroneously to III.20) is from Erich Auerbach, “Philologie der Weltliteratur,” in *Weltliteratur: Festgabe für Fritz Strich zum 70. Geburtstag* (Bern: Francke, 1952), 49. See *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor*, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 101.

its borders in a new alliance with cultural studies.⁴⁷

As others have observed, such a globalizing perspective also offers a salutary counter to the tendency of many area studies specialists to limit access to and interpretations – beyond the biographical and philological – of materials they control by virtue of special linguistic expertise.⁴⁸ By the same token, it must constantly take care to ensure that a new cosmopolitanism does not disguise a much older form of metropolitan thinking. For instance, when the field of ‘East-West comparative literature’ first opened up to introduce consideration of Asian examples, comparisons were inevitably one-sided or unwittingly invidious: similarities or ‘affinities’ could be demonstrated if something Chinese was just like something European. Discussions comparing Chinese to Western poets on an individual basis proliferated, uncovering the proleptically ‘romantic’ or ‘symbolist’ practices of the former, or discovering that deconstruction’s heralds were fourth-century B.C.E. Daoists. If differences existed, it was to the detriment of the Chinese example (China ‘lacked’ epic and tragedy, for example, or its fiction suffered from the ‘limitations’ of a strong didactic impulse). Entire richly varied traditions became homogenized as unqualified monoliths in the face-off of East and West, with a selected group of Asian texts and figures charged with the burden of being ‘representative,’ reduced to distillations of an already essentialized culture, and subject to the measure of literary ‘universals’

47 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 87, 19, 5.

48 See, for example, Jale Parla, “The Object of Comparison,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 41 (1) (2004): 118.

that turned out, to no one's surprise, to be Western ones.⁴⁹ Such early discussions only confirm a point Natalie Melas has made, that comparison "is a highly normative procedure" that "seems always constrained by an invisible binary bind in which comparison must end either by accentuating differences or by subsuming them under some overarching unity."⁵⁰ It is perhaps a good thing, therefore, that unabashed comparison is rarely a feature of comparative literature these days and that the discipline, as Haun Saussy put it, "has failed to live up to its name."⁵¹

In the end, however, for all its hand wringing and self-questioning, its fretting about names, standards, and identities, comparative literature has managed to do quite a lot over the past two centuries. If its methods and focus have continually shifted, it is to a large extent owing to the ways in which, like a chameleon, it has absorbed powerful contemporary influences, be they the dynamic tension between nationalism and transnationalism, the appeal of a scientific method to humanistic study, the reassertion of humanistic values, or the impulse to challenge the boundaries of disciplinarity. Its current practice re-

flects a hard-fought understanding that the commitment to language study does not require a narrow nationalism and that a hegemonic comparative literature swallowing up foreign language departments would soon risk starvation. Its turmoils have been those of the humanities writ large. The upheavals wrought by a theoretical climate of suspicion that questioned the coherence and credibility of both the literary work and its critic; the increasingly eager unwillingness of some, and reluctant inability of others, to continue to disregard the presence of new or hitherto unrecognized players on the literary scene; the destabilization and decentering of a largely European, 'elitist' canon of study; the changing demographics of the American scholarly and student community; and the inherent impulse of the humanities in general to question their very premises – are all shared to some extent by comparative literature with its sister disciplines.

In his contribution to the 2003 ACLA draft report, David Ferris suggested that there is a "logic that drives Comparative Literature to question continually what constitutes it as a discipline," a will to what he called "indiscipline" that ensures that "the answer to what Comparative Literature is should always fail in order to preserve the question." And indeed, precisely because of its incessant anxieties and continuing flirtation with crisis, its habits of engaging in "a critique that seeks to sustain the limits within which it operates," comparative literature has become "a theoretical account of the humanities in general."⁵² In that relentless questioning of aims and contexts resides, after all, one of the most important strengths of all the humanistic disciplines.

49 For a recent discussion of some of these issues, see James St. André, "Whither East-West Comparative Literature? Two Recent Answers from the U.S.," *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu jikan* 20 (March 2003): 291–302.

50 Natalie Melas, "Versions of Incommensurability," *World Literature Today* (Spring 1995): 275. Melas refers to the first case as "contrastive literature," a term employed two years earlier as the title of an article by Michael Palencia-Roth in the *Bulletin of the American Comparative Literature Association* XXIV (2) (Spring/Summer, 1993): 47–60.

51 Saussy, "Comparative Literature?" 338.

52 David Ferris, "Indiscipline," 2003 ACLA draft report manuscript, 2, 11.

Anthony Grafton

History's postmodern fates

As the twenty-first century begins, history occupies a unique, but not an enviable, position among the humanistic disciplines in the United States. Every time Clio examines her reflection in the magic mirror of public opinion, more voices ring out, shouting that she is the ugliest Muse of all. High school students rate history their most boring subject. Undergraduates have fled the field with the enthusiasm of rats leaving a sinking ship. Thirty years ago, some 5 percent of all undergraduates majored in history. Nowadays, around 2 percent do so. Numbers of new Ph.D.s have risen, from a low of just under five hundred per year

in the mid-1980s to almost one thousand now. But the vision of a rise in the number of tenure-track jobs that William Bowen and others evoked, and that lured many young men and women into graduate school in the 1990s, has never materialized in history. The market, accordingly, seems out of joint – almost as badly so as in the years around 1970, when production of Ph.D.s first reached one thousand or more per year just as universities and colleges went into economic crisis. Many unemployed holders of doctorates in history hold their teachers and universities responsible for years of oppression, misery, and wasted effort that cannot be usefully reapplied in other careers.¹

Anthony Grafton, a Fellow of the American Academy since 2002, is Henry Putnam University Professor of History at Princeton University and chair of the Council of the Humanities. He is the author of eleven books, including "Defenders of the Text" (1991), "Commerce with the Classics" (1997), and "Bring Out Your Dead" (2001). Grafton has received numerous honors, among them the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, the Balzan Prize for History of Humanities, and the Mellon Foundation's Distinguished Achievement Award.

Those who succeed in obtaining tenure-track positions, moreover, may still find themselves walking a stony path. Historians' salaries, like most of those in the humanities, are low. So, more surprisingly, are history book sales – except in some favored fields, like Holocaust studies. Some university presses have cut back in fields of history vital not only to scholarship but also to American nation-

¹ Thomas Bender, Philip Katz, and Colin Palmer, *The Education of Historians for the Twenty-First Century* (Urbana and Chicago: Published for the American Historical Association by the University of Illinois Press, 2004).

© 2006 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

al interests – the history of Latin America, for example – because even the best monographs sell barely a hundred copies and thus fail to cover their costs. Very strong books, it seems, still find publishers even when sales will be low. But the general picture is dark.

Even our annual convention is celebrated only for its dullness. At an American Historical Association opening session in January 2004 devoted to “War in a Democratic Age,” renowned historians rose in Washington to discuss “mayhem, mass destruction, and total annihilation.” These subjects of undoubted contemporary relevance have played a central role in the historical tradition in the West from the days of Herodotus and Thucydides to those of the History Channel. Yet neither the big questions nor the deep thinkers who addressed them proved capable of touching off intense discussions. Instead, the audience “evaporated” as speaker after speaker offered “a classic academic combination of insight and obscurity, thoughtful analysis and mind-numbing delivery, and by the time the question period finally rolled around, even the AHA’s president, James McPherson, was ready to head for the door.” “I can see,” cracked Charles Maier of Harvard, “we’ve conducted a war of attrition.” It all seems very sad: Clio’s grand discipline, for millennia the school of politics, has transformed itself into a science so dismal that even its practitioners do not want to hear about it.²

Historians share the obsession with navel gazing that has infected a number of the humanistic disciplines in recent

times, and they have elaborated a set of narratives that more or less explains the general conditions I have described. Professional history in America, they say, came into being in the late nineteenth century under the zodiacal sign of Leopold von Ranke, as historians like Herbert Baxter Adams and Frederick Jackson Turner appropriated his methods of archival scholarship and source criticism in order to situate the United States in world history. They established seminars: not classes, originally, but special classrooms equipped with catalogs, collections of primary sources, and journals. Here students could learn to wield the tools of their trade – to establish bibliographies, work through primary and secondary sources, and compose reports, which they read aloud to their teachers and colleagues. At the same time, the Masters of this new disciplinary universe devised elaborate, powerful courses, organized around clear theses. History excavated the origins of American freedom – depending on whether one listened to Adams or Turner – in the traditions of self-government nourished deep in the Germanic forests or in the geographical openness and rich resources of the North American continent. Students often found it difficult to see the connection between the narrowly defined exercises they carried out and the grand syntheses that their teachers presented in their lectures and textbooks. But the new professional history proved attractive to many young men and the smaller number of young women who gained access to it. Its products filled the history departments that took shape at the end of the nineteenth century, as an elective system replaced the uniform curriculum of the old colleges and a historical narrative of the winning of freedoms, rooted in the Magna Carta and the rise of the British

2 Bob Thompson, “Lessons We May Be Doomed To Repeat: American Historians Talk About War, But Is Anyone Listening?” *Washington Post*, January 11, 2004, D01.

House of Commons, became a central curriculum subject.³

By the early decades of the twentieth century, however, professional historians inhabited more than one mansion. The New History that James Harvey Robinson, Carl Becker, and others developed after World War I challenged the founders' emphasis on politics and institutions, and insisted on the central importance of ideas. The revisionism of Charles Beard, who deconstructed idealistic accounts of the Founding Fathers and World War I, also attracted some younger scholars. The great regional and historical diversity of the American universities encouraged the emergence of new subfields – fields that the founding generation, for whom Europe was still the biggest thing in America, saw as lying outside true history. When the young Elizabeth Wallace asked the recently arrived head professor of history at Chicago, Hermann von Holst, for guidance in Latin American history, he exploded: “Vy did you come to me? I know notings von tose countries. For me tey do not exist. Tey are tead!” Yet William Rainey Harper, the university's president, encouraged Wallace to develop a course of her own in the field.⁴ At Wisconsin and Berkeley in the same years, the history of Latin America and the American borderlands became popular subjects for courses and for research. The great, Politically Incorrect art nou-

veau fresco of the Masque of History – one in which clothed and dignified Europeans brought sweetness, light, and civilization to the nude and grateful inhabitants of the Americas and other peripheral continents – was slowly whitewashed and replaced by a modernist panorama with more varied participants. Even the most technically difficult fields, like Chinese history, began to attract a few young scholars, some of them the children of missionaries.

Diversification led to struggle. Ugly flowers of discord began to pop up, here and there, as historians sharply debated the theses of skeptics and revisionists and even more sharply debated which pieces of historical turf deserved more intensive cultivation by students and faculty. On the whole, however, historians – so the usual story goes – retained a considerable degree of comity. All agreed that those who occupied the pinnacle of the field were the great political historians, especially those at Harvard – the department that, until World War II, boasted an unmatched array of star historians, from Turner and Roger Meriman, author of a massive study of the Spanish Empire, to Arthur Schlesinger, the great historian of the Age of Jackson. All agreed that Harvard and a few other schools – Johns Hopkins, Columbia, Cornell, Chicago, and Wisconsin – offered the best graduate programs. Almost all agreed, finally, that historians everywhere had two primary tasks: carrying out their own research and offering civic education for young men and women, especially in the form of surveys of Western civilization and American history. Some of the prestige that had invested the universities, and history in particular, in the Age of Reform had worn away, and salaries had never risen much, or even fallen, since the heady 1890s, when salaries as high as

3 John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); and, above all, Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

4 Robin Lester, *Stagg's University: The Rise, Decline, and Fall of Big-Time Football at Chicago* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 4.

\$7,500 placed the incumbents of the most lucrative chairs firmly among the local gentry.⁵ Still history clearly owned a stable place in the intellectual and political cosmos.

No wonder, then, that the crisis of World War II radically transformed the field, boosting its numbers and its national prominence. Many policymakers agreed with scholars that historians could shed light, not only on the causes of the war, but also on its likely course. Students, readers, and government officers competed to gain access to them. Historians found positions with the Office of Strategic Studies or the Office of War Information, where many of them had the opportunity to extend their educations by working with émigré experts on Germany like Franz Neumann and Felix Gilbert. After the war, historians played a major role in organizing what became the CIA, and the distinguished diplomatic historian George Kennan determined the course of American relations with Russia – though the history he made was not exactly the history he wanted to make. History, after all, could shed light on Germany's failure to embrace democracy in Weimar, Russia's failure to embrace democracy in 1917, and the likely future histories of African and Asian countries in the long recession of European empire that was clearly impending. When peace broke out, history was ready to explode.

The next fifteen years saw the discipline reach something like its zenith. Even as professional discourse on litera-

ture and the arts became largely critical, rather than historical, erudite and articulate European scholars like Erwin Panofsky and Paul Oskar Kristeller, and brilliant natives like Richard Hofstadter and C. Vann Woodward, became pre-eminent among humanistic writers and teachers. The curriculum continued to accord a central role to interdisciplinary surveys of Western and American civilization. Inexpensive travel, the strong dollar, and new fellowship programs like the Woodrow Wilson, the Fulbright-Hays, and the Danforth enabled young scholars to master the languages of countries around the world and to reach local archives from California to Kamchatka. Government money directed students into newly prominent fields like Russian, Asian, and African history. By the 1960s, more students than ever before or after were majoring and doing graduate work in history. Influential teachers like Woodward and Lawrence Stone occupied a peak of influence, inside their universities and in the larger world of letters. Both regularly addressed a large public in the newly founded *New York Review of Books*, which gave a great deal of space to professional history, much of it quite technical. By 1970 historians were training over one thousand new Ph.D.s a year, and the expanding university system found room for most of them in tenure-track positions.

And yet – so the standard stories go – just as history reached its zenith, it shattered and collapsed. The rise of social history, largely fueled by the political inspiration of the New Left, brought with it a new rhetoric and set of standards. History, some now claimed, must abandon its high, straightforward narrative of great events and allow new voices to be heard – the voices, in the first in-

5 See Frank Stricker, "American Professors in the Progressive Era: Incomes, Aspirations, and Professionalism," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 19 (1988): 231–257; W. Bruce Leslie, *Gentlemen and Scholars: College and Community in the 'Age of the University,' 1865–1917* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

stance, of the laboring and rebellious poor, as heard and interpreted above all by European historians like Richard Cobb and George Rudé; but also the voices of American slaves, of women, of 'peoples without history' in the Third World, and of peoples with non-Western histories in the Middle East, East and South Asia, and elsewhere. Disagreement raged – not only about where university historians should set their priorities, but also about the extent to which their work should or should not reflect political and social commitments.⁶

The reasons for change were multiple. Most important, probably, was the rise of new constituencies for historical study. As early as 1961, when Carl Bridenbaugh of Brown University gave his presidential address to the American Historical Association, he lamented that "many of the younger practitioners of our craft, and those who are still apprentices, are products of lower middle-class or foreign origins, and their emotions not infrequently get in the way of historical reconstruction. They find themselves in a very real sense outsiders on our past and feel themselves shut out."⁷ Jewish and Catholic men – the first outsider groups to enter the profession in large numbers – in fact began by accepting its values and priorities, though a good many of them argued passionately for an enlargement of the historical canon. But the large numbers of women, African Americans, Asian Americans, openly gay scholars, and others who became historians in the 1970s and 1980s

6 The best account of these developments is Novick, *That Noble Dream*, chap. 13.

7 Carl Bridenbaugh, "The Great Mutation," *American Historical Review* 68 (1963): 322–323. Lawrence Stone's offprint of this address, now in my possession, contains some pungent marginalia.

shattered not only history's white male image but also its coherence as a discipline.

Moreover, these new groups competed for jobs in a market that declined catastrophically after 1970 – a situation that exacerbated anger and distrust on all sides. Male historians working in traditional fields railed that their prospects had been sacrificed to make openings for women and African Americans. Women and African Americans complained that traditionalist male colleagues treated them with distrust or contempt. The political and social crisis of the discipline became impossible to ignore. In 1972, when J. Anthony Lukas attended the AHA convention in New York, he found it anything but boring to trace the multiple fracture lines that separated the old mandarins who ran the association from the unemployed and underemployed young, the courtly and condescending senior male historians from their critical female colleagues, and those who wished to keep the discipline apolitical from those who insisted that failing to denounce the war in Vietnam was itself a political act.⁸

Even as new groups began to take over and dismantle the professional study of the past, new methods seemed to call traditional ones into question. Some social historians insisted that their work should take the place of other forms of narrative. In the 1980s, many historians made a 'linguistic turn,' as they drew new tools from philosophy and literary studies and tried to make their analyses of texts more than mere paraphrases of their arguments. A decade later, a 'material turn' followed, as others turned their

8 J. Anthony Lukas, "Historians' Conference: The Radical Need for Jobs," *New York Times Magazine*, March 12, 1972; Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 574–575.

attention from texts and other written documents to the physical environments, tools, clothing, and material possessions of the past. Each new swerve became the object of sessions at conferences; produced its own new journals, volumes of essays, and monographs; and provoked both applause and denunciations.

Even developments that most historians viewed with enthusiasm and pride seemingly contributed to the breakdown of comity. In the middle of the century, most good departments of history concentrated, as they had for decades, on Europe and America, with some subsidiary interest in Latin America. Fifty years later, every major department boasted specialists in Russian, Near Eastern, Asian, and African history. William McNeill of Chicago was not only a pioneering world historian, but also a pioneering department chair. He tried to “develop systematic and linguistically competent investigation of all the great cultures of the world” during his six years as head of the Chicago history department. Thirty years later he reflected ruefully:

This was a laudable ambition and one that I still subscribe to, but there was a disastrous byproduct that I never anticipated: the different subdisciplines, with their regional and linguistic specialties, tended to fall apart as the professors of, say, Chinese and Latin American history ceased to have any sense of shared enterprise. . . . This meant that we don't read each other's books, we don't think in comparable terms, and we don't learn much from each other, or share responsibility in the self-government of the department.”⁹

9 *Speaking of History: Conversations with Historians*, ed. Roger Adelson (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997), 174.

As specialized courses multiplied, a case study based on Stanford's department revealed, they often fell in size. No two products of this or any other history department in the fin-de-siècle graduate or undergraduate read the same books or received training in the same skills.¹⁰

By the late 1970s, many informed observers thought the discipline was falling apart. Scholars like Oscar Handlin and Eugene Genovese, who had themselves transformed the objects and practices of history, now bridled as they saw themselves pushed aside and the standards of inquiry they had established ignored. Mandorlas of scholarly flame swallowed up individual works – Fogel and Engerman's *Time on the Cross*, David Abraham's *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis*, Natalie Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Michael Bellisle's *Arming America*, and many others – and, in some cases, their authors' careers as well. At times – as when the medievalist Norman Cantor denounced his former colleagues at Princeton for running a Marxist indoctrination center – the polemics took leave of reality.¹¹ At times, however, the traditionalists had a point – as when practitioners of one of the new forms of history began to insist that others had not only to accord them space to teach and do research, but also to include the new work in their own teaching and research.

Slowly but inevitably parallel scholarly universes took shape. Those interested in new subjects – such as women's history – or new methods – such as quantita-

10 Larry Cuban, *How Scholars Trumped Teachers* (New York: Teachers' College, 1999); Bender, Katz, and Palmer, *The Education of Historians*.

11 Norman Cantor, “The Real Crisis in the Humanities Today,” *New Criterion* 3 (June 1985): 28 – 38.

tive history – found that they had a great deal in common with their fellow specialists, little or nothing with their immediate colleagues. “There was no king in Israel” – so Peter Novick summed some of these matters up in his elegant and influential study of the effort to obtain objectivity in historical writing, *That Noble Dream*. Instead, a sullen truce came into effect, intermittently broken by ambushes and counterattacks of a viciousness not seen before – a viciousness that reflected the fact that scholars now seemed to have few principles or assumptions in common. So goes a standard narrative – one told in different keys, from the varied denunciations offered by opponents of the new histories like Richard Evans and Keith Windschuttle to the narratives of pluralism triumphant found on many departmental web pages.¹²

Rather as grandparents and grandchildren combine to denounce the generation between them, elder statesmen agree with marginal writers like *Invisible Adjunct*, the young scholar whose web page served as a popular virtual rallying point for underemployed historians and other critics of the existing order until she closed it down and changed careers in 2004.¹³ Their indictments always run on surprisingly similar lines, given the different presuppositions and positions from which their authors start. The frag-

mentation that characterizes the profession, they claim, has transformed the mores of scholars, mostly for the worse. Prominent historians nowadays choose their research subjects not for their intrinsic importance but in order to promote their own careers. Worse, they often pursue their research agendas irresponsibly. They bend the evidence to support their theses, which are often politically motivated, and they pooh-poo the worst mistakes of those with whom they share a political cause. Many of them, finally, do not confine themselves to their own fields, but try to act as ‘public intellectuals,’ writing for a wide audience about subjects on which they cannot claim expert knowledge. Not surprisingly, teaching has little appeal for these academic butterflies. They lure bright undergraduates to go to graduate school and then abandon them to flounder in the desolate wastes of the job market, declaring that the invisible hand assigns positions to those who deserve them.

Indictments like these ring true, but they are certainly not new. Readers of *Lucky Jim* will remember that the young medieval historian who is that inspired novel’s antihero began his article with the already hackneyed phrase “This strangely neglected subject” – only to find himself the object of his own savage, satirical wit. In the 1960s and 1970s, new method after new method was rolled out at seminars and conferences to the accompaniment of flatulent outpourings of self-praise, derision for all those who refused to see that quantification or an emphasis on the public sphere would make the heavens roll back like a scroll. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie was only one of many who assured readers that “a history that is not quantitative cannot claim to be scientific” – only to refute his own prophecy decisively in

12 Richard Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta, 1997; New York: Norton, 1999); Keith Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How a Discipline is Being Murdered by Literary Critics and Social Theorists* (Paddington, NSW, Australia: Macleay, 1994; 2d ed., San Francisco: Encounter, 1996).

13 As of February 13, 2006, the archive of this web site was still available at <http://www.invisibleadjunct.com>.

less than a decade, as he turned away from quantitative history and all its works.¹⁴

In fact, promises and manifestos – and the posturing of public intellectuals – have shaped the writing of history in America since the very days, not long after the Civil War, when the field first became professional. The process began as part of America's rush to attain and profit from technical expertise in the Age of Reform. Historians believed that those who wanted to professionalize the civil service, the courts, and the planning of cities were their natural allies. They were still few in number, moreover, and had few outlets for their technical writing. Accordingly, many of them regularly wrote for this larger public. In 1906, when Wendell Garrison announced his retirement from the editorship of *Nation*, a young historian at the University of Kansas, Carl Becker, wrote to congratulate him for having fought so well “the enemies of the Republic.” Becker, who had as yet no doctorate and had published no books, had written some thirty-five reviews for the magazine since 1903 – and would continue to address a wide public, outside as well as inside the profession, until the end of his career, when he devoted much effort to finding authors for the *Yale Review*, taking advantage of a circle of acquaintances that included journalists as well as academics.¹⁵

More generally, simple tales of degeneration or fragmentation, for all their

partial validity, exaggerate the coherence of American historiography in the past. Only a few of what are now seen as the new subjects of the 1960s and after – women's history, the history of slavery, the history of American Indians and the West – were really new. Most of them, as Ellen Fitzpatrick has shown, were systematically discussed in substantial, deeply researched books, which were in turn reviewed in detail in the professional journals.¹⁶ Many of what have been hailed as radically innovative historical methods – for example, the emphasis on objects, crafts, and the basic materials of life, now often referred to as ‘the material turn’ – are in fact revivals of earlier efforts. The great Vassar historian Lucy Maynard Salmon led her pupils into the material turn in the 1910s and 1920s, writing articles that still dazzle for their deft use of a vast range of materials as historical evidence – and became famous for doing so.¹⁷ Two generations later, John Demos traced many of the same threads, inspired by working at Plymouth Plantation, where every curator had expert knowledge of crafts and household objects.¹⁸ Most general narratives offered by both progressive and conservative critics of the existing historical order are ‘disciplinary histories’

ed *Letters of Carl L. Becker, 1900 – 1945*, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1973), 8 – 9. For the *Yale Review* see Becker's letters to Max Lerner, April 1937, *ibid.*, 256 – 257.

16 Ellen Fitzpatrick, *History's Memory: Writing America's Past, 1880 – 1980* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

17 See Lucy Maynard Salmon, *History and the Texture of Modern Life: Selected Essays*, ed. Nicholas Adams and Bonnie G. Smith (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

18 Adelson, ed., *Speaking of History*, 72.

14 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Territory of the Historian*, trans. B. Reynolds and S. Reynolds (Hassocks, Eng.: Harvester, 1979), 15, quoted by Lawrence Stone, “The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History,” *Past and Present* 85 (1979): 5.

15 Carl Becker to Wendell Garrison, July 1, 1906, in “What is the Good of History?” *Select-*

– stories invented to justify, or criticize, the discipline as it is now, rather than sophisticated and subtle investigations into history ‘as it really was.’ The ‘consensus history’ that they conjure up as the background to the fragmentation of the 1960s existed, for the most part, as a delusion of the self-satisfied or as a strawman to be ritually burnt in polemics.

It would take the graphic talent and analytical skill of a Charles Minard to trace the full development of history over the last century – and even Minard might not be able to register all the gains and losses incurred by the army of historians who have tramped back into the icy wastes of the world’s pasts and returned, or failed to do so, bearing booty. Instead, let’s try something different: a look at how one recent episode in modern historiography has played out.

Every historian, as Le Roy Ladurie famously remarked, is either a parachutist or a truffle hunter: a synthesist who hangs high above the landscape of the past and surveys it as a whole, or a monographer who presses his or her snout against the sources to examine them in microscopic detail. But for the last three decades, historians engaged with the whole range of specialties now cultivated have played the truffle hunter in a new way. They have focused in on particular moments and stories, hoping to catch, in the nightmare brilliance and clarity of a tightly focused scholarly spotlight, past individuals going about tasks that ranged from harvesting crops to composing cosmologies to killing cats. Many of these microhistories have investigated mysteries. For mysteries attract policemen and inquisitors, who keep detailed records of ordinary lives and record the words of ordinary men and women.

Microhistories have captivated readers, won places on syllabi, been translated into many languages—and enraged and delighted their fellow professionals. How can we explain, and how should we evaluate, their achievement? And what does a microhistory of microhistory tell us about the state of the discipline?

Standard lists of the historians who have turned their microscopes on the past concentrate on early modern Europe and begin with two acknowledged and much-criticized masterpieces: *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (1975), by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, a distinguished French practitioner of *Annales*-style total history in mid-career; and *Il formaggio e i vermi: il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500* (1976), by Carlo Ginzburg, an Italian prodigy.

Le Roy Ladurie, best known for his brilliant, massive study of the Malthusian trap that crushed the peasants of early modern Languedoc, turned away in mid-career from the quantitative and serial sources on which he had cut his scholarly teeth and attacked the Inquisition register of a thirteenth-century Dominican, Jacques Fournier. In the interrogations of peasants, millers, Cathar *perfecti*, and noble ladies, he saw something like a medieval Herculaneum or Pompeii: a lost civilization, perfectly preserved by the eruption that destroyed it. Le Roy Ladurie used the words of Montaillou’s preternaturally eloquent inhabitants to call those who had uttered them back to life, in all the strange glory of their tiny mountain town, where locals deloused each other and gossiped about cosmology in every kitchen.

Ginzburg, steeped in both the methods of the *Annales* school and those of the Warburg Institute, turned away from the problems about witchcraft and

its history that had previously occupied him and turned to the records of two Inquisition trials, both with the same defendant: a Friulian miller called Domenico Scandella, nicknamed Menocchio. His words, as well as those of his acquaintances, revealed that he had elaborated a spectacularly vivid and heretical cosmology, which he insisted on discussing even at the risk of his freedom and his life. In these protocols, in which Menocchio portrayed the world as taking shape like a cheese, and the human race as the bugs created in it by spontaneous generation, Ginzburg heard the rough, materialist voice of a peasant civilization. Normally given no access to the written word and never allowed to speak, peasants were provoked to articulateness by the impact of printing and the Reformation, and then crushed by the Counter-Reformation, which set out to eliminate all heresies. Both books immediately found a wide readership in Europe. Soon translated into English, both became the objects of widespread and passionate discussion.

American early modernists soon joined their European colleagues in Clio's attractive new realm. Natalie Zemon Davis drew on a vast range of sources, including published case reports, legal and economic documents from archives, and contemporary literature, to retell the extraordinary story of *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983). Robert Darnton interpreted fairy tales, police inspectors' records, and a strange episode from a printer's autobiography to shed light on what he identified as fundamental characteristics of eighteenth-century France in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (1984). Two leading historians of early modern Italy, Gene Brucker and Judith Brown, drew on legal records to tell the stories of star-crossed lovers,

one set of them heterosexual and the other lesbian, though not in any modern sense.¹⁹ Historians of science applied the technique in more diverse ways – to Galileo's encounters with the Inquisition and to the development of laboratory techniques by Boyle and his contemporaries.²⁰

In less than a decade, microhistory had become an established genre. Seminars and courses were devoted to the most readable microhistories. Publishers naturally looked for successors to these unexpectedly saleable studies of the forgotten and bizarre, and scholars supplied them, branching out into nineteenth-century Europe and nineteenth- and twentieth-century America.²¹ A new form of historiography had somehow taken shape – or so it seemed – in an area already rich with models and methods.

Historians have been trying to come to terms with these new histories since their beginnings. Lawrence Stone witnessed two of the most influential be-

19 Gene Brucker, *Giovanni and Lusanna: Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Judith Brown, *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

20 Pietro Redondi, *Galileo eretico* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983); Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

21 Howard Bloch, *God's Plagiarist: Being an Account of the Fabulous Industry and Irregular Commerce of the Abbé Migne* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); James Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro* (New York: Pantheon, 1994); Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

ing born: Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms*, the first draft of which was written at Princeton's Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Research, and Darnton's *The Great Cat Massacre*, parts of which were first discussed there. Ever alert to the condition of history as a whole, Stone took these innovative studies as symptoms of a wider change. In what became a famous article, he argued that historians had become discontented with big questions and, even more, with the big, impersonal theories they had previously used in trying to answer them. They had rebelled against the large-scale quantitative projects of American Cliometricians and French *Annalistes*. In the place of these large-scale, systematic reconstructions of past societies and systems, with their emphasis on stability over time, they set a newer, nimbler, Energizer Bunny-style of history – one that returned to the ancient historian's craft of telling stories.²²

Stone's pointed, witty essay focused attention on the new genre, but also provoked immediate dissent. Eric Hobsbawm, who knew the continental world from which the first microhistories emerged even better than Stone did, noted almost immediately that for all their narrative flair, these writers had hardly abandoned the analytical intentions of their predecessors. If Ginzburg focused on Menocchio, for example, he did so because he saw a microscopic study as the most profitable alembic in which to raise questions about and to analyze the relations between popular and learned, oral and written cultures.²³

Others noted that all kinds of microhistory were not identical. Ginzburg's

work, for example, formed part of a larger enterprise developed by a number of contributors to the journal *Quaderni storici*, and were designed to fit the particular conditions of Italy, where everything from the land itself to the vast civil and ecclesiastical archives made it possible to recreate particular stories in as much detail as if they had happened in much more modern times.²⁴

Stone himself, moreover, pointed out that microhistories had roots in a variety of intellectual traditions. French scholars in the tradition of the *Annales* – starting with the cofounder of that journal, Lucien Febvre – had tried to reconstruct what they termed, with provocative vagueness, the *mentalités* of past societies – the sets of tools with which they understood the universe, society, and their own place. The influential American anthropologist Clifford Geertz called for the creation of detail-rich “thick descriptions” of rituals, which could in turn be used to tease out an alien society's values, assumptions, beliefs, and practices. Ginzburg was visibly inspired by Febvre, even if he used archival records to do what Febvre had done by reading literary and philosophical texts. Davis and Darnton were as visibly inspired by Geertz, with whom they regularly exchanged ideas. Both insisted for a time on calling themselves anthropologists as well as, or instead of, historians.

Many observers, however, identified one feature of microhistory as far more striking than the rest, and as one that connected it to other fields of innovative, ‘postmodern’ history: its propensity to spark ferocious argument from

22 Stone, “The Revival of Narrative,” 3–24.

23 Eric Hobsbawm, “The Revival of Narrative: Some Reflections,” *Past and Present* 86 (1980): 3–8.

24 Edward Muir, “Introduction: Observing Trifles,” in *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, ed. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, trans. Eren Branch (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

scholars who insisted that the micro-historians violated basic canons of historical research. Every one of the early modern microhistories generated at least one massive effort at refutation. Leonard Boyle, the great specialist in medieval documents who eventually became Vatican Librarian, argued with characteristic irony and force that Le Roy Ladurie had failed to set his materials into their proper content or to do justice to the nuances of his inquisitor's language.²⁵ A number of senior specialists in intellectual history insisted that Ginzburg had not taken into account the nearby learned circles from which Menocchio could have derived his heresies, and even the richly metaphorical language in which he couched them.²⁶ And established specialists on the Roman Inquisition attacked Pietro Redondi, at the same time, for misclassifying the chief document he used to support his new interpretation of Galileo's crime.²⁷

Though the first volleys struck the European originators of the new gen-

25 Leonard Boyle, "Montaillou Revisited: Mentalité and Methodology," in *Pathways to Medieval Peasants*, ed. J. Ambrose Raftis (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), 119–140.

26 For a full bibliography see *Domenico Scandella detto Menocchio: i processi dell'inquisizione (1583–1599)*, ed. Andrea Del Col (Pordenone: Biblioteca dell'Immagine, 1990); *Domenico Scandella Known as Menocchio: His Trials Before the Inquisition (1583–1599)*, ed. Andrea Del Col, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1996).

27 Vincenzo Ferrone and Massimo Firpo, "From Inquisitors to Microhistorians: A Critique of Pietro Redondi's *Galileo eretico*," *Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986): 485–524.

re, they were soon followed by direct attacks against almost all of the American microhistorians. All of these attackers argued that the microhistorians had gone wrong, at least in part, by importing alien ideas into or putting alien questions to their materials. Robert Darnton found himself under fire for reifying the French character he believed he had found in the tales of peasants and the rituals of apprenticeships and imposing on the past a grid of anachronisms drawn from his own modern concerns. Why, critics asked, insist on the absolute alienness of the past – and then insist that it was characterized by a uniform and durable "Frenchness"?²⁸ Roger Chartier held that anyone looking for the realm of the symbolic in early modern French culture should begin not from the sorts of behavior that allured twentieth-century historians and anthropologists, but from the sorts of words and images that early modern Frenchmen would have recognized as bearing symbolic content. Robert Finlay found equally absurd Davis's attempt to apply the postmodern notion of "self-fashioning," as formulated by Stephen Greenblatt, to the behavior of sixteenth-century peasants.²⁹

28 Roger Chartier, "Texts, Symbols, and Frenchness," *Journal of Modern History* 57 (1985): 682–695; Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985); Dominick LaCapra, "Chartier, Darnton and the Great Symbol Massacre," *Journal of Modern History* 60 (1988): 95–112; James Fernandez, "Historians Tell Tales: Of Cartesian Cats and Gallic Cockfights," *Journal of Modern History* 60 (1988): 113–127; Harold Mah, "Suppressing the Text: The Metaphysics of Ethnographic History in Darnton's Great Cat Massacre," *History Workshop* 31 (1991): 1–20. Cf. Robert Darnton, "The Symbolic Element in History," *Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986): 218–234.

29 Robert Finlay, "The Refashioning of Martin Guerre," *American Historical Review* 93 (1988):

Yet the objections to microhistory extended beyond the level of interpretation to that of simple fact. When Finlay warned, “The historian should not make the people of the past say or do things that run counter to the most scrupulous respect for the sources,”³⁰ he spoke for many of his colleagues in criticism. Harold Mah argued that Darnton had, in effect, abridged the text he analyzed in the title article of *The Great Cat Massacre* by ignoring the conclusion of the episode, and that by doing so he had changed its meaning. Finlay insisted that Davis had read the documents that described the case of Martinguerre in an arbitrary way, drawing conclusions that they simply did not support.

Microhistory, in other words, turned into something more than a new form of historical writing. It became a central, spotlit arena in its own right, one in which prominent historians debated the very nature and meaning of their craft. Taken together, moreover, these debates suggested a reading of the larger situation of history itself. A number of the microhistorians represented history’s new constituencies – especially the large number of women who were transforming the profession in so many ways. Most came from one region or another of the Left, and more than one of them explicitly defined their task as one of restoring voices and characters to past actors whom previous histories had omitted or oversimplified. These writers made no secret of their sympathies. “Who built Thebes of the seven gates?” asked Ginzburg, starting off with a text from Brecht in the best manner of the

553 – 571; cf. Natalie Zemon Davis’s reply, “On the Lame,” *ibid.*, 572 – 603.

30 Finlay, “The Refashioning of Martin Guerre,” 571.

European student movement of the 1960s.

Just as the microhistorians roiled the waters of history by telling stories about new subjects, they also irritated some of their professional readers by appealing to methods drawn from outside their field – methods that, in the case of anthropology and literary studies, had come in the course of the 1970s and 1980s to be associated with the academic Left. To some true believers in the centrality of politics and warfare, and even to more up-to-date practitioners of quantitative and class-based social history, the moral of the story seemed clear. The microhistorians, like earlier generations of Left revisionists before them, wanted to create a New History even if doing so required them to ignore the normal canons of historical research.

But any effort to argue that microhistory went with a lack of concern for sources foundered on the case of one of the new genre’s founders, Carlo Ginzburg. For if Davis and Darnton drew their favorite tools from the shiniest of the new human sciences, Ginzburg found his in the oldest and most respectable of humanistic tool bins, the very one that Ranke used when he created the nineteenth century’s New History: philology. Trained at Italy’s superb forcing-house for mandarin classicists, medievalists, and Renaissance scholars, the fiercely selective Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Ginzburg learned the crafts of historical research in the seminars of two uncompromising masters, Delio Cantimori and Augusto Campana, and spent much time pondering the work of postwar Italy’s greatest classical scholar, the historian of scholarship Sebastiano Timpanaro.³¹ The method

31 The philological roots of Ginzburg’s method are most apparent in two of his essays:

he used to unlock the secrets of Menocchio's confession was the central philological tool of textual comparison. It was by juxtaposing what the miller said to what he had read, adjective by adjective and verb by verb, that Ginzburg teased out Menocchio's peasant hermeneutics. Similarly, comparisons served to show that Menocchio could not simply have drawn his belief that the world came into existence from chaos like a great cheese from any known text or learned radical. Ginzburg intended his work to serve as a model for a Left history of a new kind – but its method grew organically from deep roots in the darkest, richest soil of the historical tradition.³²

Yet for all the traditional qualities and goals of the microhistories, they did also reflect something new: a feeling that historians could no longer tell large, sweeping stories of the sort that their professional predecessors most esteemed. If microhistorians never became as subjective in their methods as their sharpest critics claimed, they were fascinated above all by past subjectivities: by experience as mediated through individual consciousness. At times, their very vivid-

ness and popularity seemed to challenge the whole project of historical synthesis – their critics would have said, of coherence itself.

The harsh controversies that attended the birth of microhistory were far from unprecedented. From the 1950s through the 1970s, many Americans looked to British historians not only for the substance of their work, but also for models they could apply to other fields. For example, American historians of labor and of African American slavery found their chief inspiration not in homegrown historiography but in E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). British historiography, however, was one vast battle zone.

Journals like the *Economic History Review* and *Past and Present* thrived on long, polemical exchanges, which focused the attention of historians around the world on key issues. Even general periodicals – the *TLS*, the *Observer*, the *Listener*, and, above all, the *Encounter* (now remembered for the CIA money that supported it, but in its day a splendid fusion of British and New York Jewish modes of critical writing) – took a strong interest in history and encouraged distinguished writers to present their debates to a broad, nonspecialist readership. The 1950s and 1960s became, as Ved Mehta reported to readers of the *New Yorker* in 1962, a golden age of historical argument without end.³³ The guardians of history – Hugh Trevor-Roper, A. J. P. Taylor, and Thompson – spent years at a time on patrol in learned journals and Grub Street weeklies, armed with sharp nibs and ready to arrest or cut down anyone who dared to bring a new thesis

"Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 96 – 125, and "High and Low: The Theme of Forbidden Knowledge in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Past and Present* 73 (1976): 28 – 41. For a perceptive description of his early career see Anne Schutte, "Carlo Ginzburg," *The Journal of Modern History* 48 (2) (1976): 296 – 315.

32 A copy of the version of Ginzburg's paper on Menocchio, as discussed at the Shelby Culom Davis Center, is preserved in the Center's archive. Warm thanks to Warren Boutcher for calling this document to my attention and for his comments on its significance.

33 See Ved Mehta, *Fly and the Fly-Bottle: Encounters with British Intellectuals* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962), chaps. 3 – 4, for a superb evocation of the climate of these years.

onto history's stage without having thought hard enough about the evidence and its meaning. Certain red-flag issues – for example, the role of the gentry in what used to be called the Puritan Revolution, the origins of World War II, and any effort to advance large-scale philosophies of history – were guaranteed to provoke these bad-tempered, muscular bulls.

By the beginning of the 1960s, these controversies were starting to cross the Atlantic. Lawrence Stone, who suffered harm at Trevor-Roper's hands at the beginning of his career, brought a more humane version of the same polemical style with him to the United States. And J. H. Hexter, after parachuting into the controversies over the gentry with a brilliantly polemical piece in *Encounter*, came to specialize in the critical dissection of major works of history, not all of them recent. At the invitation of William McNeill, for example, Hexter subjected one of the acknowledged masterpieces of twentieth-century historiography, Braudel's *Mediterranean*, to a public autopsy of unparalleled precision, sharpness, and wit, cast as both a parody and a tribute.³⁴

As Americans began to adopt the British style of polemic, the key of historical criticism became unmistakably sharper – and its modes of argument more engaged with the details of research. For more than a decade after Hans Baron's *Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* appeared in 1955, it won the assent of most readers, generating a vast amount of research by others out to confirm and extend its conclusions. In 1966, however, a young historian, Jerrold Seigel, subjected Baron's arguments to systematic

scrutiny. Seigel argued that Baron – no microhistorian, but a historian of culture trained in the innovative Leipzig school – had misread his sources and their authors.³⁵ Baron noted a number of errors in Seigel's work when he replied.³⁶ But Seigel's critique unleashed a debate that has, in the end, revealed both how indispensable Baron's work is – and how impossible to accept in all its details.³⁷

As Hexter, Stone, and others naturalized the British polemical tradition in the United States, such detailed commentaries proliferated. Darnton, whose microhistory became the object of so many extended attacks, began his own career as a writer with a detailed demolition of Peter Gay's attempt to create a "social history of ideas." He wittily contrasted Gay's vaguer, traditional method to the more rigorous, if sometimes idiosyncratic, work of French historians of the book.³⁸ Julius Kirshner and Eric Cochrane carried on the same tradition in their own sharp, individual fashion, when they set out to reduce Frederick Lane's massive and learned history of Venice to a heap of unhistorical rub-

35 Jerrold Seigel, "'Civic Humanism' or Ciceronian Rhetoric? The Culture of Petrarch and Bruni," *Past and Present* 34 (1966): 3–48.

36 Hans Baron, "Leonardo Bruni: 'Professional Rhetorician' or 'Civic Humanist'?" *Past and Present* 36 (1967): 21–37.

37 James Hankins, "The 'Baron Thesis' after Forty Years and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995): 309–338; *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

38 Robert Darnton, "In Search of the Enlightenment: Recent Attempts to Create a Social History of Ideas," *Journal of Modern History* 43 (1971): 113–132.

34 Jack Hexter, "Fernand Braudel and the monde braudelien," *Journal of Modern History* 44 (1972): 480–539.

ble.³⁹ No wonder, then, that when Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman set out their new interpretation of slavery in *Time on the Cross* – a book that rested on a vast amount of research, carried out by teams, and that cast its results in a quantitative form unfamiliar to most historians – they found themselves beset on all sides by critics intent on dismantling their bright new structure, stone by stone – in one famous case at book length.

In other words, the sharp critiques that attended the rise of microhistory – and other innovative forms of historical writing, like the New Left's efforts to recast the history of the cold war or the new social history of the 1960s and 1970s – were not simply responses to innovation. They were also exercises in a form of invective made popular by the most innovative white male historians of the 1950s and 1960s, and vital to the transformation of history in America into a cosmopolitan and truly critical discipline.

Historical practices have certainly mutated in the last fifty years. But our story also shows that these mutations in authorial and critical practices took place, and are still taking place, within limits established long ago. Microhistories, like other recent innovations in historiography, have played a major role in attracting the large numbers of bright, well-trained young men and women who apply every year to begin graduate work in history – numbers far in excess of the number of places they can occupy. Their methods may be novel – yet the goals of these students remain essentially the same as those set by their eigh-

teenth-century ancestors: to produce literary works of art, and to see the world through the eyes of the dead.

Yet the story of microhistory has its disquieting side. For all the excitement that the genre continues to generate, for all the new stories that its practitioners have unearthed, historians have failed to make a case to one another, or to the wider public, that they can reconcile this new way of seeing the past with older, broader ones – or, as became clear at the Washington meeting of the AHA, that synthetic treatments of the past can still engage a professional audience. Critics and recipients of criticism alike, moreover, have failed to explain to outsiders that harsh debate is an integral part of history's tradition, one that came back into widespread practice after World War II, as part of a broad-gauged, successful effort to assert that history has real explanatory and critical power.

Intellectually, history is far richer, far more charged with excitement, than it looks from the outside. But senior historians face real problems. They have not explained to the wider public why their new methods add up to the elements of a liberal education, or demonstrated to the young that they can join in current discussions without either risking personal disaster or finding themselves forced to catch the first bandwagon that passes. Closer and less ideological scrutiny of history's own past will help. But it will take more intensive self-examination – something, perhaps, more like the systematic scrutiny to which art historians and literary critics have recently subjected their own practices – to sort out these issues with clarity, charity, and honesty.

39 Eric Cochrane and Julius Kirshner, "Deconstructing Lane's Venice," *Journal of Modern History* 47 (1975): 321 – 334.

Thomas Crow

The practice of art history in America

“... the moment just past is extinguished forever, save for the things made in it.”

– George Kubler, *The Shape of Time*¹

As the name for a discipline, ‘art history’ enacts a syntactical clash every time it is uttered or written. Which is the principal term, which its modifier? The two elements in their coupling confront one another in an undecided hierarchy. The more decorous substitute, ‘history of art,’ puts the weight on the object that history is called upon to serve, but its currency is less – and in the shorthand of everyday speech, virtually nil.

There is, of course, a large measure of convention, common to most European

Thomas Crow is director of the Getty Research Institute at the Getty Center, Los Angeles, and professor of art history at the University of Southern California. His publications include “Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth Century Paris” (1985), “Emulation” (1995), “The Intelligence of Art” (1999), and most recently “The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent” (2005). He has been a Fellow of the American Academy since 2001.

© 2006 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

languages, in the particular use of the term ‘art’ to designate painting, sculpture, drawings, prints, and (more distantly) architecture. In any event, it primarily denotes a range of physical objects. Its true, much wider application to any creative practice or product generally requires some explicit indication – an odd reversal of the general and the particular. Is this anomaly a mere accident of usage? Or does it point to some actual eccentricities in the term’s historical formation that bear on the position of art history in the American constellation of humanistic disciplines?

The fact that the visual arts successfully lay claim to a general, honorific designation as Art may lie – and this is speculative – in the physically enduring nature of the artifacts that fall under such a description. Literature can manifest itself in any legible transcription, and the performing arts of music and theater can conjure physical actuality from a score or script, but fidelity to any original enactment can never be secured – dance is even less traceable beyond living routine and memory. By contrast, the intricate physical remains on which art history concentrates its

¹ George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1962), 79.

attention are the actual things fashioned and handled by the subjects of history themselves.

Therein lies a rightness in the obdurate pair of nouns that name the discipline. George Kubler (1912 – 1996), the great specialist in both colonial Spanish architecture and pre-Columbian art, was one of the rare American scholars of his generation to address the theoretical underpinnings of a discipline operating under this designation. He likened the gaze of the art historian to that of the astronomer, “concerned with appearances noted in the present but occurring in the past However fragmentary its condition, any work of art is actually a portion of an arrested happening, or an emanation of past time.” The “initial commotion” entailed in the making of an art object survives – as does no other creative act – as a unique, physically sensible pattern.²

In comparison, the textual materials relied upon by the profession of history can seem, despite their profusion, thin and remote. The object of art, by contrast, allows its maker to speak in the present with the full vividness of an unforced creative act, one that can preserve a significant, if not absolutely complete, inventory of its particular traits and structural complexity. By this I do not mean to say that artists and craftsmen do not operate under a confining series of stipulations and constraints, but these are the standard conditions of all human activity, within which art production is exceptional in the scope it provides for nuanced emotional expression as part and parcel of its social utility.

The difficulty, it hardly needs stating, lies in interpreting this physical commotion from the past that arrives in

our midst like a traveler through time. Kubler observes in *The Shape of Time* that there is nothing in the cultural record so resistant to analysis and interpretation as the single work of art.³ Hence the necessary recourse to schemes of generalization and comparison around which arise the endless disputes that, in effect, constitute the history of the discipline. But the unique material object also beckons as a place of refuge and safety from any spirit of controversy. It is what it is, an epistemological difficulty readily inviting redescription as a quasi-mystical presence. The curators of museum collections and merchants of the art trade – most of whom underwent the same training as art historians in academia – frequently resort to claims of superior knowledge based largely on physical proximity and familiarity. Beyond the work of description and classification, the work of art is presumed to ‘speak for itself.’

Subtending the mutual suspicion between museum and academy is the patent reality that art history’s objects of study cross over into the category of objects of desire. The rarity, technical distinction, emotional intensity, and formal beauty that variously characterize these survivals of Kubler’s distant “commotions” have made them among the most sought-after possessions in the modern world. (A scholarly interpretation is, in its way, as much a claim on the object of art as any other.) As market prices are continually bid up to levels incommensurable with virtually any other category of human artifact, powerful players in the system – public and private – can impose demands for flattering affirmation that run counter to the requirements of historical and interpretative probity that the discipline

2 Ibid., 19 – 20.

3 Ibid., 36.

shares with its sisters in the humanities at large.

At the same time, the operations of desire that drive the circulation of art objects, along with all the perturbations that their movement sets off in subsequent art practice, constitute a key category of research in modern art history. For example, one cannot set apart the antique fragments incorporated into the basilica of San Marco in Venice, spoils of predation on Constantinople, from any other element of its design history and meaning. And the same spectacular desire for possession has resulted in the reproduction at a reduced scale of the entire Piazza San Marco, with all of its layered accretions of form and symbol, as the facade of the largest hotel in the world, the Venetian in Las Vegas. This gambling and entertainment resort additionally boasts a joint branch of the Guggenheim and Hermitage museums – the latter collection itself the plunder of the monetary raids by the Czarinas Elisabeth and Catherine the Great on the artistic trophies of western Europe.

Such phenomena already lie firmly on the agenda of ‘visual culture’ studies, a hybrid category embraced by a number of art historians to whom the cult of fine aesthetic discrimination appears an unsustainable relic of the past. The global entrepreneurship of the Guggenheim Museum, of which the Las Vegas franchise is just one part, has thrived on the disdain of museum traditionalists, which has only served to enhance its intended aura of postmodern glamour and friendliness toward popular culture. But these latest episodes directly echo the process by which the great exemplars of European fine art came to this country in the first place. Selection and promotion by entrepreneurs like the Duveen brothers placed this legacy in the hands of Gilded Age magnates

who had grown staggeringly wealthy on the leading industries of the era – rail, oil, and steel – but were still short of the requisite cultural polishing. The American discipline of art history would be unthinkable without the public collections subsequently endowed by these direct ancestors to a figure like hotelier Steve Wynn of Las Vegas, whose personal museum of art at the Bellagio hotel rivals the institutional weight of the Guggenheim-Hermitage effort.

Both of these new institutions of art strive to present objects of art in a manner that is as deracinated, as divorced from the circumstances under which they arose, as human ingenuity can contrive. Paintings that satisfied the courtly aggrandizement of Russian potentates come to stand in perfectly isolated splendor against the pitted reddish-brown walls of industrial steel stipulated by architect Rem Koolhaas. In no environment could the visitor be less encouraged to probe the internal complications of any one of them, that is, to search out the telltale imprints of the particular past commotion that brought each one into being. The cult that surrounds the displaced objects in all of America’s museums reach a kind of pure extreme in this, their ultimate desert outpost. A layered, intricately worked physical artifact hovers before the eyes as an ‘image,’ that is, a mental event; and its promise points exclusively toward the realm of pleasure – the single-minded purpose of the entire built environment in which they find themselves.

Elucidating fully the sources and wide effects of this phenomenon would require concentration on the anthropology and psychology of the fetish. For the purposes of this essay, taking some measure of its distorting effects is sufficient. Among these are an exaggerated sense

of possession and a blindness to the particular and contingent circumstances in which these fascinating works are experienced. Colleagues in the cognitive sciences – lately the most vocal commentators to set their sights on art from outside the field – have tended to adopt the Las Vegas mindset as their idea of a universal human norm in the experience of art objects. Linguistic psychologist Steven Pinker, summing up the lessons of recent research into what he calls “evolutionary aesthetics,” informs us that “art is a pleasure technology, like drugs, erotica, or fine cuisine – a way to purify and concentrate pleasurable stimuli and deliver them to our senses.”⁴ It follows for him that any form of art that might irritate or confound the viewer’s perceptual faculties must be a perverse and willfully unnatural deviation from the path dictated by our common genetic predisposition.

Foremost among such deviations have been the formal experiments of twentieth-century modernists, who cast aside with startling abruptness “all the tricks that artists had used for millennia to please the human palate” in favor of “freakish distortions of shape and color and then to abstract grids, shapes, dribbles, splashes” Such behavior Pinker can only comprehend in terms of some imposed, partisan agenda: if art holds a mirror up to nature, then modernism represents a willful campaign to assert that the social world itself had lost all harmony with just human needs and aspirations.⁵ But any scholar of art could

inform him that artists and their patrons have, over those millenia, just as often sought to elicit somatic and emotional responses that lie far from the loci of pleasure. The entire gamut of human feeling and knowledge has been fair game for artists since the advent of the first “man-made object to which we assign a more than utilitarian value” (citing Erwin Panofsky’s degree-zero definition of art).⁶ As often as not, the decidedly unpleasant experiences of intimidation, guilt, exclusion, taboo, and dread have been the intended effect of the objects that come under the scrutiny of the art historian. Take the colossal stone block bearing the ferocious likeness of the Aztec goddess Coatlicue/Cihuacoatl, with her monstrous countenance of opposed rattlesnake profiles emerging from her severed neck, which today constitutes one of the artistic glories of the National Anthropological Museum in Mexico City. Consider the range of emotions likely to have been felt in its presence by any potential victim of the priest’s obsidian knife, and then try to equate that with the hedonist’s menu of sensory gratifications adduced by Pinker.

Surely wiser in this regard is Kubler, who had a profound knowledge of the Mesoamerican traditions from which the Aztec effigy arose. No particular partisan of modern avant-gardism, he describes the same European aesthetic revolution circa 1910 in these terms:

to demonstrate such conscious political leanings in the practice of exemplary modern artists – and have usually come up empty.

⁶ Erwin Panofsky, “The History of Art,” in *The Cultural Migration: The European Scholar in America*, ed. W. R. Crawford (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1977), 83.

⁴ Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2002), 405.

⁵ A further weakness in this assertion lies in the fact that many assiduous scholars on the Left, devoutly wishing that Pinker could be correct, have spent at least a generation attempting

The fabric of society manifested no rupture, and the texture of useful inventions continued step by step in closely linked order, but the system of artistic invention was abruptly transformed, as if large numbers of men had suddenly become aware that the inherited repertory of forms no longer corresponded to the actual meaning of existence The nature of artistic invention therefore relates more closely to invention by new postulates than to that invention by simple confrontation which characterizes the useful sciences.⁷

A postulate on the order of the heliocentric planetary orbits, the movement of tectonic plates, or, indeed, natural selection itself can force as abrupt (and to many as freakish) a reordering of cognition as the eruption of a new, antinaturalistic set of criteria for success in painting.

In fact, over the millennia evoked by Pinker, naturalistic depiction has been the exception rather than the rule (though the technical barriers to its achievement are quite low) because it is not, on the whole, what human beings have desired from their art. One key element in any explanation for the drastic artistic transformations of the early twentieth century, as Kubler conceives them, lies in the grafting of tribal and non-Western formal sequences in all their historical concreteness onto an otherwise played-out European line that had lost, by any objective measure, most of its capacity for fresh invention. The new African, Oceanic, and archaic models offered, in addition to an expanded range of expressive intensity, an advanced capacity for rendering volumes into linear patterns transferable to a flat surface, in a way that acknowledged with a new realism the painting as a two-dimensional thing. Any single

7 Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, 70.

object in this new sequence captured for the future its concrete moment of active translation between two symbolic technologies.

The task of understanding such a moment necessarily entails a patient unpacking of a process, many layers of which are only partly visible or indeed entirely obscure to the immediate, untutored glance. Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, perhaps the prime moment in this process of translation, has enjoyed just such an unpacking by Leo Steinberg, the recondite scholar of Leonardo da Vinci and High Renaissance art.⁸ The work's legions of admirers share with art historians like Kubler and Steinberg a fascination with the moment of invention and with the creative act itself, into which this prime modernist work finds ways to draw its spectators – and the same could be said of an equally foundational object for a previous tradition, say, Leonardo's cartoon for his *Virgin, Child, and Saint Anne*. This higher order of communication virtually necessitates that the artist confound comfortable habits of viewing, pushing aspects of form toward or beyond the limits of what might be comfortable or even legible at any given historical juncture. The evolution of what is heard as a 'dissonance' in European music provides an instructive parallel almost too obvious to mention.

It is not the case, however, that the scholars who established art history in American universities necessarily resisted the temptation to regard the apparent immediacy of visual art as a relief from the more laborious demands

8 See Leo Steinberg, "The Philosophical Brothel," pt. 1, *Art News* 71 (5) (September 1972): 20–29; *Ibid.*, pt. 2, *Art News* 71 (6) (October 1972): 38–49.

of historical interpretation. In an essay of 1929, Charles Rufus Morey, the most influential figure in the development of the field at Princeton, lamented the absence of historical depth in the environment surrounding American students compared to the palpable sense of tradition enjoyed by their European counterparts. To amass a commensurable awareness through the study of languages or history consumed years and, even then, might yield only uncoordinated fragments of knowledge: “the *disiecta membra* of the history of human action and thought.” In the history of art, however, “the student is conducted to the spirit of an epoch by his most direct sense, the eye ... [which] provides a history capable of exposition within the narrow limits of time and effort which have been left for such integrating disciplines by the multiplicity of the modern college curriculum.”⁹

No hint here that the proper unpacking of even one representative object requires no less elaboration of philological and historical knowledge than that required by any cognate discipline – in fact, one could argue that it requires a good deal more. Morey’s own scholarship, in particular his founding and use of the monumental *Index of Christian Art* as a comprehensive guide to the visualization of doctrine over the entire body of medieval art, belies his own proposition. The achievements of medievalists like Morey and Arthur Kingsley Porter, his equally forceful and accomplished colleague at Harvard, had been impressive enough to elicit the admiration of jealously nationalistic Europeans.¹⁰ But

both of these founding figures also professed in their teaching and polemics an avowedly conservative social agenda, wherein the perceived hierarchy and dogmatic certainties of the Middle Ages could be held up as an alternative model for Americans, one to be set against the democratizing forces of advancing industrial technology, mass immigration, urban growth, and materialistic consumption. As Morey wrote in 1944: “There is revealed in every work of mediaeval craftsmen, from the macrocosm of the cathedral to the microcosm of the miniature or ivory carving, an element bitterly missed in the modern scene, an element whose restoration would do most to integrate a new and more human civilization, in a new and more reasonable world. And that is unity of faith.”¹¹

A good deal of faith, in fact, underlies this pronouncement, as it sets aside the distinct possibility that the eclectic corpus of medieval objects present in American public collections could themselves appear as so many *disiecta membra*, cut off from one another and divorced from their inspiring original contexts. Porter simply gave up the struggle, retiring to a castle on a remote Irish coast, there to shut out the modern world amid his pious rural clients. The more practical Morey sought a less drastic solution; he championed the fashioning of an architectural pastiche from the architectural remains of five French monasteries – financed by the devout John D. Rockefeller, Jr. – in order to create the Cloisters museum in New York, where the bulk of the Metropolitan Museum’s medieval objects have come to be housed. The Cloisters, he wrote,

9 Charles Rufus Morey, “The Value of Art as an Academic Subject,” *Parnassus* 1 (3) (March 15, 1929): 7.

10 Panofsky, “The History of Art,” 85–88.

11 Charles Rufus Morey, “Mediaeval Art and America,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 7 (1944): 6.

represent the maturity of American museum planning towards the evocation of the mediaeval scene The rugged height of Fort Tryon park provided a typical monastic site, and the cloisters, halls, and details of five French monasteries furnished the core of the architectural complex, which was brought to consistency by judicious copying of necessary elements from other South French abbeys In the landscaping, most difficult of all mediaeval aspects to recapture, a great deal of diligent research resulted in a convincing lay-out of monastic orchards, and even included a garden of medicinal herbs conforming to a Carolingian list of the year 812.¹²

The yearning of fantasy is palpable in this passage. The Cloisters can boast the actual stones of the Middle Ages, and the intervening decades have lent the complex its own patina of age, but the conceptual difference between its re-creations and those of the Las Vegas Venetian have remained more a matter of degree than of kind.

As the Cloisters opened in 1938, the unfolding political catastrophe in Europe was surpassing the worst fears these American medievalists may have harbored for their own culture. Touchstones of European artistic achievement had been arriving in America piecemeal over the previous half-century; in a burst, the cream of Old World scholarly achievement in interpreting those objects followed, as a wave of Jewish art historians sought refuge across the Atlantic. The Institute of Fine Arts, housed within New York University, established itself in a few short years as the peer of any Ivy League program by incorporating the largest number of refugee Europeans. Its director, Walter Cook, likened

his initiative to the acquisition of physical objects, frequently declaring (with a somewhat disturbing insouciance): "Hitler is my best friend. He shakes the tree and I collect the apples."¹³ That anecdote was reported by Panofsky, one of Cook's chief recruits, who went on to occupy the first chair in the discipline at the Institute for Advanced Study. Similarly, by gathering in Rudolf Wittkover, a commanding authority on Renaissance architecture and humanism, Columbia lifted the ambition and performance of its already established program. Nor was the exodus limited to Jewish refugees. Yale's program did not really exist prior to the arrival of Henri Focillon, a polymath with a strong theoretical inclination toward autonomous formal developments in art, who migrated in 1940 from occupied France.

Because the discipline's traditional core in the study of classical antiquity and the Italian Renaissance had remained under recognized German dominance, the one field of conspicuous American investment and prestige to that date had been in early Christian and medieval art. This influx of talent from the German-speaking sphere was bound to undo the medieval idyll of art history in the United States. It further set the stage for a marked expansion of the field in the aftermath of World War II. Within the elite universities, the increasing ease and frequency of overseas travel had begun to stimulate a need for training in the history and meaning of significant European monuments. As more meritocratic admissions made this preoccupation less socially exclusive, art history began to assume its habitual position as a favored elective, and the charismatic survey teacher became a campus staple. For the proportionally smaller

12 Ibid., 2.

13 See Panofsky, "The History of Art," 95.

number of majors who chose to continue in the field, relatively plentiful opportunities existed in two sectors (double that generally offered in the other humanistic disciplines): there was the continuing higher-education expansion, which was feeding on itself and spreading the discipline into state schools and smaller colleges; at the same time, there was an equally growing museum sector in need of curators and administrators.

But this climate of postwar optimism and opportunity did not at first alter the conservative tendencies of the American discipline. The first wave of European professors, as they stepped in to meet the demand for trained personnel, found their new American charges lacking the level of erudition they would have assumed in their European counterparts (and cultural misunderstandings doubtless led these professors to exaggerate both the norms they had known and the deficiencies they were discovering). Thus they tended to prune away many of the more complex and speculative elements of art history in favor of conceptually simple and often mechanical tasks: decoding iconography, tracing fragments of dispersed ensembles, identifying hands, dating. Ascertaining points of fact that European scholars – and other humanists in America – would regard as just the starting point for interpretation became sufficient justification for a successful research career. Irving Lavin, until recently the long-serving professor of art history at the Institute for Advanced Study, has been forthright about the pedagogy offered by “those miraculously translated Elijahs bringing the good word from the Old World to the New,” going so far as to celebrate as a lost golden age the times when “Panofsky would hand over to every member of his seminars a specific new idea or discovery of his own,

just waiting for the enterprising graduate student to work up into an article.”¹⁴

Not to underestimate the difficulty of detective work frequently entailed in these endeavors, but they had in common a fulfillment in some definite conclusion. This pedagogically reduced version of European art history largely set the limits for the entire discipline in its postwar American translation. An inherited social conservatism thereby joined itself to a structurally generated intellectual conservatism, both reinforced by material rewards that could go well beyond comfortable salaries and tenure.

Here, the unanalyzed power of the physical art object worked once again to set the discipline apart from its text-based counterparts in the humanities. Because of the inherent charisma of European masterpieces, generous patrons were willing to provide an exceptional level of financial support for fellowships and study centers abroad. As the center of the field shifted, thanks to the émigré influx, toward the Italian Renaissance and Baroque, Rome and Florence became regular destinations for summers and whole years of leave. What was more, the resulting exclusivity benefited a significant number of art historians who could present themselves to the art market as the sole experts in the attribution of works by a particular artist – fees for this kind of expertise could mount into six figures.

Even if many art historians steered clear of overt dealings in the market, the mindset that naturally followed from this activity, the identification with the interests of wealthy collectors and their manner of living, filtered widely through the field and became internalized as a re-

14 Irving Lavin, “The Crisis of ‘Art History,’” in Mieke Bal et al., “Art History and Its Theories,” *Art Bulletin* 78 (1) (March 1996): 14.

quirement for professional acceptance. For those who were benefiting so abundantly from this system, the stigma of the soft option, a certain disdain from colleagues outside art history, was a price worth paying. Their first line of defense became the mystification of an intuitive 'eye' that allowed the expert to perform feats of connoisseurship that no merely bookish historical scholar could accomplish. Even the close connections to Europe and to foreign scholars, a potential boon in an American academic scene prone to a certain parochialism, fostered the imitation of a high-handed, authoritarian treatment of students out of keeping with the more collegial style of graduate training that characterized the contemporaneous development of other disciplines.

The foregoing picture, despite its largely unflattering character, represents an attempt to describe a system according to what might be called its default functioning. While much sincere and valuable work was accomplished in the 1950s and 1960s, the system nonetheless worked against this collective acumen coming together in such a way that it could take the study of visual art to the next intellectual level. This has in fact happened over the last three decades – and Anglophone art history has in the process come to set the pace for the world. But the system had to change before what was still an immature body of thought and procedures, too long diverted to noncognitive ends, could truly grow up.

The persistence of the old system depended on conditions that could be maintained for only so long. Chief among these was keeping the research agenda of art history close to the centers – both geographical and chronological – that the first postwar generation

commanded. Of the many forces that undid that restricted compass was the progressive shift of interest among new entrants to art history toward the modern period, meaning roughly Western art since the mid-nineteenth century. During the same years that John D. Rockefeller, Jr., was financing the medievalists' dream at the Cloisters, his forward-looking wife, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, planted the seed of this development. In 1929, with the support of two female friends, she established the Museum of Modern Art in New York. They chose a young art history instructor from Wellesley College, Alfred Barr, as the museum's founding director. And Barr used his growing collection and landmark special exhibitions to stamp a historical schema on the art of the very recent past where none had existed before.

The early program of the museum included gestures toward native artists and vernacular forms consistent with a philanthropic mission in Depression-era America. But the heart of its activities, like those of the Gilded Age collectors and academic medievalists, lay in the imported culture of Europe. The distinction of Barr's enterprise resided in the fact that the Europeans themselves were not producing a competing body of scholarship or museology. Writing in the early 1950s, Panofsky acknowledged that a systematic history of modern European art had required the intervention of Americans. On their home ground, he opined, the immediate impact of the European avant-gardes "forced the *littérateurs* into either defense or attack, and the more intelligent art historians into silence. In the United States such men as Alfred Barr . . . could look upon the contemporary scene with the same mixture of enthusiasm and detachment, and write about it with the same respect

for historical method and concern for meticulous documentation, as are required of a study of fourteenth-century ivories or fifteenth-century prints.”¹⁵

Those art historians then devoting themselves to such objects did not, in the main, share Panofsky’s sympathy for this development. “Modern art,” Morey declared, “is on the whole an art of disillusionment, struggling to free itself from the ruins of abandoned shibboleths Hence its emphasis on the material aspects of our civilization, and especially on those more sinister ones of economic stress and social injustice, which stir the modern artist, writer, musician, to conscious or unconscious satire.”¹⁶ These words, written during the mid-1940s, appeared in a leading scholarly journal, at a moment when Barr’s prestige had reached something of a peak. Indifference or active resistance on the part of the established academy was such that training in the history of modern art remained distinctly marginal compared to the established subject areas from classical antiquity to around 1700; even the eighteenth century lay near the edge of the discipline’s zone of chronological comfort.

This self-imposed restriction had effects on the study of all periods. The discipline’s principal intellectual tools had evolved from a preoccupation with stable symbolic systems as yet untouched by the secular tumult and corrosion of modernity. There was next to no intellectual equipment available for gauging the impact of conflict, disruption, or even of change itself, the *raison d’être* of any historian. In the same essay cited above, Morey gave passionate voice to this assumption of stability, implausibly

declaring, “The forms in which the concepts of Christianity were cast showed remarkably little variation throughout the Middle Ages and throughout the mediaeval world.”¹⁷

In contrast, the increasingly independent, disenchanting, and rapidly changing art of modernity impelled its interpreters to begin comparing an arrangement of pigments in an oily emulsion with rapidly evolving phenomena like the Industrial Revolution or mass urbanization. The two phenomenal orders – aesthetic and historical – could at first be made only tenuously commensurable with one another because few, if any, ready mental maps existed that were adequate to both.

In the face of such a challenge, the first plausible explanatory strategy, adopted from the aesthetics of the Bloomsbury group in England and promoted by Barr, was to steer art history in a direction parallel to that of New Criticism in literary studies, giving pride of place to an artwork’s internal relationships and transformations of acknowledged precedents and prototypes (thereby bracketing historical determination and the consequent need for wide research). The new power of American abstract painting in the postwar period seemed to confirm criteria of value that required no justification outside the formal character of any individual work, and this intentional approach came to have its heyday during the early 1960s under the aegis of New York critic Clement Greenberg and his followers in the academy, chief among them Michael Fried of Harvard and later Johns Hopkins.¹⁸

17 Ibid.

18 Fried’s principal work in this vein has recently been collected in Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

15 Panofsky, “The History of Art,” 91.

16 Morey, “Mediaeval Art,” 5.

The historiography of art has habitually shadowed the expanding self-consciousness of the advanced art practice contemporaneous to it (which has had far more to contribute than the well-meaning efforts of the aestheticians in departments of philosophy).¹⁹ As American artists moved away from formal abstraction toward the context-dependent strategies of Minimalism and Conceptual Art, this narrow set of formal preoccupations largely ceded the field – or, better, found itself incorporated into a more comprehensive brief. The emerging direction in studies of the modern period bore the imprint of those developments in advanced art around 1970 that brought to the fore the determining conditions of art making itself. This new tendency in scholarship likewise sought to align an object's formal properties with the production of social meaning, turning even the defensive hostility toward theory and speculation on the part of most American art historians into a means to this end.

The principal compensation for the paucity of explicit theorizing in art history had been an obsession with empirical discovery – of unknown drawings, variants, contracts, recorded iconographic programs, original locations of objects – that had inculcated in generations of art historians a strong set of skills in archival research. And a further latent strength lay in the equally under-theorized activity of connoisseurship, that is, the concentrated attention to objects in search of telltale clues to condition, authorship, and quality. What

came to be called, in misleadingly reductive shorthand, 'the social history of art' succeeded to a significant extent by tapping this unique and underexploited combination of pursuits. The two halves of established art history – the mania for documentation and the cult of fine discrimination – had both represented a silencing of the demand for interpretation. But when these categories of analysis were put back together, they were to spark a collective release of pent-up energy and a recovery of lost time.

Each phase in the development of American art history appears to require a privileged geographical locus. For the first phase, it probably hovered somewhere near the relic-rich cathedral town of Santiago de Compostela, the western hub of the routes followed by medieval pilgrims. For the postwar generation, it was Rome and its Italian tributaries. For the social history of art, it was surely Paris.

Walter Benjamin, in his studies of Baudelaire, had memorably called Paris "the capital of the nineteenth century," and a new wave of art historians took this aphoristic dictum to heart. In this same moment began the belated process of publishing and translating Benjamin's own immense, unfinished project on the Parisian arcades, for its time a profoundly idiosyncratic attempt to correlate the most sophisticated art with the states of mind induced by an incipient consumer capitalism. But Benjamin, fortunately for the ultimate reception of his work, had an American counterpart of commensurable foresight and scholarly energy in Meyer Schapiro, the Columbia art historian with whom he shared a brief and poignant meeting in 1939. (Schapiro had sought out Benjamin with the aim of persuading the exiled German scholar

19 As Kubler observes (*The Shape of Time*, 67), "The work of many artists often comes closer to philosophical speculation than most aesthetic writings, which retrace the same ground over and over, sometimes systematically and sometimes historically, but rarely with originality."

to seek safety among his old Frankfurt School colleagues in New York; Benjamin declined and met his death while fleeing toward Spain in the following year.)

Two years before their meeting, Schapiro had broached the connection between habits of consumption, particularly the newly intensified marketing of fashion and organized leisure, with concurrent developments in the artistic avant-garde. Taking Barr to task by name (and by implication his museum), he disputed the assumption that the history of modern art could adequately be “presented as an internal, immanent process among the artists.”²⁰ Addressing the historical moment commonly taken as the founding moment of modernism in painting, he observed:

It is remarkable how many pictures we have in early Impressionism of informal and spontaneous sociability, of breakfasts, picnics, promenades, boating trips, holidays and vacation travel. These urban idylls not only present the objective forms of bourgeois recreation in the 1860's and 1870's; they also reflect in the very choice of subjects and in the new aesthetic devices the conception of art as solely a field of individual enjoyment, without reference to ideas and motives, and they presuppose the cultivation of these pleasures as the highest field of freedom for an enlightened bourgeois detached from the official beliefs of his class. In enjoying realistic pictures of his surroundings as a spectacle of traffic and changing atmospheres, the cultivated rentier was experiencing in its phenomenal aspect that mobility of the

environment, the market and of industry to which he owed his income and his freedom. And in the new Impressionist techniques which broke things up into finely discriminated points of color, as well as in the “accidental” momentary vision, he found, in a degree hitherto unknown in art, conditions of sensibility closely related to those of the urban promenade and the refined consumer of luxury goods.²¹

It would be difficult to overestimate the degree to which this single passage anticipated the later development of the discipline. It is a mark of the time in which it was written (1937) that Schapiro was by vocation a young scholar of medieval art. And his ability to envision this schematic but prescient program for the interpretation of early modernism coincided with his single-handed effort within that subfield to counter the certainties of Porter and Morey with an alternative intellectual model.

The Marxist pedigree evident in much of Schapiro's vocabulary points to his preoccupation with conflict and change in the arts of Romanesque France and Spain, particularly as manifested in the dramatic expansions of trade and town life as countermovements to ecclesiastical hegemony around the turn of the twelfth century. The dominant approaches in the American art history of his time tended toward the amassing and cataloguing of ever more examples in a given category of object with the aim of establishing something like a statistical norm for the type – one in keeping with the stable complex of beliefs assumed to underwrite such a norm. Projects of this kind were for all intents and purposes boundless, endlessly postponing the interpretative challenge posed by any single work.

20 Meyer Schapiro, “The Nature of Abstract Art,” *Marxist Quarterly* 1 (January – March 1937), reprinted in Meyer Schapiro, *Modern Art: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Selected Papers* (New York: George Braziller, 1978), 188.

21 *Ibid.*, 192 – 193.

Schapiro adopted a diametrically opposed method, advancing the hypothesis that the most productive cases for art-historical inquiry will involve objects that constitute disruptive exceptions against the matrix of related works that surround them. And here his command of the modernist critic's alertness to innovation and internal artistic form came to serve that enterprise: instead of proceeding from the preponderance of examples that are most alike and defining everything else as peripheral or exceptional, he began by analyzing what happens when the reassuring regularities of form break down, so as to posit the operations of a larger signifying system from virtually a single instance.²²

In this wager, everything rested on what the most searching internal analysis of that chosen object could yield: bringing to light the fissures, discrepancies, and contradictions on which the exceptional artist had to impose some resolution, all without repressing the fractious heterogeneity of the concepts and techniques with which he was enjoined to work. A viewing intelligence schooled in the intricacies of Picasso and Braque's Cubism could come to the task with the requisite acumen. Schapiro's articles of the late 1930s advanced the art history of the Middle Ages by more than a generation – it remains an

22 Meyer Schapiro, "From Mozarabic to Romanesque in Silos," *Art Bulletin* 21 (4) (December 1939): 312–374, reprinted in Meyer Schapiro, *Romanesque Art: Selected Papers* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 28–101; Meyer Schapiro, "The Sculptures of Souillac," in *Medieval Studies in Memory of A. Kingsley Porter*, ed. W. R. W. Kohler (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939), 2:359–387, reprinted in Schapiro, *Romanesque Art*, 102–130; see also Thomas Crow, *The Intelligence of Art* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 1–23.

open question whether the discipline has yet caught up with his example.²³

When he turned to the genesis of modernism, Schapiro reversed this maneuver, bringing to bear the medievalist's preoccupation with decoding obscure symbolic subject matter – what art historians designate as iconography in a technical sense. To the degree that the realists and impressionists of mid-nineteenth-century Paris set aside overt literary and mythological content, modernism had been assumed by both its admirers and detractors to lack significant subject matter: its motifs were deemed to be little more than pretexts for experiments in optical vividness or emancipated color, line, shape, and physical gesture. Schapiro's contrary contention was that the artistic avant-garde was advancing another systematic account of subjectivity to replace the outmoded 'official beliefs' of established religion and state power. He posited that the advanced artist, after 1860 or so, succumbed to the general division of labor as a full-time leisure specialist, an aesthetic technician picturing and prodding the sensual expectations of other, part-time consumers. In the hands of the avant-garde, Schapiro argued, the aesthetic itself became identified with habits of enjoyment and release produced quite concretely within the emerging apparatus of commercial entertainment and tourism – even, and perhaps most of all, when art appeared entirely withdrawn into its own sphere, its own sensibility, its own medium.

23 Remarkably, a tired and incoherent rehearsal of all the old mainstream resistances to Schapiro's ideas has recently been published in the journal of the discipline's principal professional organization: John Williams, "Meyer Schapiro in Silos: Pursuing an Iconography of Style," *Art Bulletin* 85 (3) (September 2003): 442–468.

But some three decades had to pass after Schapiro's first interventions before the kinds of resistance adumbrated above could be overcome. Crucial in this success was the building of a systematic iconography for Parisian modernism undertaken by Linda Nochlin, then at Vassar, and by Robert Herbert with several of his students at Yale.²⁴ And, by the late 1960s, new tools of interpretation from beyond art history's own store of techniques and practices came to hand, a kit that proved particularly useful in rendering analyzable structures out of the scale and fluidity of modern historical experience.

That moment represented a cusp when French structuralism and semiotics had achieved sufficient coherence to be apprehended by a curious student, but still remained a minority interest, even in film and literary studies, let alone in art history. A work like Roland Barthes's *S/Z*, his landmark anatomization of Balzac's novella "Sarrasine,"

came close to an ultimate pulling apart of the disparate strands that an artist maneuvers into an effect of unity.²⁵ Adding to the appeal of such an enterprise was a new style of social history based in Britain, within which this same body of French theory took its place alongside equivalent commitments to neo-Marxist social theory and diligence in the archives. At the same time, the incipient British school of cultural studies was turning a similar set of tools toward contemporary society, making possible a new acuity in the dissection of vernacular culture, with an emphasis on the ways that disaffected subcultures were repositioning and creatively redefining mass-produced products.²⁶

The first of these strands had a head start in America, largely through the prescient efforts of Annette Michelson, a scholar of avant-garde cinema who extended her reach to the contemporary visual arts in a way that has made her one of its most formidable intellects.²⁷

24 Nochlin's contribution at first centered on the rural and working-class imagery that distinguished the realism of Gustave Courbet in the late 1840s and 1850s and that set the stage for Manet's more urban set of motifs. Two particularly important articles took up and extended the insights of Meyer Schapiro, "Courbet and Popular Imagery: An Essay on Realism and Naïveté," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 4 (3–4) (April–June 1941): 164–191, reprinted in Schapiro, *Modern Art*, 47–86. These were Linda Nochlin, "Innovation and Tradition in Courbet's Burial at Ornans," in *Marsyas Studies in the History of Art*, suppl. 2, "Essays in Honor of Walter Friedlaender" (New York: Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1964), 119–126, and Linda Nochlin, "Gustave Courbet's Meeting: A Portrait of the Artist as a Wandering Jew," *Art Bulletin* 49 (3) (September 1967): 209–222. Herbert's research is represented in Robert Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988); see also Paul Hayes Tucker, *Monet at Argenteuil* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982).

25 Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970). The lesson of Barthes's project for established literary-critical assumptions follows Kubler's formula, written a decade before (*The Shape of Time*, 28), for unpacking the apparently unified work of art: "... the cross-section of the instant taken across the full face of the moment in a given place, resembles a mosaic of pieces in different developmental states, and of different ages, rather than a radial design conferring its meaning on all the pieces."

26 The founding text was Phil Cohen, "Subcultural Conflict and Working-Class Community," Birmingham University Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Working Papers in Cultural Studies 2, Spring 1972, 5–51, reprinted in Phil Cohen, *Rethinking the Youth Question: Education, Labour and Cultural Studies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998).

27 See as an example Annette Michelson, "Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression," in *Robert Morris* (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969).

Settled at New York University after an extended sojourn in Paris, she would join with Rosalind Krauss (the leading scholar of modernist sculpture, who was then guiding a small, insurgent program at the CUNY Graduate Center) in building on this new foundation and encouraging an impressively sophisticated circle of younger art historians and critics that had gathered around their jointly edited journal *October*. Accelerating the incorporation of all three currents into a unified project was the arrival of T. J. Clark, a young British art historian who spent an initial period at UCLA during the mid-1970s, moving later to Harvard before settling at UC Berkeley. In his work on impressionism, Clark returned to the territory for which Schapiro had provided a rough map in 1937. Alongside much archival research in the spirit of Benjamin's notebook citations for the Arcades project, Clark brought to bear a new analytical penetration of the internal workings of individual pictures, one that made concrete and detailed Schapiro's acute but generalized characterizations of Parisian modern-life painting.

A striking example of this occurs in his discussions of those motifs that most easily lent themselves to comfortably brain-soothing harmonies: scenes of strollers and yachtsmen on the banks of the Seine's great curves north and west of the city. "[H]ere was a subject," Clark states, "which lent itself normally to simple rhythms and sharp effects: sails bending in unison, rigging arranged in casual geometries, reflections laid out as counterpoint to the world above."²⁸ While canvases by Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, or Alfred Sisley

most obviously fall under this characterization, Clark gives pride of place to a painting like *Canotiers à Argenteuil* by Édouard Manet, the older artist who had led the way for the larger impressionist group. In the summer of 1874, when Manet fashioned this work, his friend Monet was living in the suburban town of its title, then a transitional settlement of weekend villas, boat basins, and intruding factories in search of available land and river access. And the avant-garde painters who gravitated to such locations formed a marginalized subculture in themselves, one compelled to improvise an identity in the as yet ill-defined spaces of metropolitan pleasure and consumption.

The granular degree of detail in Clark's extended account of the painting does not permit the succinctly summarizing quotations supplied by Schapiro. The following passage, however, which comes at the end of several pages of analysis, has the virtue of moving rapidly from a set of totalizing propositions to their anchor in the technical fabric of the painting via minutely particularized description devoted to a seemingly insignificant segment of its surface – one that the recreational art lover would in all likelihood overlook:

Signs, things, shapes, and modes of handling do not fit together here. Paint does not make continuities or engineer transitions for the eye; it enforces distinctions and disparities, changing completely across an edge, insisting on the stiffness of a pose or the bluntness of blue against yellow. This is the picture's overall language – this awkwardness of intersection, this dissonance of colour . . . For example, the hank of rope which hangs over the orange side of the boat towards the right. No doubt we decipher the flecked rope and the fluffy tassel without too much dif-

²⁸ T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, rev. ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 167.

ficuity, and proceed to examine the more elusive trail of paint which starts down from the gunwale, bends, and seems to peter out into the orange – peter out for no good reason. And in due course the eye makes sense of the situation: we begin to see the wandering line as a shadow, and realize eventually that the orange surface is not – as it first assumed to be – simply flat. It is curved, it is concave; and the curve explains the peculiar shadow and is explained by it – or, rather, is half explained and half explaining: the broken triangle of brushstrokes is not mended quite so easily, and never entirely proves the illusion it plays with. It stays painted, it stays on the edge of a likeness.²⁹

Impressionism is conventionally celebrated for its objectivity in rendering the play of light and color in the world as one sees it, but Clark identifies in the studied ambiguities and discrepancies of Manet's portrayal of these two awkward urban pleasure seekers a higher order of objectivity about the troubled and uncertain transition of the traditional city to the modern one, an historical watershed experienced by old and new city dwellers as a continual succession of unresolved edges and illegibilities.

This marriage of scholarly object and approach proved particularly fruitful for the discipline's belated engagement with questions of sexuality in general and the ethical imperatives of the women's movement in particular. The redoubtable Nochlin, before and after moving to the graduate Institute of Fine Arts at NYU, had for some years been extending the social-historical model in the service of an emergent feminism.³⁰ Younger scholars like Hol-

lis Clayson and Carol Armstrong – now at Northwestern and Princeton respectively – were later able to seize upon the impressionist rhetorics of ambiguity and disguise as preeminently figuring relations between the sexes, where the centrality of these very qualities had defeated the old (male) art historian's compulsion toward iconographic certainty.³¹ This level of explanatory ambition presented demands that led art history, at least for a time, to an engagement with the material intricacies of its physical objects of study that surpassed anything that the postwar establishment had ever contemplated.

Nor did this achievement necessarily depend upon the particular set of tools that Clark and others selected for the job – nor indeed on the particular opportunity later nineteenth-century Paris offered as a subject. The early 1980s, during which Clark's *The Painting of Modern Life* appeared, proved particularly rich in landmark books by art historians. The book that launched the wave was Michael Baxandall's *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, which contains next to no acknowledgment that any new climate of theoretic-

Power and Other Essays (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), and Linda Nochlin, *Representing Women* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

³¹ Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991; reprinted Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2003); Hollis Clayson, *Paris in Despair: Art and Everyday Life Under Siege, 1870 – 1871* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Carol Armstrong, *Odd Man Out: Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991; reprinted Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2003); Carol Armstrong, *Manet Manette* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

³⁰ For representative collections of her work in this vein, see Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and*

cal speculation in the humanities even existed.³² Baxandall instead looked toward codified forms of knowledge, all strictly contemporaneous with the objects of his study, in fields as far from the practice of sculpture as the guild-lore of the Meistersingers or the “chiromancy” of the alchemist Paracelsus (which has the salutary effect of demonstrating that interpretative theories are just tools, the sophistication of which does not depend upon their date or upon the particular vocabulary in which they are expressed). His approach yielded a level of analysis applied to the inner workings of form that set a standard for all those who came after, in any period or medium, a standard all the more impressive because he was confronting exceptionally complex ensembles of sculpture, painting, and cabinetwork typically produced by a number of hands.

Baxandall becomes a part of this specifically American story when he began during the 1980s to combine his old position at the Warburg Institute in London with teaching alongside Clark in UC Berkeley’s ascendant graduate program. As such, his account of pre-Reformation piety, with its acute attention to doubt, anxiety, and tension between the sinful appetites excited by wealth and the concomitant capacity of the new affluence to fund extravagant expressions of faith, brought up-to-date Schapiro’s original insight that the greatest religious art arises from just such circumstances.

Attention to these strong forces of renewal within the discipline can serve to disqualify a common assumption that helpful outsiders from other disciplines,

observing the weakness of postwar art history, have stepped in to give the field its new energy and place at the broad humanities table. Any palpable benefits have largely accrued to the career profiles of these outsiders, not to positive gains for art history as a discipline. Among historians, lack of experience – positive or negative – with the protocols of the connoisseur has made for flat and unrevealing descriptions of works of art, which too often amount to the visual equivalent of reading for the plot. Literary critics, for their part, have tended to apply their resources of close reading and armatures of theory without the clarifying resistance generated by sustained work in the archives, which is to say, without equal concern for how works of art come to be made as for the ways in which these works can be consumed.

But it is difficult to deny that the energy of that moment has diminished in the intervening couple of decades. From its beginnings as a minority – and immediately embattled – position, the so-called social history of art has grown in the meantime to constitute something of a new default function for the field: virtually every contribution to the *Art Bulletin* (seen as the scholarly journal of record) represents a variation on this approach, even when these components are not explicitly acknowledged. The expected level of competence is far higher than was the norm a generation ago, as is productivity, whether measured by individual output or by the percentage of actively publishing scholars within the overall population of the field. And an increasingly complete picture of art practices across a wide geographical and chronological territory is consequently taking shape – including territories outside of Europe and North America. Nonetheless, with a certain domesti-

32 Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980).

cated version of ideology-critique now the norm, the outcome of many studies has become a fairly predictable affair. In one obvious sense, however, the center has ceased to hold. From the preeminent position that it occupied a generation ago, the study of later nineteenth-century French painting has markedly receded in prominence, ceasing to promise any smooth path of professional success.

Baxandall, in his book on German limewood sculpture, documented the ways in which the fragile synthesis of nearly incompatible components – held together in the art of a Veit Stoss or Tilman Riemenschneider but already on the verge of flying apart under the least added stress – was utterly dispersed by the iconoclastic forces of the Reformation. In the various specialized genres to which sculptors then turned in a climate of diminished expectations, one can identify the distinct elements obscured in their previous intertwining. A similar unraveling has occurred within art history, which has suffered to a certain degree from this conspicuous period of success. While impressive advances have continued in social-historical documentation, elaboration of theory, expansion into vernacular culture, and engagement with modernism, each of these pursuits has become increasingly self-sufficient and consequently less able to inform the others.

Shorn of reflection on the neo-Marxian theories that originally framed the social-historical project, the new mainstream has not discovered any comparable source of conceptual renewal. Later, competing claims to the semiotic and poststructuralist element of ‘theory’ have been lodged on behalf of distinctly different interests. To put it unkindly, these lie in making a metaconversation about the possibility or impossibility of a history of art into a self-sufficient

enterprise, one easily leveraged into an aura of interdisciplinary glamour and a comparatively effortless proliferation of talks, papers, and books. To this end, it has been a convenient conclusion drawn from ‘theory’ to say that any intelligible pattern drawn out of historical data represents an inherently spurious metanarrative (even though the original efficacy of the turn to theory had precisely been to identify analyzable structures in the historical record). The component of art history that has required hard graft in the archives then can be set aside – and disparaged in the bargain as a lesser, if not misguided, pursuit.³³ Indeed, “the Archive,” in the wake of Michel Foucault, has been isolated as a disciplinary social construction toward which the theorist can freely condescend.

This metahistorical pursuit has had little time for the recalcitrant physical immediacy and uniqueness of an individual object of art. This distrust of close-range sensory evidence has passed into the broad, ill-defined tendency called ‘visual culture.’ From Schapiro to Herbert, Clark, and Baxandall, the conduct of the most sophisticated art historians has entailed a deep curiosity about the varieties of vernacular expression that inevitably enter into the synthetic imagination of the artist. While never denying the independent fascination of that material, all nonetheless retained the perspective that Baxandall framed in intentionally provocative terms: “Only very good works of art, the performances of exceptionally organized men, are complex and co-ordinated enough to register in their forms the kinds of

33 For a symptomatic expression of this mode of thought, see Norman Bryson, “Art in Context,” in *The Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis*, ed. Mieke Bal and Inge Boer (New York: Continuum, 1994), 66–78.

cultural circumstance sought here; second-rate art will be of little use to us.”³⁴ His advised use of the masculine gender in this passage (there were no women known in the relevant trades of the period) matters less than his insistence on the cognitive value of aesthetic distinction, which now runs against a prevailing tide in which no special case can be made for one category of artifact against another.³⁵

The question remains as to what field of study actually remains once one sacrifices its former core, its point of departure and return, in self-conscious and highly wrought objects of art. The proliferation of potential examples extends to near-infinity, and necessarily results in a reduction of material specificity to the single plane of the image, which is phenomenal rather than actual. And, given that much of the art historian’s brief has entailed accounting for processes of conception and manufacture that are not strictly sensible in the final product, emphasis on ‘visual’ commonalities imposes a drastic narrowing of the aspect through which interpreters can grasp this newly vast field of inquiry.

A further tendency toward disaggregation lies in an unabated push toward the modern. A rule of thumb applied to new entrants is that roughly half of them will concentrate in ‘modern art’; what is more, the dividing line between ‘the modern’ and what came before it keeps creeping forward (which has left impressionism and postimpressionism in

a growing scholarly limbo, despite their huge popularity with undergraduates and the general public). A good guess would place the current median boundary (half of the graduate students before it, half after) somewhere in the early twentieth century, say 1912 or so. And the change may be more exaggerated than that figure might suggest, since the fastest growing area is better named ‘contemporary,’ meaning art produced from around 1960 forward.

The drive toward the modern, then, is in danger of shooting past the point where it can find common ground with the legitimate preoccupations of art historians working in earlier periods. As often as not, the media favored by younger scholars – film, video, reproduced texts and photographs, assemblage installations – are impermanent, impatient with the layered density of the unique physical objects around which the discipline was built. The skills required to decipher the messages of those time travelers in their vast and largely unexplored numbers and then to speak on their behalf will reside, it seems, in a shrinking number of scholars.

That bifurcation of the available skills within the discipline may nonetheless carry within itself the potential for a new synthesis at a higher level, much as the paired fetishizing of documentation and connoisseurship did among the immediately postwar generation. One can read the recent preoccupation with ephemeral and time-based works of art as saying something about the larger brief of art history: the sample of objects from which art history fashioned itself constitutes the merest fraction of the universe that an ideal form of the discipline would address, that is, all the artifacts of densely symbolic expression that have ever been made. Forever out of view are all those destroyed

34 Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors*, 10.

35 See, as a representative example, the comments of Keith Moxey, “Motivating History,” *Art Bulletin* 77 (3) (September 1995): 392–401, reprinted in Keith Moxey, *The Practice of Persuasion: Paradox and Power in Art History* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 65–79.

by war, vandalism, demolition, renovation, neglect, and natural decay; as well as the colossal if uncountable number that have been lost to time because they were never intended to be preserved in the first place (the sculptures of Michelangelo modeled in snow offer just the most spectacular instance of these submerged continents).

Other kinds of documents allow such works to be indirectly retrieved and hypothetically reconstructed, so that the actual survivors from the past can assume their places within a historically comprehensive matrix of technical and expressive possibility. From everything one can tell by such investigations, the divisions observed in our own time between high art and vernacular culture are far more difficult to maintain, such that a properly comprehensive art history obviates to a significant extent the contemporary rationale for a visual-culture alternative to the inherited field. In this regard, it has been the push of younger researchers – out ahead of the preceding generation’s preoccupation with avant-garde painting and sculpture – into the unconventional art practices of the twentieth century that has shown the way.

To the degree that one learns to ‘see’ ephemeral events, happenings, performances, film, and video under the rubric of Art (which is where their makers have placed them), then a corresponding receptivity to the historical totality of art production should follow. Some confirmation for this proposition exists in the renewed currency of one other art-historical pioneer, the visionary German scholar Aby Warburg, whose deep contributions from the 1890s to the 1920s had remained, until recently, unassimilable within the normative discipline. In a compelling series of articles, Warburg

had looked to the gesticulating mummers of the Florentine street processions as lying behind some of the most august (to the eyes of posterity) rediscoveries of classical prototypes in art.³⁶ Even when elevated by a Botticelli to the most refined movement and costume of court pageantry, the frozen gesture carried a deeper, unbroken inheritance from the ancient world, one of barely sublimated sexuality, violence, and magical thought, which lay beyond any merely bookish catalogue of mythological stories and aesthetic canons. For him, the figure in motion, derived from the direct experience of performers in the guise of ancient deities, constituted the true subject of advanced Florentine mimesis in the 1480s (and his having discerned living parallels to this history in the festivals and artifacts of the Hopi, whom he sought out during an American sojourn in 1896, provides the strongest early example of the bridge building required to render traditional Western fields of study commensurable with those devoted to the diverse cultures of the wider world).

Warburg’s legacy can, without danger of anachronism, project the artistic recognitions of the present into art history’s old heartland of the Italian Renaissance – and by extension into all older bodies of material. Beside the compellingly affective character of surviving art objects, he had been able to discern the equivalent value of their heuristic properties, which distribute networks of meaning over a much wider but more elusive field. These enduring works of painting or sculpture still provide an ir-

36 See Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999), 161 – 167.

replaceable opportunity for instruction in historical interpretation, one all the more needed when even very recent art works have left behind only a litter of residual artifacts, documentary records, and fallible memories. But each was once a physical encounter of palpable order and coherence, however fleeting the moment of its particular Kublerian “commotion” may have been. To recreate that moment in the absence of the work itself requires the trained imagination that comes from the encounter with those objects that render their own long-ago commotions in *fixed* formations.³⁷

37 I am grateful for the assistance of Alison Locke and Doris Chon in the preparation of this essay.

Gerald Early

The quest for a black humanism

In the “Autobiographical Notes” that preface *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), one of the most impressive collections of essays ever compiled by an American writer and still one of the most important meditations on race of the twentieth century, James Baldwin (1924 – 1987) memorably described his conflicted sense of himself as an American writer of African descent:

I know, in my case, that the most crucial time in my own development came when I was forced to recognize that I was a kind of bastard of the West; when I followed the line of my past I did not find myself in Europe but in Africa. And this meant that in some subtle way, in a really profound

way, I brought to Shakespeare, Bach, Rembrandt, to the stones of Paris, to the cathedral at Chartres, and to the Empire State Building a special attitude. These were not really my creations, they did not contain my history; I might search in them in vain forever for any reflection of myself. I was an interloper; this was not my heritage. At the same time I had no other heritage which I could possibly hope to use – I had certainly been unfitted for the jungle or the tribe. I would have to appropriate these white centuries, I would have to make them mine – I would have to accept my special attitude, my special place in this scheme – otherwise I would have no place in *any* scheme.¹

What does a familiarity with the cultural monuments of the West, from the plays of Shakespeare to the Empire State Building, have to offer an American of African descent? What, if anything, does an American of African descent have to offer a cultural tradition that for centuries was exclusively defined by white men of European descent? Should Americans of African descent – and especially educators – situate themselves as Negro or black, and establish programs in Negro studies and black stud-

Gerald Early, a Fellow of the American Academy since 1997, is Merle Kling Professor of Modern Letters at Washington University in St. Louis. He is the author of five books, including “Tuxedo Junction” (1989), “One Nation Under a Groove: Motown and American Culture” (1995), and “This Is Where I Came In: Black America in the 1960s” (2003). He is also the editor of “The Culture of Bruising: Essays on Prizefighting, Literature and Modern American Culture,” which won the 1994 National Book Critics Circle Award for criticism.

© 2006 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

¹ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), 4.

ies? Or are such programs a form of intellectual apartheid?

Leading African American intellectuals have long offered conflicting answers to such questions. In the early 1960s, on the eve of the explosion in black studies at elite white universities across America, the historian John Hope Franklin warned that such programs would merely reproduce a version of the segregation that civil rights activists in the South were then struggling to uproot. Three generations earlier, Booker T. Washington, who hoped to give poor blacks the skills to become upwardly mobile, had scorned the liberal arts as a waste of time, while W. E. B. Du Bois revered them as a precious tool for cultivating an African American elite who would interact with their white peers as equals and bring the unique perspective of the Negro to bear on renewing the high culture of the West.

The ongoing debate between these contrasting perspectives has produced a richly suggestive, and sometimes fiercely ambivalent, understanding of what a black humanism might look like and what contribution, if any, a distinctively black perspective might bring to the humanistic tradition – as witness James Baldwin.

As a self-avowed “bastard of the West,” James Baldwin described himself simultaneously as an outsider and an insider, a son but an illegitimate son – and he did this explicitly in relation to humanistic endeavors, to the understanding and appreciation of architecture, fine art, music, and literature. In part, the passage from *Notes of a Native Son* is an expression of Baldwin’s personal preoccupation as a writer. But in greater measure, Baldwin cogently summed up the cultural dilemma of black Americans.

For the most part, the development of an African American humanistic tradition has followed a trajectory that Baldwin would recognize: by trying to claim the “white centuries” of the West, it has sought not only to create a scheme in which African Americans fit, but a scheme through which blacks could define Western reality in their own terms, and with sufficient power to forge a useable past out of specifically Western traditions. The sense of estrangement that Baldwin felt, being Ishmael as a permanent cultural condition, was meant to be both exploited and acknowledged. For what was the African American’s great disadvantage in his history was also his great advantage: the fact that he was *in* the West but not precisely *of* it, a “special place” indeed.²

2 In some respects, Baldwin’s autobiographical statement here is a response to Richard Wright’s famous (for some, infamous) parenthetical in his 1945 autobiography *Black Boy*: “Whenever I thought of the essential bleakness of black life in America, I knew that Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western civilization, that they lived somehow in it but not of it. And when I brooded upon the cultural barrenness of black life, I wondered if clean, positive tenderness, love, honor, loyalty, and the capacity to remember were native with man. I asked myself if these human qualities were not fostered, won, struggled, and suffered for, preserved in ritual from one generation to another.” Richard Wright, *Black Boy (American Hunger): A Record of Childhood and Youth* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993), 43. Baldwin steered clear of the issue of whether black people’s enforced estrangement from Western civilization was a suitable or plausible explanation for their pathologies. Baldwin generally took a more ironical view of blacks as insiders/outsideers than Wright did in *Black Boy*. For Baldwin, this insider/outsider perspective seemed a condition; for Wright, a tragedy. But Wright’s view was not always so stark. In *White Man, Listen!* (1957), he wrote, with sufficient irony, that the “Negro is America’s metaphor.” Richard Wright, *White Man, Listen!* (New York: Anchor Books, 1964), 72.

“The special attitude” that Africans brought to the traditions of the West, the perspective of the outsider who can also see things from within, was their greatest gift. But this gift was perversely difficult to accept. The politicized nature of their presence in the West – the insistence by Europeans and white Americans that Africans were “interlopers” or victims – made the African’s claim to the Western tradition precarious, even, at times, unpalatable, both to themselves and to others. But their politicized presence also made such a claim a civic and psychological necessity.

After all, in the United States, their own cultures had been suppressed: no indigenous African languages, political ideas, or institutions survived, only remnants of an African religious sensibility. Black Americans had been raised to be Christians, to speak English, and to uphold the dominant culture’s regnant liberal dogmas – free markets, the freedom of the individual, the need for a truly free society to have competing claims to truth without privileging one above another. This stunning transformation, all the more poignant because it was so brutally realized, is perhaps one of the most incredible stories of adaptation in human history.

So, what else did one need to become a Westerner? And why couldn’t black Americans be Westerners if they wanted to be? The West itself was a fictive concept made no more unreal by the presence of blacks. Moreover, any claim of a revitalized African heritage was contingent upon the recognition – at the point of the African’s permanent settlement in the New World – that the African was or could become a Westerner, or that he could reject the claims or the seduction of the West. For in making some sort of claim to the humanistic tradition of the West, as Baldwin suggests,

the very humanity of the African was at stake.³

3 Of course, opposing Baldwin’s view of the expropriation of the “white centuries” was to be the view of someone like African American poet, playwright, essayist, and political activist Amiri Baraka, who in the mid-1960s totally rejected the white centuries as a legitimate expression of any humanist tradition worthy of people of African descent. This rejection – ideologically reinforced by the notion of Third Worldism or worldwide colorism, which became popular in the 1950s and 1960s – came to dominate race-related rhetoric in the late 1960s. A large component of this epoch was based on humanist criticism and the Black Arts and the Black Aesthetic movements. But Baraka, even in his days as a Beat poet, saw himself as something of a nonconformist in a way that Baldwin never did. In effect, Baraka was an Occidentalist: someone who learned to dislike the West (first, as something bourgeois, philistine, and conventional; later, as something fascist and oppressive) and then became preoccupied with wanting to oppose it actively or to destroy it.

But as Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit’s study, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), makes clear, all anti-Westernism is Western in origin. “The West in general, and America in particular, provokes envy and resentment more among those who consume its images, and its goods, than among those who can barely imagine what the West is like.” *Ibid.*, 15. “Far from being the dogma favored by downtrodden peasants, Occidentalism more often reflects the fears and prejudices of urban intellectuals, who feel displaced in a world of mass commerce.” *Ibid.*, 30. Baraka was largely a disaffected cosmopolite intellectual with strong modernist yearnings. Therefore, Baraka had to be conscious, in some respects, of being a Westerner before he could rationally reject it. To be anti-Western would have had no appeal or made no sense to him had not Westernism been somewhat seductive (like the white woman, Lula, in *Dutchman*, his famous play and possibly best realized work).

I make this point to emphasize the fact that there can be no quest for a non-Western, reformulated African consciousness, pure and undefiled by the West or absolutely outside the West. In part, what Baraka and other cultural nationalists and Marxists like himself were

So, in the United States, African Americans had the same ‘opportunity’ as other Americans: to reinvent themselves. But historically they had the fewest tools with which, and the largest obstacles against which, to accomplish the feat.

And they needed not only to define themselves using the materials of the West but also to define the West in their own terms, and with such moral and political clarity that whites would be bound not only to acknowledge how blacks understood the culture of the West, but also to find it impossible to maintain their own cultural scheme independently of this black understanding of shared cultural values.

Baldwin’s views invite comparison with those expressed a half-century earlier in W. E. B. Du Bois’s 1903 masterpiece, *The Souls of Black Folk*. “I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not,”

looking for in their anti-Westernism was a mode of thought that would enable black people to act heroically, to be heroic on their own behalf. Baldwin’s struggle to expropriate the white centuries did not seem heroic. What would be heroic would be the creation of a new humanist system that would challenge the West, not the assimilation of a Western system of humanist values that had historically denied that blacks were human. It is not surprising that during the heyday of Baraka and black nationalism/black radicalism, Baldwin was fiercely rejected and his homosexuality disparaged as a sign of weakness. Later, Baraka freely admitted that his cultural nationalist search for heroism in the late 1960s had regrettably bred a form of fascism. See Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of Le Roi Jones/Amiri Baraka* (New York: Freundlich Books, 1984), particularly the chapters entitled “The Black Arts” and “Home.” Very vigorous forms of Occidentalism among African Americans have always been susceptible to becoming fascism. For more on Baraka, see Jerry Gafio Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

wrote Du Bois (1868 – 1963). “Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come graciously with no scorn nor condescension.”⁴

Writing at a time of viciously enforced Jim Crow segregation, Du Bois was mostly concerned about being denied access to the Western tradition because of his race, not with whether the Western tradition spoke to him in the ways that it spoke to whites nor with whether his view of the tradition was different from that of whites. Du Bois may have thought about some of these matters, but even if he had, he felt they were not the truly vital issues of the moment. What was important to him was to insist that the Western humanist tradition did indeed speak to black people and that blacks did not in any way compromise that tradition by being a part of it. Denying the African American access limited his possibility for growth and degraded his humanity, constantly reminding him that he was inferior.

Writing during the post-World War II age of integration, Baldwin expressed more complicated concerns because circumstances themselves had become more complex. His preoccupation with humanist tradition had nothing to do with access to it, but rather with the absorption, the uses, he could make of it. Baldwin’s problem was the psychological consequences of having no choice but to express himself using the tools of a cultural tradition he sometimes experienced as alien, even hostile.

4 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: New American Library, 1982), 139.

Both *Notes of a Native Son* and *The Souls of Black Folk* were, in part, about forms of intellectual and spiritual estrangement that blacks have experienced. But these forms were historically and even culturally distinct. Both books are shot through with the idea of blacks being insiders who are forced outside or outsiders who happen to be inside, but Baldwin's conception might be seen almost as a pose disguised as a quandary whereas Du Bois's seems a cause disguised as fate.

Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folk* at the height of his conflict with Booker T. Washington (1856 – 1915), the influential president of Tuskegee Institute – one of the most important black colleges in America at the time – over the direction of African American education. Indeed, Du Bois's chapter, "On Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," defined, in sharp relief and better than anyone else had or would, the nature of the struggle between the Washingtonians and the Radicals, a group that rejected Washington's philosophy and, ultimately, his claim to national leadership. Here, Du Bois's preoccupation with access to the humanist tradition was not surprising in light of Washington's staunch opposition to liberal education for blacks. Although liberal education encompasses more than just the humanities, both Washington and Du Bois, in large measure, represented liberal education as if it were solely the humanities.

Washington believed such education to be impractical for a people who had largely been and would largely continue to be a serving, working-class, agrarian people. Washington characterized at length the fatuity of black humanist education in his autobiography, *Up From Slavery* (1901), at the time the most popular book written by a black American

and the most widely read by whites. In one of the book's most bitter passages, he recalled one of his first forays into the countryside around Tuskegee: "One of the saddest things I saw . . . was a young man, who had attended some high school, sitting down in a one-room cabin, with grease on his clothing, filth all around him, and weeds in the yards and garden, engaged in studying a French grammar."⁵ Du Bois was so struck by this image that he responded to it specifically in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

And so thoroughly did [Washington] learn the speech and thought of triumphant commercialism, and the ideals of material prosperity, that the picture of a lone black boy poring over a French grammar amid the weeds and dirt of a neglected home soon seemed to him the acme of absurdities. One wonders what Socrates and St. Francis of Assisi would say to this.⁶

Washington's charge that humanist education is impractical and elitist still resonates today. The classical tradition, according to Washington, offered no useful skills, and some patina-like exposure to it falsely swelled the pride of the lowly who misunderstood what they learned anyway. The only people who could afford a humanist education were people who did not need to make a living in the real world or, if they were clever, duped others into supporting them because their useless knowledge afforded them a perverse status.

Yet what Washington lampooned Du Bois thought essential for any people seeking independence: a leadership class, and leadership was largely forged,

5 Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 122.

6 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 81.

for Du Bois, with a humanist education. Finally, for Du Bois, education was acquiring not merely skills but the ability to live fully and deeply. And this defense, too, still resonates today.

By the time that poet, novelist, songwriter, and former U.S. consul James Weldon Johnson (1871 – 1938) wrote his preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1921), one of the important literary anthologies of the New Negro or Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, the importance of the humanities to the advancement of the African American people had been more clearly established. In the preface Johnson wrote, “[A] people may become great through many means, but there is only one measure by which its greatness is recognized and acknowledged. The final measure of the greatness of all peoples is the amount of and standard of the literature and art they have produced.”⁷ A little later in the same piece, he echoed the same theme: “The status of the Negro in the United States is more a question of national mental attitude toward the race than of actual conditions. And nothing will do more to change that mental attitude and raise his status than a demonstration of intellectual parity by the Negro through the production of literature and art.”⁸

However, while the attempt to link African American liberation with art production and humanist criticism was largely what the New Negro Renaissance was, and largely what the Black Arts movement of the 1960s was as well, the visions of both movements differed.

7 James Weldon Johnson, ed., *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1931), 9.

8 Ibid.

It is difficult to say whether the New Negro Renaissance favored assimilation or opposed it: Was the movement about access to major publishing houses and mainstream literary organs and about black artists and writers being taken under the wings of some important white artists and writers? Was it about creating a discrete humanistic sensibility or about coming to terms, in some useful way, with the dominant humanistic sensibilities of the period? Probably, it was a little bit of everything. The Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, on the other hand, had a stronger entrepreneurial component, with blacks running their own organs of commentary and criticism, publishing their own books, developing their own critical audiences, controlling the political and polemical nature of the humanities fields in which they had a stake, and the like.

The differences in emphasis between these two movements represent the historical dilemma of black humanists, who have been caught between trying to gain access to institutions controlled by whites and creating their own ‘shadow’ institutions, which usually did not have enough capital and support to be fully effective. Despite how much blacks have desired to have their own cultural institutions and how much they have preached among themselves that they should support such institutions, it has been difficult for blacks to sustain, in any compelling way, independent structures and vehicles for humanist and critical analysis that could produce and nurture intellectuals for the group. There are many complex reasons for this: blacks’ preoccupation with practical political concerns; distrust of intellectuals as a group and confusion over how to use them beyond simply as examples of the group’s capacity to think as well as whites; and an anti-intellectual tenden-

cy among blacks that mirrors white American anti-intellectualism.

Thus, as the civil rights movement crested, thoughtful observers like Harold Cruse wondered what, if anything, could be done to address this 'crisis' of the Negro intellectual. By the time that Cruse published his book, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967), the answer for many had become both simple and clear: establish new academic programs in black studies at elite universities, some only recently opened to Americans of African descent.

Such programs had a precedent in the Negro studies programs created earlier in the twentieth century at a number of black colleges. As the historian John Hope Franklin explained in his famous 1963 essay, "The Dilemma of the Negro Scholar,"⁹ Negro studies had started in the nineteenth century in order to produce studies of the American Negro that refuted racist white scholarship, which denied not merely the intellectual ability but also the humanity of Americans of African descent. Naturally, these polemical studies varied in quality, often making up in earnestness what they lacked in rigor. Some of the earliest figures in this regard were David Walker, William Wells Brown, Fredrick Douglass, J. W. C. Pennington, Henry Highland Garnet, James McCune Smith, Martin R. Delany, and other black abolitionists who wrote scholarly or historical-cum-literary defenses of blacks.¹⁰

9 Herbert Hill, ed., *Soon, One Morning: New Writing by American Negroes, 1940 - 1962* (New York: Knopf, 1963), 62 - 76.

10 A great deal of this defense was rooted in a conflict about blacks and the humanist tradition. Thomas Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785) criticized blacks largely on humanistic grounds, speaking about their limi-

The three major African American humanist intellectuals of the first half of the twentieth century - Du Bois, historian Carter G. Woodson, and cultural and literary critic Alain L. Locke, all Harvard Ph.D.s - also took up this mission, which was first enunciated by the American Negro Academy, the first black think tank. Formed in 1897 in Washington, D.C., by Du Bois and associates such as Alexander Crummell, a writer and African émigré, the Academy sought, in part, to refute the racist assumption that blacks, if put into direct competition with whites, were bound to

tations particularly as poets, thinkers, and memoirists. His denunciation of Phillis Wheatley became controversial: "Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whately [*sic*]; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism." Merrill D. Peterson, *The Portable Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Viking, 1976), 189. His criticism of Ignatius Sancho's *Letters* (1782) is a bit more expansive and somewhat less harsh. On the whole, though, Jefferson sees blacks as outside the Western humanist tradition. They are mimics, incapable of sustained, vigorous, closely reasoned argument. The response to this by nineteenth-century African American thinkers was virtually to enshrine Wheatley as the first significant black person of letters and an exemplar of the race, more or less the first black person of note in the Western humanist tradition. She remains defined in that way today. Generally, Jefferson's views on race and slavery were more advanced than those of his contemporaries. Despite his clearly racist views in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he was anti-slavery and often, in his latter life, tried to promote blacks in the eyes of whites. David Walker's *Appeal* is a passionate rebuttal to much of what Jefferson says about race and slavery in *Notes*. White abolitionist Lydia Maria Child directly challenges Jefferson's view of Wheatley's poetry in her *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans* (1836), republished as *An Appeal in Favor of Americans Called Africans* (New York: Arno Press and the *New York Times*, 1968), 162.

lose because they were less racially fit. In "The Conservation of the Races," the first paper given before the members of the Academy, Du Bois echoed the sentiments of the time: "The history of the world is the history, not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations, but of races."

In papers like this, Du Bois laid out the conceptual basis for Negro studies, which he saw not just as a protest against racial discrimination. Rather, in the view of Du Bois and his allies, black humanists also had to study race as a major form of community, both imagined and real, in order to help reshape the fundamental values of the United States and the West: "We are that people whose subtle sense of song has given America its only American music, its only American fairy tales, its only touch of pathos and humor amid its mad money-getting plutocracy. As such, it is our duty to conserve our physical powers, our intellectual endowments, our spiritual ideals . . ." ¹¹ The way that blacks humanized America was as much a moral as it was an aesthetic achievement;

11 W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Conservation of the Races" in David Levering Lewis, ed., *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1995), 21, 25. It is in this essay that Du Bois adumbrates his famous formulation about double consciousness: "What, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American? If I strive as a Negro, am I not perpetuating the very cleft that threatens and separates Black and White America? Is not my only possible practical aim the subduction of all that is Negro in me to the American? Does my black blood place upon me any more obligation to assert my nationality than German, or Irish or Italian blood would? It is such incessant self-questioning and the hesitation that arises from it, that is making the present period a time of vacillation and contradiction for the American Negro . . ." *Ibid.*, 24.

their existence outside of the domain of power and money was something of a virtue.

For Du Bois, this inquiry into the facts about the Negro race was one that Negroes were uniquely qualified to pursue within the university. He argued in his paper that "we need race organizations: Negro colleges, Negro newspapers, Negro business organizations, a Negro school of literature and art, and an intellectual clearing house, for all those products of the Negro mind, which we may call a Negro Academy. Not only is all this necessary for positive advance, it is absolutely imperative for negative defense." ¹²

But this conception of Negro studies later presented a problem for some black scholars. John Hope Franklin was perhaps the most prominent of these critics. As he told the story, Negro studies had evolved into an unfortunate form of race conservation:

There emerged a large number of Negro scholars who devoted themselves almost exclusively to the study of some aspect of the Negro. Soon recognized fields emerged: the history of the Negro, the anthropology of the Negro, the sociology of the Negro, the poetry of the Negro, the Negro novel, the Negro short story, and so on.

In moving forthrightly in this direction, what had the Negro scholar done? He had, alas, made an institution of the field of Negro Studies. He had become the victim of segregation in the field of scholarship in the same way that Negroes in other fields had become victims of segregation. There were the Negro press, the Negro church, Negro business, Negro education, and now Negro scholarship. Unhappily, Negro scholars had to face a situa-

12 *Ibid.*, 25.

tion, not entirely of their own creation, in the perpetuation of which their stake was very real indeed. In the field of American scholarship it was all they had. It grew in respectability not only because the impeccable scholarship of many of the Negroes commanded it, but also because many of the whites conceded that Negroes had peculiar talents that fitted them to study themselves and their problems. To the extent that this concession was made, it defeated a basic principle of scholarship – namely, that given the materials and techniques of scholarship and given the mental capacity, any person could engage in the study of any particular field.

This was a tragedy. Negro scholarship had foundered on the rocks of racism It had become the victim of the view that there was some “mystique” about Negro studies, similar to the view that there was some “mystique” about Negro spirituals which required that a person possess a black skin in order to sing them.¹³

As examples of the inescapability of race that race-based enterprises begot, Franklin discussed the fate of three turn-of-the-century black scholars: W. H. Croghan, Julian Herman Lewis, and C. V. Roman. Though formally trained as a classicist, a biologist, and a medical doctor, respectively, they all wound up writing books about blacks – Croghan’s *The Progress of a Race*, 1898; Lewis’s *The Biology of the Negro*, 1942; Roman’s *American Civilization and the Negro*, 1916 – even though none of them had entered the academy with that intention. For Franklin writing in the early 1960s, Du Bois’s turn-of-the-century race vision had become a constraint, a reminder of what

black people were and were not permitted to have, of what their elites were and were not allowed to do.

The first Negro studies programs had appeared in the 1930s at historically black colleges like Fisk, which was founded in 1866 and was one of the premier black colleges in the country during the first half of the twentieth century. Fisk offered courses in Race and Culture, Race Differences, and Race Psychology during the academic year 1937 – 1938. In the early 1940s, it also introduced a major in African Caribbean studies. In the 1944 Fisk catalog, the college added an African studies major, built around courses such as African Music, Survivals of African Culture in the New World, The New Africa and Its Problems, Study of an African Vernacular, and Ancient and Medieval History of Africa. It also offered courses in Negro American history, Negro rural sociology, Negro spirituals, and Negro literature.¹⁴

In black studies programs at elite white universities today, surprisingly similar courses still exist, with the word “Negro” replaced by more current prefixes like “black,” “African American,” or “diasporic.”

Yet they are clearly not the same courses. Negro studies set out to counter white racist scholarship by proving that the Negro was a worthy subject for the university and that the Negro scholar could do scholarship. African studies at Fisk also encouraged young black students to go to Africa in something like a missionary capacity: “The curriculum has a vocational aspect. There are increasing opportunities for

13 John Hope Franklin, “The Dilemma of the American Negro Scholar” in Hill, ed., *Soon, One Morning: New Writing by American Negroes*, 1940 – 1962, 68 – 69.

14 All information about Fisk course offerings based on author’s examination of Fisk College catalogs from 1931 – 1932 to 1979 – 1980.

American Negroes trained in medicine, social work, agriculture, education, and other disciplines to work in Africa and the Caribbean area.”¹⁵

By contrast, the new black studies that emerged in the 1960s expressed a new hope: African Americans could liberate not only themselves but others as well through their own hegemonic counter-claims of self-determination. As Manning Marable, director of the Institute of African American Studies at Columbia University, expressed, “The purpose of black scholarship is more than the restoration of identity and self-esteem; it seeks to use history and culture as tools through which people interpret their collective experience for the purpose of transforming their actual conditions and the totality of the society around them.”

Note also the reference to “history and culture,” to the essentially humanistic bent of black studies in contrast to the vocational emphasis of Negro studies. For all the talk of subversion, the real function of black studies, as it emerged in elite white institutions in the 1960s and afterward, was to empower black bourgeois intellectuals, by making plausible the claim that they, and they alone, could further social change simply because they had adopted an ideological stance proclaiming the purity of their commitment to the idea, at least, of social change. This stance, in effect, had to be struck, for black studies had taken the black humanist scholar to the white university, removing him from the everyday lives of ordinary blacks.

The new institutional location of black scholars was also tantamount to an admission that the historically black col-

leges had failed the black humanist.¹⁶

It is worth comparing to an analogous trend in the realm of professional sports. The integration of major league baseball implied that the Negro Leagues, as a race institution, were neither sustainable nor, in the end, desirable. In other words, in the age of integration, there was a growing sense among a cadre of blacks that black institutions, products of segregation, could no longer produce professionals for the world that was coming into being by the early 1970s. The inability of their institutions to help them achieve power has been painful for many blacks to accept, and exceedingly complex as well, tied as it is to issues of race pride and loyalty; black versus white philanthropy (upon which, in very unequal measure, many black institutions have depended upon to exist); and the political and economic insufficiency of

16 The black student revolt that produced black studies at the white university repudiated the Negro college and Negro studies. Nathan Hare, who became the head of black studies at San Francisco State College, the first black studies program at a white college, said in 1969:

Ideally, Negro colleges should play the role of devising a new black ideology and a new black ethics . . . Negro colleges should be setting the pace and providing models of scholarly excellence and inquiry into the problems of color . . . comprising laboratories for experimentation in the techniques and tactics of revolutionary change. But we do not believe in miracles. The Negro college is glued to the mores of its missionary origins. It is located in the South, cemented to the prevailing cake of conservatism, and less free politically even than the typical white college there. Rather than address itself seriously to the solution of the problems of academia, the Negro college has been more inclined to ape and compound white trivia and miseducation.

See also Ron Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies* (Los Angeles: The University of Sankore Press, 1993), 10.

15 From the description of the African and Caribbean studies major in the *Fisk University Bulletin*, 1953–1954.

the black community to support its own aspirations in the way it would like to see them realized.

The emergence of the black humanist scholar in much the way we understand that person today is largely the result of the thrust during the civil rights era to open white institutions, including universities, to blacks. But when black scholars came to the white university, many of them carried the legacy of black studies with them, which created a huge contradiction, of course: the integration of blacks within white institutions became the material precondition for preserving, and promulgating more widely, an ideology of black alienation.

Yet the rise of the new ideology of black alienation within white institutions helped spur an enormous increase in organizational professionalism among blacks between 1965 and 1980. In 1968, the Association of Black Psychologists¹⁷ and the National Association of Black Social Workers were formed in San Francisco. The National Association of Black Accountants was launched in New York City in 1969. The Association of Black Sociologists and the Association of Black Anthro-

pologists were both created in 1970. The Black Society of Engineers came into being in 1971. These groups joined two older African American humanist professional groups, the College Language Association, started in 1937, and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, which began in 1915. The rampant professionalization among black intellectuals and academics increased their influence by allowing them to establish journals that published their particular scholarship, hold annual academic meetings, press universities for greater representation on both the faculty and in the student body, and collectively influence their predominantly white organizational counterparts.

Still the question remains: What has black studies really accomplished in the humanities?

In my view, the greatest achievement of black studies has been the creation of a set of black publics that feel the need of intellectual representation and scholarly legitimation. Black studies was revolutionary in that it opened black access to white institutions to create methods and ideologies of black partisanship to protect and defend black interests, largely through humanistic expression. At the same time, it spawned a newly energized set of black presses, black book stores, black reading groups, black magazines, black talk radio – in short, all the dispensing mechanisms for a public culture, for a black public humanities.

And black studies has changed intellectually over the thirty years of its existence. At first, it was resistant to the influence of white radical ideologies, even though the existence of those ideologies, in some measure, made black studies possible. A strong cultural nationalist core marked black studies in the early years. However, feminism quickly be-

17 The Black Psychology movement has probably been the most important in providing a rationale for a black humanist tradition. Black thought has commonly seen the content of the humanities as a form of “propaganda,” according to Carter G. Woodson. See Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1994, originally published in 1888), 88.

This idea that education for blacks amounts to brainwashing led to the Black Psychology movement, which advocated for proper education for blacks as a way to increase their mental health. See Na'im Akbar, *The Community of Self (Revised)* (Tallahassee: Mind Productions and Associates, Inc., 1985), 24–25. The belief is that the humanities are primarily racial or racialized and that people derive a sense of who they are from their humanistic experience.

came the first major ideological challenge from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, when a number of black women writers achieved great prominence by questioning certain masculinist assumptions about black history and the creation of a black humanist tradition.

Then, in the 1980s, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. emerged as a singular force in the study and preservation of African American letters. Not only did his presence, along with the intense interest in black women's literature at the time, make literature and literary criticism the major focus of black studies, but Gates himself was part of a cohort of black scholars – educated as undergraduates and graduate students during the 1970s – who turned away from the explicitly political agenda of black studies as a liberationist ideology.

Under Gates, black studies became far more concerned with achieving institutional respectability, of moving away from the margins and occupying a more mainstream position in the American academy. Gates did this in three ways: First, he made himself a celebrity scholar, whose every move and book contract was publicized in the mainstream media. Second, he acquired as many of the credentials of academic achievement as he could – various organizational memberships, prizes, and appointments – making himself a mainstream academic leader, even though he was in the ostensibly 'marginal' subject of black studies. Finally, he was not afraid to criticize blacks who took 'extreme' political positions, such as Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam when they launched an anti-Semitic campaign in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In these ways, Gates made black studies and black scholarship desirable for two important institutions: major publishing houses, both academic and commercial, and univer-

sities who wanted to be on the cutting edge. Whites no longer had to consider black studies a poor intellectual relation, something to be merely tolerated. In the age of diversity and multiculturalism, it had become a useful marketing and political vehicle.

Gates's approach set off two counter-challenges from both black leftist scholars and Afrocentrists who saw him as a bourgeois careerist out to wreck black studies by stripping it of its oppositional thrust. Gates himself has shrewdly managed to deflect these attacks. And the field has continued to mature: Comparativist work using the concept of a 'Black Atlantic' – a combined study of the United States, Western Europe, and Western Africa – emerged in the 1990s and continues to develop. Also, the field has adopted new oppositional concepts like Queer Theory and postcolonial studies in recent years.

But just as black studies was achieving legitimacy in the academic community, it was in danger of failing to interest students. Its very entrance into the white university signaled a historic shift in the education of black Americans. Where once most blacks had attended all-black colleges, by 2000, more than three-quarters of all bachelor's degrees to blacks were being awarded by predominantly white schools. Moreover, most of the black students who now attend white colleges and universities steer clear of black studies. According to the summer 2002 issue of *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, most black students do not major in black studies or any ethnic studies field. In 2000, only 782 African Americans earned a bachelor's degree in ethnic studies while over twenty-two thousand blacks earned a bachelor's in business management.

At the same time, black studies programs have all but disappeared at his-

torically black colleges and universities. Fisk, for instance, dropped its black studies and African studies programs in the late 1970s because students lost interest. Most black studies programs are now found at the more prestigious and expensive schools, where the fewest blacks attend. (Most blacks who attend college go to two-year institutions, the least expensive schools available.) In this way, black studies has become a paradoxically elitist enterprise, taught by the most famous black professors and available mostly to those black students who would have made up Du Bois's Talented Tenth. Perhaps it is students at these schools who can afford to major in black studies, which many students at less prestigious schools would consider an impractical major unless one intended to teach the subject.¹⁸

As even this short history suggests, African Americans have long debated the importance of the humanities in ways that echo the debate in the dominant culture, but also in ways that reflect their situation as a uniquely persecuted minority. One cannot see the various ways that the humanities and the arts have functioned in African American life as a set of simple alternatives: Washington versus Du Bois, or Baldwin versus Baraka, etc. Rather, this history has been a mosaic of controversy and concord, agreement and disagreement. This mosaic may in fact reflect, as Harold Cruse suggested, the cultural pluralism of the United States, the dynamics of group power in a diverse society where authority and control are spread over a number of institutions. One can regard each distinct view

of the African American's relation to a humanist tradition as a manifestation of cultural pluralism, of questions of how the group should function as a group and what its identity should be.

But if one understands humanism as a code of action, what is black professionalism's relationship to the creation of a black humanist tradition? How does one conduct oneself as a black professional in a white world?

In a 1973 interview, the novelist and critic Ralph Ellison remarked that "young blacks became separatists because they were frightened by the need to compete."¹⁹ Like John Hope Frank-

19 This is similar to Ellison's famous assertion about black writers that "they fear to leave the uneasy sanctuary of race to take their chances in the world of art." Introduction in Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage, 1972), xxii. Ellison is an important figure in assessing black studies because he was so reviled by black students and many black intellectuals and scholars, particularly during the early days of black studies in the 1970s. Ellison was, without question, one of the most accomplished literary figures of his time, and he wrote the most highly regarded black novel of the twentieth century, *Invisible Man* (1952). Yet it is interesting to note that Ellison was strongly disliked by the very element among blacks that one would think would have celebrated him: the college-educated, the elite, the leaders, the vanguard. In the 1950s, he was forced to respond to one type of black criticism concerning *Invisible Man*, from conservative, middle-class blacks who thought the book was not a positive representation of the race. In the 1960s and 1970s, he was attacked by black radicals for the same reason, for creating a politically incorrect art. Both groups hated Ellison because both saw literature as a threat: it tended to emphasize the individuality of the author. And historically, many blacks have regarded individuality skeptically. For the bourgeois critics, Ellison's individualism threatened their sense of conformity and solidarity and the validity of their leadership. For the radicals, Ellison's individualism was itself reactionary, a type of bourgeois conformity. For them, Ellison was, at best, just another constrained, centrist, cold-war liberal.

18 "Black Studies is an Unpopular Major," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 36 (Summer 2002): 14–15.

lin, Ellison hoped that the discipline of the scholar would become a wellspring of black creativity. Ellison wrote to Stanley Edgar Hyman in 1970: "And despite the prevalence of stereotyped notions of Negro spontaneity and instinctuality, our life-style – at least as it has evolved in the South – has been shaped by a determined will to control violent emotion (we seldom run amuck) as a life-preserving measure against being provoked into retaliatory actions by those who desire only to destroy to us."²⁰

What is important here in thinking about the quest for a black humanist tradition before black studies came to the white university is the role played by restraint and self-control. The great black hero of Franklin's and Ellison's young adulthood offered one model for this sort of discipline: heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis, who held the championship from 1937 to 1949, longer than anyone else in the history of the sport. Louis always presented himself publicly with such self-control, such taciturn detachment, that it bordered almost on a form of 'cool.' No one could have survived as long as Louis did in his brutal sport or in the harsh public spotlight of racist America without having been an extraordinarily disciplined man. He was the model for that 'greatest' generation of black Americans who came through the Depression and World War II.

Contrast Louis with Muhammad Ali, who emerged in the 1960s – loud, bragging, brilliantly skilled and enormously

talented, seemingly out of control. Ali presented a public image of disrespect for his opponents and a lack of discipline in learning his craft correctly. Perhaps the symbolic representation of these two men captures the difference between the civil rights generation that brought black studies to the university and the Negro studies generation that preceded it better than any other comparison. To understand the complexities and paradoxes of the quest for a black humanist tradition; to understand both Negro studies and black studies as episodes in that quest; to understand how different black intellectuals and educators have constructed conflicting myths and competing codes of professionalism – this is to begin to understand something about how Americans of African descent have made a place for themselves within, and against, the humanist traditions of the West.

20 In 1972, Ellison described the act of making art: "Art has to do with the process of reaching down into *repressed* values and giving it some luminosity" (emphasis mine). Leon Forrest, "A Conversation with Ralph Ellison," in *Conversations with Ralph Ellison*, ed. Maryemma Graham and Amritjit Singh (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 217.

Jack M. Balkin & Sanford Levinson

Law & the humanities: an uneasy relationship

In 1930 Judge Learned Hand, widely regarded as one of the most distinguished judges in our nation's history, spoke to the Juristic Society at the University of Pennsylvania Law School. In his address, "Sources of Tolerance," he told his listeners,

I venture to believe that it is as important to a judge called upon to pass on a question of constitutional law, to have at least a bowing acquaintance with Acton and Maitland, with Thucydides, Gibbon, and Carlyle, with Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton, with Machiavelli, Montaigne

and Rabelais, with Plato, Bacon, Hume and Kant, as with the books which have been specifically written on the subject.¹

Here Hand presents himself as a wise jurist, a legal scholar whose judgment has been profoundly informed by the great books he has selected for our attention. Because he himself is familiar with all of the writers alluded to, he not only enjoys membership in a 'republic of letters' – he is able to "live greatly in the law."²

There was nothing particularly unusual about Hand's range of references in the early twentieth century, particularly coming from an elite member of the legal profession. Moreover, for many years, membership in the American republics of law and letters had run both ways. Robert Ferguson's important book, *Law and Letters in the New Republic*, concerns, among other topics, the many late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American writers who had been trained as lawyers (and in many instances, had actually prac-

Jack M. Balkin is Knight Professor of Constitutional Law and the First Amendment at Yale Law School. His publications include "Cultural Software" (1998) and "The Laws of Change" (2002). He was elected a Fellow of the American Academy in 2005.

Sanford Levinson, a Fellow of the American Academy since 2001, is W. St. John Garwood and W. St. John Garwood, Jr. Centennial Chair in Law and professor of government at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of "Written in Stone" (1998) and "Wrestling with Diversity" (2003) and the editor of "Torture: A Collection" (2004).

© 2006 by Jack M. Balkin and Sanford Levinson

1 Learned Hand, *The Spirit of Liberty: Papers and Addresses of Learned Hand* (New York: Knopf, 1952), 81.

2 Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Profession and the Law," in *Collected Legal Papers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1920), 29–30.

ticed law), including Charles Brockden Brown, Hugh Henry Brackenridge, Washington Irving, William Bryant, and James Fenimore Cooper.³ One might also think of Hand's contemporary, the Harvard Law School-educated poet Archibald MacLeish, or, closer to our own time, writers ranging from Louis Auchincloss to Scott Turow and John Grisham.

Nonetheless, few legal scholars today share Hand's assumptions – that law is part of the humanities and that law is not complete unless it draws nourishment from them. Indeed, these assumptions were already under fierce attack by the start of the twentieth century.

Consider perhaps the most important single lecture in the history of American law: "The Path of the Law," delivered by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., who taught briefly at Harvard Law School before fleeing to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. Speaking in June 1897 before Boston University's students and faculty, Holmes predicted that "[f]or the rational study of the law the black-letter man [i.e., the master of legal case law] may be the man of the present, but the man of the future is the man of statistics and the master of economics."⁴

Holmes and Hand were friends – but they clearly disagreed over the substance of legal studies. While Hand in 1930 advocated the study of the humanities, Holmes advocated the study of the social sciences, particularly economics. Hand evoked Shakespeare and Milton; Holmes's imagined alternative to black-letter law was statistics. Where Hand

3 See also Michael Meltzer, *Secular Revelations: The Constitution of the United States and Classic American Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming), 95.

4 Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., "The Path of The Law," *Harvard Law Review* 10 (1897): 457, 469.

welcomed the edifying influence of moral philosophy, Holmes strove to make law more scientific and even industrial, discarding all forms of humanist sentimentality. Law is a "business," Holmes said, in which "people . . . pay lawyers to argue for them," and "predict . . . the incidence of the public force through the instrumentality of the courts."⁵ It was a mistake to confuse the law with morality, he insisted – and he wondered "whether it would not be a gain if every word of moral significance could be banished from the law altogether."⁶

Of these two legal scholars, it is undoubtedly Holmes who has proven more prescient. Economics has indeed become arguably the most important discipline within legal studies – such that law to this day has an uneasy relationship to the humanities. The student at an elite law school today is more likely to be acquainted with Ronald Coase's Theory of the Firm than with Plato's Theory of the Forms,⁷ with agency costs

5 *Ibid.*, 461.

6 *Ibid.*, 464. For further reflections on this point, see Sanford Levinson and J. M. Balkin, "The 'Bad Man,' the Good, and the Self-Reliant," *Boston University Law Review* 78 (1998): 885.

7 In fact, a study by Yale Law School librarian Fred Shapiro, "The Most Cited Law Review Articles Revisited," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 71 (1996): 751, discovered that Ronald Coase's classic article, "The Problem of Social Cost," *Journal of Law and Economics* 3 (1960): 1, was the single most heavily cited article by legal academics. Whether citation counts should count as proof of scholarly influence is a controversial question, on which see our somewhat irreverent analysis of Shapiro's study, "How to Win Cites and Influence People," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 71 (1996): 843. Nevertheless, Coase's placement at the top of the list is an apt symbol of the influence that the law and economics movement maintains in the contemporary legal academy.

than with Acton, and with rent-seeking than with Rabelais.

Is it therefore only a play on words to call law a 'humane' profession in a way that is different from, say, medicine – a field that is certainly concerned with the humane care of sick people, but which is more strongly associated with the sciences than with the humanities?

To answer this question one must first consider the sea change in professional self-consciousness that has occurred between the time that Judge Learned Hand spoke, a full three-quarters of a century ago, and the present. Part of this change involves the very meaning of a professional lawyer – what lawyers do and what counts as relevant materials of legal study, both by those who learn in law schools and those who teach in them. We emphasize the term 'professional' for good reason: One can certainly study law without becoming a practicing lawyer. But one cannot, at least in the United States, become a lawyer without going through law school.

What does (or should) constitute that discipline raises three related questions.

The first is whether the canon of standard-form legal materials is sufficient to do good work in law. Although Hand was one of the consummate professional judges of his era, he nonetheless seems to suggest to his audience that studying only standard-form legal materials is a mistake. Indeed, one might even infer from Hand's pronouncement (though we doubt that this was his intent) that perhaps one does not need to be a lawyer at all in order to have cogent, well-formed opinions about what the law is or should be. Holmes, too, had his doubts about studying only standard-form legal materials, particularly when a knowledge of statistics and economics might produce better legal decisions.

The second question is whether law is a genuine discipline, with its own distinctive methodologies and standards of argument and proof. Or is law, on the contrary, merely a 'subject matter,' similar, say, to the city of New York or the nineteenth-century settlement of the American Midwest – a topic that can be approached any number of ways? If the latter, then there is nothing necessarily special – at least from a purely methodological perspective – about being a lawyer or having received professional legal training.

The third question is whether law is a science, defined by reference to rigorous procedures and norms, as are other sciences, or something else – perhaps the 'art of governance,' whose study would be much closer to the humanities than to either the natural or the social sciences.

The modern American legal academy begins in 1870 with the appointment of Christopher Columbus Langdell as dean of Harvard Law School. Langdell's avowed mission was to transform American legal education into 'scientific analysis,' and he had been appointed to the deanship by Harvard President Charles Eliot, himself a scientist. For Langdell, 'legal science' consisted, principally, of reading a relatively closed set of materials found in libraries – the decisions of judges, particularly at the appellate level. From these decisions the legal scientist would then discern, through the power of legal analysis, the structures of overarching doctrine that could unite such seemingly disparate topics as the sale of potatoes and the sale of slaves into one subject matter called contracts. We do not know how well-read Langdell was, but we are fairly confident that he would have looked askance at a student (or a Harvard Law School professor) who thought that it was more important to immerse oneself in Dante or Shake-

spare than in the case law generated by courts. It would be as if a paleontologist preferred reading Aristotle to carefully assessing the fossil record.

Ever since Langdell, the drama of American legal education has revolved around the recurrent slaying of the beast of legal science in the name of humanism and/or social science, followed by the phoenix-like resurrection of elements of Langdell's original program of analyzing legal cases and materials (albeit now suitably leavened by a sprinkling of nonlegal sources). Of course, only the most foolhardy academic today would describe doctrinal analysis as 'scientific.' The preferred term today is 'craft,' which people, especially those educated at Harvard Law School, continue to use as an evaluative term. (And by legal craft, few mean the ability to weave in references to Homer, Hume, or Rabelais.) As we shall see, however, the highly influential law and economics movement, although it rejects many aspects of Langdell's original program, is not at all averse to emphasizing the scientific status of economics to justify its own claims to authority. And so the drama continues.

The recurring conflict over whether law is a branch of the humanities or the sciences has coincided with an even more basic trend in twentieth-century legal studies, at least in the United States: a rejection of so-called formalism. Formalism is a rather nebulous concept; sometimes one feels that it stands for whatever the speaker thinks is wrong with the study and practice of law.⁸ In fact, to the extent that formal-

8 See Robert Gordon's imaginative list of different accounts of formalism and why people were opposed to them in Robert W. Gordon, "The Elusive Transformation," *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 6 (1994): 137, 154–157,

ism means belief in the importance of rules to organize conduct, formalism has never departed the legal academy; indeed, it is more popular than ever.⁹

However, the sort of formalism that almost all American legal scholars have rejected during the twentieth century is the notion that the sole job of the legal mind is to work out the correct solution to legal problems through the law's materials and internal logic, and the correlative belief that the internal logic of those materials, and not any knowledge of extralegal matters, determines whether a legal argument is good or bad.

Instead, twentieth-century legal theory in the United States has repeatedly rejected this type of formalism in favor of realism, on the one hand, and proceduralism, on the other.

Realism refers to the jurisprudential insights of a highly influential legal movement called American legal realism, insights which, we should add, have nothing whatsoever to do with the philosophical position called realism. Legal realists claim that legal actors do not and cannot make decisions wholly free of ideological beliefs and attitudes; that legal reasoning has much in common with political reasoning and policy argument; that judges inevitably draw upon a wide variety of nonlegal norms to decide concrete cases; and that lawyers, judges, and legal scholars should try to make law responsive to facts about the world, to the insights of other disciplines, and, above all, to changes in society as a whole. Given these characteristic claims, it is not surprising that many

a review of Morton J. Horowitz, *The Transformation of American Law 1870–1960: The Crisis of Legal Orthodoxy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

9 See, e.g., Fredrick Schauer, "Formalism," *Yale Law Journal* 97 (1988): 509.

of the original legal realists avidly embraced social science in the 1930s and 1940s, hoping that it would help them solve important questions of legal administration.

Nevertheless, the legal realists made only limited progress during those early years due to a combination of factors: the difficulty of getting funding for social science studies; the rudimentary nature of social science in the United States; and the fact that the early realists, who had been trained as traditional doctrinal lawyers, were not particularly good at doing social science.¹⁰ As

10 John Henry Schlegel, *American Legal Realism and Empirical Social Science* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). Equally important debates about the rule of law – provoked by the rise of overt class-based politics, the development of the administrative welfare state, and the pressures of war – had occurred in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A. V. Dicey, a leading English constitutional lawyer, bewailed what he viewed as the potential demise of the rule of law in the jaws of the new administrative state. His views would later become influential in this country through analogous arguments made by Frederich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944). Even more fundamental debates took place in Germany among figures including Max Weber, Hans Kelsen, Carl Schmitt, and Franz Neumann. See, e.g., William Scheurman, *Between the Norm and the Exception: The Frankfurt School and the Rule of Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997). Although little of this debate filtered into the American legal academy, it did influence a number of other disciplines in the United States. The American attack on the pretensions of the rule of law was carried out almost exclusively by persons linked with progressive politics and the defense of the New Deal and the administrative state. By contrast, those attacking the rule of law in Europe were as likely to be right-wing authoritarians like Schmitt as leftist progressives. Indeed, as Edward Purcell demonstrated some years ago, many American legal realists became considerably chastened in the 1930s and 1940s, when attacks on the rule of law became iden-

it has developed over the years, American legal realism is as much a mood as a set of doctrines. It reflects the experience, felt on occasion by all who study the law, that the discourse of lawyers and the forms of legal reasoning are often too musty, circumscribed, and closed in upon themselves, and therefore, inevitably fall out of touch with social and political realities.

The second major tendency in twentieth-century American legal theory – indeed, the favored response to legal realism – has been proceduralism. Proceduralism begins with the incontrovertible insight that legal disputes often raise controversial questions of morality and policy. That is particularly true of the sorts of problems faced by administrative agencies, who took on increasingly elaborate tasks and extended the state's influence in increasingly large areas of social life in the twentieth century. If one cannot tell what the right answer should be on the merits, proceduralism teaches that it is far better to create a series of procedures through which the legal system can settle the 'right answer' for its purposes. Since creating and following procedures are the lawyer's stock in trade, lawyers are particularly adept at this task.

The legal process school of the 1950s – identified particularly with Harvard,

tified with Nazis and Communists. See Edward A. Purcell, *The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism & the Problem of Value* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973). This did not necessarily mean, of course, that the critiques of the rule of law were genuinely overcome, only that they were shunted aside in what tended to turn, especially in the 1950s, into a celebration of the American legal order. The rise of the civil rights movement in the 1960s and the Vietnam War brought that celebration to an end, with the concomitant revival of American legal realism in the form of what came to be called critical legal studies.

then almost certainly the dominant law school in the United States – assimilated and co-opted elements of the realist critique and concluded that the job of lawyers was not so much to decide what was right and wrong but to decide who should decide what was right and wrong and how they should go about deciding it. As a result, legal process scholars spent a great deal of time thinking about questions like the proper methods of statutory construction; the appropriate balance of power among various branches of the federal government and between the federal government and the states; how courts should assess the procedural status of claims brought by litigants; how courts should review the decisions of administrative agencies, and so on.

Proceduralism can be – and has been – ridiculed as a flight from substance. It has been criticized for encouraging lawyers to focus obsessively on formal niceties while avoiding or obscuring deeper questions of substantive justice and thus fomenting ever-new ways to preserve the status quo. Yet, at the same time, proceduralism has its own normative commitments and ethics: a belief in orderly deliberation and a conviction that the legal system functions best when it assigns difficult, controversial decisions to the institutions or persons most likely to have the expertise and authority to make a legitimate decision.

Realism and proceduralism are the two great legacies bequeathed by American jurisprudence, and each responds to the other in a great spiraling dialectic. Every important jurisprudential movement in the United States – and most of the unimportant ones too – owes something to this dialectic. Realism demands that lawyers look up from their procedural fetishes and attend to the world as it is, with all its warts and injustices; it seeks to throw open the curtains that

cloak the musty halls of law and bring in the light and fresh air of other disciplines so that law might better reflect changing social realities and attitudes. Critical legal studies, legal feminism, and critical race theory, not surprisingly, all share the realist call for law to awake from its dogmatic slumbers and attend to law's complicity with social hierarchy. Proceduralism, on the other hand, worries that making law too overtly political endangers law's legitimacy; it insists that the key to preserving values of democracy, fairness, and the rule of law comes from cultivating questions of procedure, even when these seem dry and abstract to the outside world.

Realism and proceduralism are not only America's gifts to legal science, they are also the features of American legal thought that most distinguish it from the civil law tradition practiced in Europe, which has tended to be far more formal in its approach. To this day, most European lawyers – and many professors – find American legal theory bizarre and almost the opposite of truly 'legal' reasoning. Americans are far less likely to delve deeply into the intricacies of legal codes to figure out how each part fits with the others. Instead, Americans ask what to the civil law mind are 'non-legal' questions like "What rule would be most efficient?" or "Given that people will inevitably disagree about certain basic values, what procedures are most suitable for resolving disputes over such issues as abortion, affirmative action, or the death penalty?"

What is particularly important for our purposes, however, is that though realism (and, to a lesser extent, proceduralism) made law increasingly interdisciplinary in its ambitions, neither necessarily brought law closer to the study of the humanities. (The one major exception, of course, has been the continuation of

the realist tradition in legal feminism, critical race theory, and critical legal studies; each of these movements has drawn from the work of philosophers, literary critics, and historians in the humanities.) Indeed, both realism's fascination with facts and proceduralism's attempt to harness the expertise necessary to run the administrative state pushed law further and further away from the humanist vision we see in Hand's opening quotation and brought it closer and closer to becoming a branch of policy science.

Thus, both legal realism and legal proceduralism tended to produce not humanists but technocrats. This result has spawned yet another set of reactions by those who feel that law has lost a good deal of its humanity and its humanness; these scholars have sought to reconnect the study and the practice of law to humanist ideals. This humanist tendency cuts across ideological divisions and the many different movements in the American legal academy. It can be found in the critique of rights offered by some adherents of critical legal studies; in the works of the law and literature movement, which seeks to think about law in humanist terms; and in Anthony Kronman's *The Lost Lawyer: Failing Ideals of the Legal Profession* (1993), which decries the soulless practice of corporate law and the equally soulless calculations of contemporary law and economics scholarship. The urge to recover humanism – often identified, whether correctly or incorrectly, with what people in humanities departments are actually doing these days – is one species of response to the American law school's technocratic tendencies.

Nevertheless, the two key institutional contexts in which law is practiced and taught – the 'legal services industry' and

the modern professional school – limit the links that can be established between law and the humanities.

Outside of the academy, the practice of law today is organized around law firms ranging from small-town general practitioners to large firms specializing in federal regulations and corporate counsel, to even larger multinational firms that have increasingly complicated links to fields like finance and accounting. Lawyers have become key players in an ever-expanding globalizing technocracy – and contemporary law schools have tended to turn, not to comparative literature, but to economics and rational-actor methodologies, in an effort to produce lawyers geared to this legal services sector.

This industry continually reorients legal scholarship back toward its professional origins and, many might say, its professional obligations. Thus, at the end of the day, no matter how interested legal scholars may be in Jacques Derrida or Herman Melville, they have to return to the classroom and teach J.D. students to become lawyers. Yale Law School, where both of us have taught, is perhaps the closest to a traditional graduate program, but even at Yale some 80 percent of the student body do not intend to become legal scholars. Some of them, to be sure, will become novelists, politicians, and investment bankers, but most of them will become lawyers, and, in particular, corporate lawyers. At other schools the percentages are even higher.

This fact distinguishes graduate education in law from graduate education in almost every other area of the humanities. Relatively few law students, even at the elite law schools, actually wish to emulate their professors by becoming academics themselves. It would be a strange graduate program in history that

was populated by Ph.D. candidates with no interest at all in a scholarly career. Not so the average J.D. student.

In law schools, almost all students do not want to grow up to be like their professors, and almost all of the professors have consciously chosen not to become practicing lawyers. This creates occasional mutual incomprehension between students and teachers. Similar tensions sometimes surface between the academy and the profession when legal scholarship strays too far from the familiar work of offering expert advice and advocacy on legal questions for the benefit of the bench and bar. Until the 1970s, offering such advice was the standard practice of law professors, and in their legal scholarship they tended to view judges – especially Supreme Court Justices – as their ideal readers. The legal profession honors legal academics who continue this practice but displays considerably less esteem for the increasing number of legal academics whose work strays too far from this paradigm – and members of the bench and bar are not shy in saying so.

For example, a decade ago Judge Harry Edwards of the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, himself a former legal academic, complained of the “growing disjunction” between what law professors write in scholarly journals and what lawyers and judges expect from them. Legal academics, he lamented, have become less like their colleagues in the bench and bar and more like their colleagues in the rest of the university: increasingly, they write about things likely to interest only their academic colleagues at peer institutions. Yet despite Edwards’s qualms, basic features of American legal education – including the fact that most law students are destined for the profession and not the academy – continuously reorient the

study of law back toward a set of traditional professional concerns. If this were not so, the disjunction Edwards complains of would be far greater than it is.

Law’s prescriptivism is a second major reason why legal studies resists becoming a branch of the humanities. Compared to their peers in the humanities, law professors generally demand that each piece of scholarship offer some account, however nebulous, of its practical implications: they want to know how a new theory will affect public policy and particularly how it might justify a change in the law. “Now that you’ve told me about Deleuze and Guattari,” a colleague will say, “what does this have to do with telecommunications law?” The demand that legal scholarship cash out into policy prescriptions deeply circumscribes the legal imagination and the permissible boundaries of legal scholarship, while simultaneously reorienting legal scholarship toward legal practice and policy science.

We do not wish to exaggerate. Much legal scholarship today is barely distinguishable from political or literary theory. But such analysis, however distant from legal doctrine it may appear, is always understood to have consequences either for the reform or for the legitimation of existing legal institutions. When scholars seek to treat law as a cultural or aesthetic object, much as one might do in art history, their colleagues in the academy inevitably want to know how the work furthers debates about the choice and interpretation of legal norms. If a scholar responds that he or she had no intention of doing anything of the sort, the work is likely to be judged irrelevant or ‘not law.’

In sum, ‘humanists,’ however defined, may be welcomed into the company of professional legal scholars – but they are

welcomed with the understanding that the humanities are not central to the legal academy's future. One sometimes sees at elite law schools seminars on subjects that would fit comfortably in graduate school humanities departments, but these seminars are possible because most law professors continue to teach the traditional skills of legal argument with their strongly prescriptive orientation. The latter practice subsidizes the former. Rather than celebrating the humanities, as Hand had hoped, the legal profession either enjoys or tolerates them – but only as long as it can afford them.

What, then, is the long-term future of the law as part of the humanities?

In one respect, the law will never abandon the humanities for the simple reason that law is rhetorical through and through. The work that practicing lawyers do today has much in common with the lessons of classical rhetoric taught centuries ago in the great humanist academies of Ancient Greece and Rome. It is no accident that Chaim Perleman, the coauthor of *The New Rhetoric*, a classic in the field first published in 1969, was also a legal theorist, or that Stanley Fish, the well-known literary critic, has more recently taken delight in studying, and manipulating, the rhetorical tropes of contemporary American legal theory.

Nevertheless, despite law's rhetorical features, law will never fully embrace the humanities, and law will never be a fully humanist subject – precisely because law's use of rhetoric is to legitimate particular acts of political power. That reality increasingly requires legal scholars to adopt technocratic forms of discourse that draw upon the social and natural sciences rather than the humanities.

Then too, there has always been something puzzling about law's encounter

with the humanities. Hand may wax eloquent about what lawyers can learn from the great humanists of the past and how the humanities can enrich the lawyer's moral imagination, but these hopes must confront the harsh reality that there has always been a dehumanizing tendency in legal education. Traditionally, the first year of legal education discourages sentimentality – it shows in case after case in which the poor and defenseless are caught in the web of legal doctrine that legal doctrines have their own logic; so to simply bemoan the results as unjust is no argument. A 'good lawyer' is a rigorous thinker who does not waste time denouncing injustice at the expense of legal analysis. It is only the insufficiently rigorous and well trained, whom legal education has inadequately 'disciplined,' who think that the solution to a legal problem is resolved by asking which result is more just. Even scholars who believe it important to emphasize issues of justice are careful to instill analytical rigor and skepticism in their charges. They, too, seek to distinguish what is law from what is right.

The aggressive and unsentimental nature of legal education, many think, has real consequences later in the careers of those trained in American law schools. A debate now raging through the legal academy concerns the work of Justice Department lawyers in the Office of Legal Counsel, several of them drawn from the highest reaches of the elite legal academy, who drafted memoranda for the Bush administration that narrowly and legalistically defined torture so that they could assert that American interrogators were not perpetrating it. These same memoranda forcefully argued that the president as the commander in chief had virtually absolute powers to conduct warfare; therefore, neither congression-

al statutes nor international agreements barring torture could restrict his authority.

Legal academics now debate whether these lawyers were simply doing their professional duty by representing their clients or, on the contrary, were betraying their professional commitments in the deepest sense. Here it is useful to return to Holmes, that most iconic of figures in American law. Holmes once suggested that his epitaph should read: "Here lies a supple tool of power."¹¹ He also wrote to Harold Laski, "If my fellow citizens want to go to Hell I will help them. It's my job."¹² Hand also told an oft-quoted anecdote about shouting out to Holmes, as they were departing company, "Well, sir, good-bye. Do justice." Holmes sharply replied, "That is not my job. My job is to play the game according to the rules."¹³

One wonders whether Holmes would have been at all shocked by the Office of Legal Counsel's torture memos or would have seen them simply as quotidian examples of lawyers' stock in trade – coming up with arguments to justify whatever their clients would like to do. One equally wonders whether Hand would have been taken aback by these memos, and whether he seriously believed that exposure to the works of Plato or Montaigne might have helped prevent these memos, or, at the very least, led their authors to leaven their

11 Quoting Holmes, Yosai Rogat, "The Judge as Spectator," *University of Chicago Law Review* 31 (1964): 213, 249–250.

12 "Letter of March 4, 1920," in Mark De Wolfe Howe, ed., *The Holmes-Laski Letters*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), 249.

13 Harry C. Shriver, *What Gusto: Stories and Anecdotes About Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes* (Potomac, Md.: Fox Hills Press, 1970), 10.

lawyerly arguments with greater moral concern.

Holmes was a notably well-read man, but we have little doubt that he would have scoffed at the idea that reading literature or engaging in the humanities would have had the edificatory effect that Hand seemed to advocate. He would have insisted that acquaintance with Homer and Shakespeare would not have changed what the ambitious young lawyers in the Office of Legal Counsel wrote to please those in power. Even a torturer can love a sonnet, or, as we learned during World War II, even a Nazi can thrill to Wilhelm Furtwangler conducting Beethoven.

At the same time, Hand's admonition to study the humanities may have been motivated, at least in part, by a sort of cultural elitism; in particular, his concerns about the ambitious and grasping parvenus who were invading the legal profession of his day. Hand may have invoked the humanities primarily to defend the values of the traditional legal establishment. (There is an obvious analogy to the development of English as a subject matter to civilize the children of the working class who were entering universities for the first time.)

The political meaning of promoting the humanities in law has changed in half a century, and along with it the power and influence of the humanities. Hand wrote when the humanities formed the deep roots of an imagined republic of letters in which elite lawyers believed they participated. Contemporary legal scholars like James Boyd White and Patricia Williams refer to the humanities not to uphold the values of the legal establishment, but rather to criticize those values. Contemporary law and literature scholars offer the humanities as an antidote to a form of legal professionalism that they believe

has become all too technocratic and divorced from any human values, save economic efficiency.

Does this mean that the humanities have been thoroughly routed by the forces of social science, so that they no longer play a significant role in the legal academy or the legal profession? Certainly not. Although institutional and professional constraints will continue to limit the influence of the humanities on legal studies, the law will always maintain an uneasy relationship with the humanities, as long as it remains a thoroughly rhetorical enterprise. But whether this kind of relationship will – or should – satisfy those humanists who gaze on the legal academy from the outside remains an open question.

Dagfinn Føllesdal & Michael Friedman

American philosophy in the twentieth century

In 1900, Europe was the philosophical center of the world, as it was the center for science and scholarship in all fields. America was a province – in philosophy there were few teachers and few stu-

Dagfinn Føllesdal, a Fellow of the American Academy since 1984, is Clarence Irving Lewis Professor of Philosophy at Stanford University. He has written five books, including “Rational Argumentation” (1986) and “Referential Opacity and Modal Logic” (2004). He is also coeditor of “Phenomenology and the Formal Sciences” (with Thomas M. Seebohm and Jitendra Nath Mohanty, 1991) and editor of the series “The Philosophy of W. V. Quine” (2000).

Michael Friedman, a Fellow of the American Academy since 1997, is Frederick P. Rehmus Family Professor of Humanities at Stanford University. His research interests include Kant and the history of twentieth-century philosophy, in particular, the interaction between philosophy and the exact sciences from Kant through the logical empiricists. Among his publications are “Kant and the Exact Sciences” (1992), “Reconsidering Logical Positivism” (1999), “A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger” (2000), and “Dynamics of Reason” (2001).

© 2006 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

dents. It was to Europe one went for advanced study of philosophy, and some of the main American philosophers, such as William James, eagerly did so.

However, some influence had begun to flow in the opposite direction as well. James’s *Principles of Psychology* (1890) was widely studied in Europe and was a major influence on the young Edmund Husserl when he started to develop phenomenology. Charles Sanders Peirce’s logical work also became well-known in Europe, primarily because of the attention Ernst Schroeder gave it in his important *Vorlesungen ueber die Algebra der Logik* (1890 – 1905).

Now, one hundred years later, the situation has changed dramatically. America has more philosophers and more philosophy students than do all the countries in Europe combined. But mere numbers are no good indication of quality. Two better indicators are where students go and where one prefers to publish. Students from Europe and the rest of the world now go to America to do their graduate work. The American Ph.D. programs are known to give a broad and thorough education in philosophy, with great stress on written work. Unlike their European counterparts, American students hand in written work several times a term and receive detailed com-

ments from their teachers. European universities are too understaffed to give similar attention and feedback to their students, and they often lack teaching staff in subfields that in America are required for accreditation. Not only in philosophy, but in all disciplines, the American system of graduate education is one of the main factors in explaining America's increasing dominance in science and scholarship.

That students go to America to study philosophy, however, may attest more to the quality of American higher education than to the quality of American philosophy. Another indicator of quality, though, is that one has to read English in order to have access to the best scholarly contributions and write English in order to be read by the best scholars. English has taken over as the main language of scholarship, in philosophy as in other fields. That English has replaced German and French as the primary language of science and scholarship reflects, it seems, a corresponding move of most of the research activity.

What happened in the twentieth century that transformed America from a province to a center for philosophy?

We shall focus on two interrelated developments. On the one hand, during the first third of the twentieth century, pragmatism, a philosophical tradition indigenous to the United States, made rapid strides and became a worldwide movement. On the other hand, many leading European philosophers immigrated to the United States following the Nazi seizure of power and continuing through World War II and beyond. These immigrants interacted fruitfully with the American tradition of pragmatism, resulting in the characteristic shape of late twentieth-century American philosophy.

Although pragmatism was native to the United States, the three classical American pragmatists – Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey – all had significant roots in European philosophy. There, late nineteenth-century developments in logic mixed with parallel developments in psychology and psychophysics in a particularly exciting way. And it was precisely this mixture that stimulated both the development of American pragmatism and the main European movement that interacted with it during and after World War II – namely, the Vienna Circle of logical empiricists led by Moritz Schlick.

Peirce made fundamental contributions to the new symbolic, or mathematical, logic that would eventually receive its definitive formulation in the work of the German mathematician and philosopher Gottlob Frege, now often considered the 'father' of analytic philosophy. Unlike Frege, however, Peirce was also deeply immersed in the new 'historical' sciences dealing with time and its directionality: geology, paleontology, cosmology and cosmogony, psychology, and Darwinian evolutionary biology. Peirce argued that these sciences could in no way be comprehended within a scientific and philosophical framework premised on necessary causal connections but instead required a radically new probabilistic, or 'tychistic,' standpoint in which chance plays an irreducible role. Therefore, he concluded, a generalized form of evolution by natural selection was the only possible source of uniformity, and thus lawlikeness, in nature. Peirce's first formulation of a pragmatic theory of meaning and inquiry, in his famous paper "How to Make our Ideas Clear" (1878), was thus inseparably connected with the characteristically late nineteenth-century vision of both nature and human sci-

entific inquiry as developing historically in accordance with Darwinian evolutionary processes.

This broader philosophical vision was shared by the Austrian physicist, psychophysicist, and ‘historico-critical’ analyst of science Ernst Mach, who also played a central role in the development of logical empiricism. Indeed, when Schlick was called to the University of Vienna in 1922, he took over the Chair for the Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences earlier held by Mach, and what we now call the Vienna Circle officially referred to itself as the *Verein Ernst Mach*. What most impressed Schlick and the other members of the Circle was Mach’s critical analysis of the Newtonian concepts of absolute space, time, and motion – an analysis that played a crucial role in Einstein’s articulation of the theory of relativity in the early years of the twentieth century. Mach’s own scientific and philosophical ambitions were quite different, however, and were rather directed at securing a new kind of unity of the sciences – especially the physical, psychological, and biological sciences – in his specifically late nineteenth-century context. And, for Mach, this new kind of psychophysical unity was also intimately connected with a biological and evolutionary conception of scientific method.

Peirce’s close friend and collaborator at Harvard, William James, took a keen interest in late nineteenth-century German psychology and physiology. In the 1880s, James had struck up a friendship and correspondence with Mach, and it appears that the psychophysical doctrine now known as neutral monism – according to which the same underlying stuff constitutes both consciousness and the physical world – was, in fact, a product of their correspondence. For James, this doctrine began to emerge in the famous

chapter on “The Stream of Thought” in his first great work, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), and it reached its culmination in his later conception of ‘radical empiricism’ and ‘pure experience,’ as expounded in such essays as “Does Consciousness Exist?” (1904). Here James posits the fundamental stuff of reality as a constantly changing and evolving flux of ‘pure experience,’ whose evolution, moreover, is necessarily driven by interests. This resulted in a pragmatic conception of the aims and methods of scientific inquiry closely allied with the views of Peirce and Mach. James also strikingly extended this conception to moral and religious belief in such works as *The Will to Believe* (1897) and *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). In the end, both human scientific inquiry and human spiritual progress are aspects of a single evolutionary process, governed pragmatically by selective human interests and values.

But it was John Dewey who was destined to complete the development of the pragmatist movement and make it a dominant force within American intellectual culture and beyond. Dewey had an early interest in both psychophysiology and philosophy, studying logic with Peirce and learning about Hegel from George Morris during his graduate studies at Johns Hopkins. Dewey began to have serious influence on American intellectual culture following his appointment as chair of the Department of Philosophy, Psychology, and Education at the University of Chicago in 1894 – where he also participated actively in Jane Addams’s Hull House and thus became deeply involved with social and economic problems as well. Together with his colleagues at Chicago, he assembled the volume *Studies in Logical Theory* (1903), which they dedicated to William James. In 1938, Dewey’s lifelong

interest in what he called ‘logic’ and ‘inquiry’ culminated in the publication of *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*.

In harmony with the ‘pragmatism’ of James – and with Mach’s conception of scientific method – Dewey saw inquiry as a developmental evolutionary process, driven by a generalization of the experimental method. Like James, he also regarded inquiry as embracing much more than the specialized experimental sciences and, accordingly, as comprehending values, norms, and interests in general. Unlike James, however, Dewey emphasized the essentially social or communal character of inquiry and, in particular, the way in which the norms and values constitutive of inquiry themselves depend on the existence of a *community* of inquirers. No such rule or norm is fixed and definitive: all are subject to correction and revision within a democratic community of free, equal, and self-consciously open-minded inquirers. It is in this way that the values of what Dewey called ‘science’ – that is, the values of inquiry – are identical with the values of progressive Western democracy. And it is precisely here that Dewey’s philosophical and political interests intersected, in 1938, with those of logical empiricism.

The most important members of the Vienna Circle, aside from Moritz Schlick, were Otto Neurath and Rudolf Carnap, and all three were caught up in the shattering events in Europe following the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. The Vienna Circle leaned distinctively to the left, and it could not survive intact. Schlick was murdered by a deranged former student in 1936. Neurath, the most politically active of the three, fled to Oxford in 1940, where he died in 1945. Carnap was a student of Frege’s before moving to Vienna in the 1920s, and the devel-

opment of modern logic left a permanent impression on his work. On this basis, he engaged in a well-known polemical exchange with Martin Heidegger in the mid-1930s (during which time Heidegger assumed the rectorship at Freiburg under the new Nazi regime). Carnap then immigrated to the United States during the winter of 1935 – 1936.

Charles Morris was instrumental in bringing Carnap to the University of Chicago in 1936. Morris, then an associate professor at Chicago, had earlier received his Ph.D. there under George Herbert Mead – who had in turn been brought to Chicago by his good friend and philosophical colleague John Dewey. Whereas Mead appealed to Dewey’s extension of pragmatism to the social sphere in creating the discipline of social psychology, Morris emphasized the social dimensions of language in creating the discipline of ‘pragmatics’ as a supplement to syntax and semantics. Morris viewed pragmatics as a natural extension of the more formal and purely logical analysis of language practiced by Carnap – a direction in which Carnap himself was also moving at the time. After meeting Carnap in Prague in 1934, Morris not only began his efforts to bring Carnap to the United States, he also became a leading participant in the *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, the official monograph series (published in English) of the logical empiricist movement in exile.

The first volume of this *Encyclopedia*, published in 1938, began with a programmatic section on the “Encyclopedia and Unified Science,” which included Dewey’s “Unity of Science as a Social Problem,” Carnap’s “Logical Foundations of the Unity of Science,” and Morris’s “Scientific Empiricism.” Following this section was “Foundations of the Theory of Signs” by Morris (where he first out-

lined his threefold conception of syntax-semantics-pragmatics) and “Foundations of Logic and Mathematics” by Carnap. Neurath was the general editor-in-chief, with Carnap and Morris as associate editors. In his introductory essay Neurath invoked the modernist Weimar vision of a return to the humanistic and scientific Enlightenment of the French *Encyclopédie*. The implication was that international and scientific cooperation, as exemplified, above all, in the global ‘republic of scientists,’ could now serve as a bulwark against the currently rising tide of nationalism and ‘metaphysical irrationalism.’

This wider implication of the *Encyclopedia* project was even more explicit in Dewey’s contribution:

At the present time the enemies of the scientific attitude are numerous and organized – much more so than appears at superficial glance. The prestige of science is indeed great, especially in the field of its external application to industry and war. In the abstract, few would come out openly and say that they were opposed to science. But this small number is no measure of the influence of those who borrow the results of science to advance by thoroughly unscientific and antiscientific methods private, class, and national interests.¹

There could be very little doubt, in 1938, who these “enemies of the scientific attitude” were supposed to be, and there can be similarly little doubt, accordingly, that what initially brought logical empiricism and American pragmatism together was a shared commitment to scientific internationalism as the best current hope for the preservation of progressive democratic values.

¹ *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), 33.

Nevertheless, this timely confluence of interests masked equally important intellectual differences – which concerned, above all, the nature of philosophy as a discipline, together with the closely related question of the status of norms and values. For Carnap, philosophy as a discipline reduced to the logical analysis of the language of science (*Wissenschaftslogik*): cognitively (or theoretically) meaningful statements were limited to the factual or synthetic sentences of the empirical natural sciences and the purely formal or analytic sentences of logic and mathematics. Thus, statements about value were not, strictly speaking, cognitively (or theoretically) meaningful at all. Carnap made a clear and sharp distinction, then, between the purely formal or analytic sentences of philosophy as *Wissenschaftslogik* and the factual or synthetic sentences of the empirical natural sciences – and a similarly sharp distinction between (theoretical) questions of fact and (practical) questions of value.

Both of these distinctions, however, were entirely foreign to pragmatism. On the one hand, the pragmatist conception of scientific epistemology was frankly and explicitly naturalistic, embodying the generalized late nineteenth-century vision of both nature and human scientific inquiry as developing in accordance with Darwinian natural selection. And, on the other hand, given this evolutionary standpoint, it was then natural to incorporate both facts and values within the single ‘selective’ or experimental process of what pragmatism called science or inquiry.

Now it was Charles Morris’s hope that his own work on the theory of linguistic signs would function as a bridge between the different philosophical movements, and, more specifically, between the socially oriented pragmatism of

Dewey and Mead and the logical analysis of language practiced by Carnap. Morris hoped that his own development of the field of pragmatics would be the key to such a bridge, and Carnap himself was quite open to this idea.

Indeed, Carnap used Morris's notion of pragmatics to refine his conception of both philosophy as a discipline and the fact/value distinction. In his mature theory of formal languages, or linguistic frameworks – first articulated in *The Logical Syntax of Language* (1934) and later developed most explicitly in “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology” (1950) – Carnap emphasized that philosophy is concerned with investigating and evaluating various alternative *proposals* for logically structuring the language of (unified) science. Within a given formal linguistic framework are (internal) questions of theoretical truth or falsity, which are settled, in accordance with the logical rules of that framework, by either formal or factual considerations. The question of which framework to adopt for the language of (unified) science, however, is not itself a theoretical question of truth or falsity. Rather, it is what Carnap now called a purely practical or pragmatic (external) question of convenience or suitability for one or another practical end, as judged, in the long run, by the practice of the scientific community itself.

Carnap deployed these distinctions, in particular, in explaining a peculiar characteristic of specifically philosophical problems – their constant liability to misunderstanding and miscommunication. Carnap thereby hoped to reform the discipline by turning philosophical attention away from the truth or falsity of competing philosophical doctrines and toward what he took to be the far more fruitful question of ‘language planning.’

While the influence of ideas from American pragmatism undoubtedly played a significant role in the development of Carnap's later view, at the same time, it is clear that a fundamental difference between his orientation and that of American pragmatism remained. For the entire point of Carnap's mature philosophy was to *persist* in a sharp distinction between formal and factual questions – both of which are adjudicable, at least in principle, on the basis of previously adopted logical rules – and practical or evaluative questions – which are adjudicable by no such rules.

So despite his lifelong passion for moral and political questions, Carnap, to the end of his life, maintained a non-cognitive, emotivist theory of value judgments: unlike properly theoretical judgments, where questions of formal or factual evidence can always be brought to bear, moral and political value judgments are, in the end, pure expressions of character and attitude, where the only devices that ultimately can be brought to bear are “persuasion, educational influence, [and] appeal.”²

Among the younger American philosophers who took a strong interest in logical empiricism in the early 1930s was Willard Van Orman Quine. After finishing a dissertation on mathematical logic at Harvard, Quine spent the academic year 1932 – 1933 abroad in Vienna, Prague, and Warsaw before returning to Harvard for the rest of his academic life. In Vienna he met Schlick and other members of the Vienna Circle, and in Prague he spent six intensive weeks learning from Carnap about the new scientific philosophy. As Quine himself

2 Rudolf Carnap, “Intellectual Autobiography,” in Paul Arthur Schilpp, *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1963), 81.

tells us, "It was my first really considerable experience of being intellectually fired by a living teacher rather than by a dead book."³

Though Carnap's deep influence is evident throughout the whole of Quine's subsequent philosophical career, Quine was also responsible for the eclipse of Carnap's particular conception of logical analysis within the Anglo-American tradition. In particular, Quine came increasingly to doubt the fundamental distinction between the purely formal, logical, or analytic sentences constituting the rules of a Carnapian linguistic framework and the contentful, empirical, or synthetic sentences, which the rules of the framework then adjudicated. Quine first expressed his skepticism in print in his famous paper "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951), which struck the world of analytic philosophy like a thunderbolt.

An important part of the background for this paper was the last major representative of classical American pragmatism, Clarence Irving Lewis, who taught at Harvard from 1920 to his retirement in 1953. Lewis acted as Quine's mentor during the early 1930s, when Quine was a student. Although their relationship was very far from smooth, it was Lewis, among the American pragmatists, whose views were closest to those the logical empiricists in Europe were developing simultaneously. He was the first thinker within the pragmatist tradition to attempt to do justice to early twentieth-century developments in logic, the foundations of mathematics, and mathematical physics; and his response to these developments bore important

similarities to Carnap's mature theory of linguistic frameworks. In *Mind and the World Order* (1929) Lewis developed what he called "conceptualistic pragmatism," a theory that was explicitly intended to add a pragmatic theory of the (logico-mathematical) a priori to the thought of Peirce, James, and Dewey. All a priori truth in the exact sciences is analytic in nature, insofar as logico-mathematical concepts are rigorously defined in an abstract deductive system. In applying such abstract concepts to the empirical world, however, we have a choice of which such system of axiomatic definitions to adopt, and the choice of any particular such system is made on instrumental or pragmatic grounds.

Thus, what Lewis called a "conceptual framework" is similar to what Carnap called a "linguistic framework," and Lewis's central idea that the choice of a particular conceptual framework is then made on instrumental or pragmatic grounds is also similar to Carnap's views. Quine, for his part, appears simply to have assimilated Carnap and Lewis on this point, as suggested by the concluding paragraph of "Two Dogmas":

Carnap, Lewis, and others take a pragmatic stand on the question of choosing between language forms, scientific frameworks; but their pragmatism leaves off at the imagined boundary between the analytic and the synthetic. In repudiating such a boundary I espouse a more thorough pragmatism. Each man is given a scientific heritage plus a continuing barrage of sensory stimulation; and the considerations which guide him in warping his scientific heritage to fit his continuing sensory promptings are, where rational, pragmatic.⁴

3 W. V. Quine, "Autobiography," *The Philosophy of W. V. Quine*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn and Paul Arthur Schilpp (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986), 12.

4 Reprinted in W. V. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), 46.

Leaving aside the legitimacy of Quine's straightforward assimilation of Carnap and Lewis, it is clear that Quine's 'more thorough pragmatism' was indeed more attuned, on precisely this point, with the earlier pragmatism of James and Dewey. By rejecting Carnap's sharp distinction in principle between logico-mathematical (analytic) and empirical (synthetic) truth, Quine opened the way for a fundamental reconsideration of the idea that philosophy as a discipline is limited to logical analysis.

More generally, in the concluding section of his paper, entitled "Empiricism without the Dogmas," Quine developed an alternative, holistic version of empiricism in which the totality of our scientific knowledge is pictured as a vast 'web of belief' with sensory experience impinging only at the periphery. When faced with a 'recalcitrant experience' conflicting with our system as a whole, we then have a choice of where to make revisions. We may choose to revise relatively low-level beliefs located close to the periphery, or, in an extreme case, we may choose to revise some of our most central beliefs, including even the statements of logic and mathematics. Therefore, since no statement is immune to revision, "it becomes folly to seek a boundary between synthetic statements, which hold contingently on experience, and analytic statements, which hold come what may."⁵ This holistic vision of science, predicated on a rejection of Carnap's central sharp distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, has been extraordinarily influential in the later development of Anglo-American philosophy. Quine himself devoted a large part of his career to its successive articulation and refinement – most influentially, perhaps, in *Word and Object* (1960).

5 Ibid., 43.

One important outcome of Quine's less restrictive conception of philosophy – and one that would certainly have been congenial to James and Dewey – was a blurring of Carnap's sharp distinction between theoretical and practical questions, so that substantive theoretical means could once again address moral and political questions. Indeed, one spectacular fruit of Quine's 'more thorough pragmatism' was clearing the ground for a remarkable revival of substantive moral and political theory. In 1971 his younger Harvard colleague John Rawls published *A Theory of Justice*, which fundamentally transformed moral and political theorizing within the world of academic philosophy and beyond.

It is clear that Rawls drew significant inspiration from Quine's critique, although Quine himself had only envisioned a naturalized and liberalized version of logical empiricist scientific epistemology as the result of his critique of Carnap and, accordingly, did not question Carnap's austere conception of the noncognitive character of moral and political judgments. Interestingly, however, the moral and political theory actually developed by Rawls turned out to owe very little to the American pragmatist tradition. Rather, as Rawls himself explains, his central idea was "to generalize and carry to a higher order of abstraction the traditional theory of the social contract as represented by Locke, Rousseau, and Kant," resulting in a theory that is "highly Kantian in nature."⁶

Rawls's leading idea, in fact, was to use the social contract tradition to challenge the utilitarian approach to moral and po-

6 See the preface to John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), xviii; for Rawls's debt to Quine on language, see xx, and on justification, see 507.

litical questions that had become dominant within the English-speaking world since Bentham and Mill. Rather than evaluating the rightness and justice of social and political arrangements purely in reference to the net sum of their actual consequences (in terms of happiness or welfare) for the individuals involved, we instead imagine an idealized situation of choice in which hypothetical individuals deliberate, and attempt to reach consensus, about standards for assessing social and political arrangements. These deliberations take place behind a 'veil of ignorance,' where no hypothetical individual knows which position in society he or she will actually occupy.

Rawls argues that in such a situation each individual would choose a paradigmatically liberal societal arrangement, where, in the first place, certain basic rights and liberties – such as the right to political participation, civil liberties, and equality of opportunity – are inviolable. More generally, each person would insist on an equal right to the most extensive total system of basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all. In the second place, against the background of such equal rights and liberties, social and economic inequalities are then to be arranged so that they are both to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, and attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.

Such an account provides a much better articulation and defense of liberal societal arrangements, Rawls thinks, than anything utilitarianism might offer. Like any good analytic philosopher, Rawls does not merely claim that his view is better but also presents arguments for this claim. However, how can one give arguments in the moral and political sphere, which some logical empiricists,

as we have seen, regarded as entirely beyond rational discussion?

Here Rawls makes a second major contribution by proposing a method for adjudicating between competing moral and political theories. This method of 'reflective equilibrium' expanded to moral and political philosophy the views on justification in the sciences and in mathematics and logic that some of the pragmatists had anticipated and that Quine and his Harvard colleague Nelson Goodman had further developed. It consists in going back and forth between our general ethical principles and our ordinary intuitive judgments of right and wrong until we reach an equilibrium. During this process both our principles and our intuitions become modified, so that our initial intuitions eventually become 'considered judgments.' In contrast to the utilitarian method of calculating the extremely complex – and thus effectively unknowable – practical consequences of liberal democratic social arrangements, Rawls instead appeals to basic ideas about the freedom, equality, and rationality of moral persons and political citizens, from which the desirability of such social arrangements then follows by a relatively simple and transparent deliberative argument.

Rawls's ideas have been extraordinarily influential – within Anglo-American moral and political philosophy, of course, but also in political science, law, and economics. Largely because of Rawls, moral and political philosophy became a very active field in philosophy toward the end of the twentieth century. Some of the most important recent developments include contractarian approaches to ethics quite generally, philosophical and interpretive works exploring the viability of Kantian moral theory specifically, new

insights connected with the utilitarian and empiricist traditions, and the articulation of more skeptical stances toward any overarching system of moral principles. More directly responding to Rawls's own work, Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1971) criticized Rawlsian liberalism on behalf of political libertarianism, and Ronald Dworkin's *A Matter of Principle* (1985) provided a liberal philosophical perspective on law and jurisprudence. Finally, these developments led also to the rise of applied or practical ethics – including biomedical ethics, legal ethics, environmental ethics, and business ethics – which took on an increasingly important role in philosophical education.

Before we end this survey, we will comment briefly on the much-discussed split between the analytic and continental philosophical traditions. The split is not between analytic philosophy and classical continental philosophy. Kant and the classical German philosophers have always been studied in the United States; indeed, they are a required part of the curriculum in American universities, along with Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. Rather, the split separated analytic philosophy from late twentieth-century continental philosophy, especially the dominant trend in both German and French philosophy most influenced by Martin Heidegger.

We noted that a well-known polemical exchange between Carnap and Heidegger occurred during the Nazi seizure of power. Moreover, it was the migration of intellectuals from Europe to the United States from the 1930s and onward that resulted in the anomalous situation of philosophy diverging into two separate traditions – one more analytic and scientific, the other more historical and

speculative – with little contact between them. After the intellectual migration, parallel splits developed within individual countries as well. Continental philosophy acquired an important foothold in the United States, while in several European countries younger philosophers established their own associations for analytic philosophy, which they united in the European Association for Analytic Philosophy.

Fortunately, this anomalous divergence between two separate philosophical traditions has recently shown signs of coming to an end. During the past forty years philosophers on both sides have started to read one another and have discovered that they are working on related problems where they can learn from one another's insights. Analytic philosophers have recognized that continental philosophers are also discussing problems concerning knowledge and justification, moral obligation, the character of a good society, the nature of consciousness, communication and interpretation, and so on – although in another terminology and in another setting. Continental philosophers, for their part, have learned that most contributions to analytic philosophy are part of an ongoing philosophical discussion extending back to the same European roots that continue to nourish us all.

An enduring legacy of the development of analytic philosophy in America is its emphasis on logic and argument. Although Carnap's conception of philosophy as concerned exclusively with the logical analysis of the language of science now appears – to just about everyone – as unduly restrictive, it arose, as we have seen, against the background of pressing concerns about the spread of irrationality in the 1930s and 1940s. Both logical empiricists and American pragmatists were intensely concerned with

what philosophers could do to counteract this surrender to rhetoric and irrationality, and they stressed, as a consequence, the need to always ask for arguments and evidence. When we are invited to accept a view or an attitude, we should not be taken in by rhetoric but always ask: What reasons are there to believe this? Likewise, if we try to bring our fellow human beings to adopt our own point of view, we should not do so through either coercion or rhetoric. Instead, we should try to induce others to accept or reject our point of view on the basis of their *own* reflections. This can only be achieved through rational argument, in which the other person is recognized as an autonomous and rational creature.

Such an emphasis is important not just in respect to individual morality but also, even more, in the social and political sphere. By emphasizing the decisive role that argument and justification should play, we can reduce the influence of political leaders and fanatics who spread messages that do not stand up under critical scrutiny but nevertheless often have the power to seduce masses of people into intolerance and violence. Rational argument and rational dialogue are thus of the utmost importance for a well-functioning democracy. To educate people in these activities is perhaps the most important task of philosophy in the world today.

Poem by Peg Boyers

Unsent Dedication

for Martin Heidegger—

This is *your* book.

You know this and do not know.
My book, but *yours*.

I cover my tracks, your tracks,
but the forest wind blows the cover,

fickle dirt over the path,
our path:

those days in Marburg,
the nights.

Meetings in the clearing.
Lichtung—

the light there in darkness, sudden as thought.
Your thought

the current that charges, my body
conducting the charge.

Remember?

The touch that taught meaning. Taught light.

Your tongue in my mouth.
My hunger for that. Word and flesh.

Appetite that grew with feeding
still grows.

Black wood of yearning.
Compulsion for light. *Lichtzwang*.

We'd do anything for it.
For clarity, we said.

As if thought could take us there,
our naked thinking-together

in the forbidden wood.
You the master, I the kneeling apprentice,

happy, submissive – unhappy
outgrowing the role.

We lay there, whispering secrets on the forest floor:
you lied, said you needed me.

Undaunted little Jewess at home in your rule.
My ruler. My measure. My Leader

leading me deep
through the thicket to Being,

inversions and reversals
in a camouflage of words.

The thrill of slow revelation,
strip-tease of layers timed to delay the blast

at the gnarled heart in the middle.
The muddle of knowing and needing-to-know.

Ideas better than sex, better still with.
You taught me. To see and not to see.

The mountain hut at Todtnauberg your classroom.
Tod –

Death, the hidden fact that didn't fit the system.
Being and Un-being, the veils you threw over it all,

secret goose step, deft pavane.
My dancing Rector, my brainy nature boy,

my peasant in lederhosen mit Fraulein
on the climb in britches and alpine hat,

rubbing arnica on our muscles,
sore from hiking, dodging thorns.

We were good at that
so long ago, and you are still,

now, where you hide, in the forest,
married, yet alone.

The clearing's grown over.
But the light at the center still draws me.

Here is my book, my German translation,
the antique title for you, O Philosopher:

Vita Activa –
the active life built on the thinking life.

You act as if thinking sufficed.
Life thought, but not lived.

Here is my book with no dedication.

*How could I dedicate it to you,
my teacher,
to whom I remained faithful
and unfaithful,
and both in love?*

*I kiss your brow and your eyes,
which I miss yet despise
and kiss again –*

Hannah

Peg Boyers is executive editor of "Salmagundi" and the author of a book of poetry, "Hard Bread" (2002). Her poetry has appeared in "The New Republic," "The Paris Review," and "Ploughshares," among others.

© 2006 by Peg Boyers

Fiction by Adam Braver

A death in the family

At the moment that young Ronnie Kennealy was struck and killed on Route 111 in a hit-and-run accident, Lupe Hernandez was hiding in one of the dozens of old bathtubs littering the sloping field that dead-ended into the roadway called Route 246. Her father worked for Mr. Kennealy, hauling the old bathtubs from condemned houses, helping Mr. Kennealy refinish them, and then delivering them to new owners. As Mr. Kennealy's sole employee, Lupe's father worked long hours but never complained, glad to have work that respectfully placed food on his table for his baby boy, his wife, and his seven-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Lupe. Dave Kennealy had taken him on a year ago, and while it would

be wrong to say that he treated Renaldo Hernandez as a member of his family, he did do what was becoming a rare sight these days between laborers and employers: he treated him with respect. Dave Kennealy didn't mind the days when Renaldo had to bring Lupe along with him. "She can play all she wants," he said, "so long as she doesn't stop you from working. And that you make sure that she plays safe."

On the afternoon that Ronnie Kennealy was struck and killed on Route 111, Lupe Hernandez was busy planning for her first communion. It had been on the forefront of her mind a few months after turning seven. She had already decided on a communion outfit, a hybrid of one seen in a storefront window in Carver and one from a magazine that her mother had been keeping for several months. Lupe could picture herself in the embroidered organza dress, with the bolero buttoned just below her neck. She was still deciding whether to wear a veil, but she had concluded with certainty that the crown, along with her lace gloves and matching bag, would also be trimmed in organza. Driving with her father to Kennealy's Antique Tubs, Lupe had tried to engage her father about which style of shoe she should wear, contemplating material and toe

Adam Braver is the author of "Mr. Lincoln's Wars: A Novel in Thirteen Stories" (2003) and "Divine Sarah" (2004). His work has been selected for the Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers program, the Border's Original Voices program, the Book Sense 76 list, as well as many other year-end lists. He lives in Rhode Island, where he is on the faculty of the Creative Writing department at Roger Williams University. His newest novel, "Crows Over the Wheatfield," will be published in June 2006.

© 2006 by Adam Braver

exposure. He told her that he was thinking about how to keep enough money to last them to the end of the month and wondering why a seven-year-old should opine on such things. Then he looked over and tried to raise a smile as an act of contrition, saying that she should save that question for her mother – she was better at those things.

From inside the dirty old tub, Lupe heard her father calling her name; her breathing spooked and echoed against the stained porcelain walls. His voice became louder and louder, but his presence did not seem closer. He called her name over and over with the cadence of trampling feet, his words trotting faster, until the rhythm took on the urgency of a desperate run. Finally she popped her head up with a grin. She waved as though the victor in a backyard game. Renaldo was running fast toward her through the obstacle course of tubs, with Mr. Kennealy a slow stride behind. “O mi padre en el cielo,” he said. “Mi padre.” He told her he thought she was dead, while modulating his anger to a calm voice. Renaldo hugged her both in thankfulness and irritation. Dave Kennealy stood behind, shaking his head. Slightly disgusted at what some parents will allow.

Dave Kennealy wouldn't hear of his son's death for several hours. Renaldo had left with his little girl shortly after finding her in the tub, wanting to get home a bit early because he feared that the early nightfall might frighten his wife. Dave decided to stay at the shop for another hour or so, hoping to get this one Mott clawfoot ready for a contractor who was pushing Dave, as his client was pushing him.

Business had been going through the roof these days. The recent homebuying craze spurred on a remodeling craze, and

it seemed like everybody wanted to strip the seventies remodels from their new homes and replace them with fixtures that showed off the vintage era, even if they were not as reliable as modern fixtures. And so it seemed as though everybody's spare bathroom needed a vintage tub. It wasn't that long ago that he had been contemplating taking his supply of baths to the dump to make room for objects that actually moved from the salvage shop. But now demand was out of this world. In fact, he recently had changed his business plan to exclusively sell old tubs. It was fairly simple now. People knew where to take them. And people knew where to find them.

It wasn't quite what a kid growing up on the east side of Providence might have expected out of his life. As a fourth-generation New Englander, his father had spent most of his years as an attorney for a downtown business that no longer existed, before taking an appointment at City Hall to protect the business dealings of those who ran the city. Dave had received a high-priced and coveted secondary prep school education at Moses Brown, where after graduating with honors, he headed up the street to Brown University after rejecting Yale and Dartmouth. But he didn't last too long, too seduced by the freedom to get off the track on his own and, as with the times, eschew the values and expectations of the social class that had embraced him. He moved out to Carver where he met his wife MaryAnn, and they lived as nouveau hippies, until they realized that they didn't really like hippies. A series of earthen jobs honed his craft skills. By chance landing he ended up in the salvage business, where he found crassness and strength to be the defining characteristics for success. His previous erudition and free-living lifestyle now metamorphosed into the hard-

ened New Englander, an edge that made him almost indistinguishable to anybody he had grown up with (although true to his heritage, he was running one of the most lucrative small businesses in the region). Dave's mother accused him of playing working class, forever telling him that one day he would find the need for his graces and education, and on that day he would be thankful for being born who he was.

Dave had really wanted to get the tub finished tonight. It was a five-foot French double-ended clawfoot that, along with the refinishing, was going to net him about three thousand dollars. Renaldo had already acid-etched the interior and sandblasted the exterior. It just needed to be primed and painted. If MaryAnn could keep things down at home tonight, then Dave would have the time to let the primer dry and begin the initial painting. He applied the primer in short, smooth brush strokes, imagining that he were the original craftsman of this tub, trying to instill the pride of workmanship into each stroke. A week later he would curse that dedication for not allowing him to pick up the phone, even when it rang three times in a row, seven rings for each try. By the time he saw his son Ronnie, the boy had been dead for nearly three hours. If Dave had just stopped his work to pick up the phone, he would have been able to tell his son a final I love you while the boy's brain was still living enough to hear. Instead he would say it to a zipped plastic bag in a chilled room, with his arms hugged slightly to his chest and his wife's fingers clawed into his shoulder. Then he would go back to his shop and sandblast the shit out of that tub, removing every inch of primer.

The police officer had told Dave Kennealy that it was an accident that took

his son. The officer apologized, said it was a shame, that eight years seemed barely enough to get your footing on this earth. But one thing Dave knew was that there were no such things as accidents. Even being born to privilege is no accident.

Hopelessness is when the anger is truly unleashed. When the known world is just out of reach. When you wake from dreams to find they were only dreams. When you replay every minute of the preceding day and realize that one step in any other direction likely would have put you in some place better today. And you don't want to think about it. Don't want to feel it. And it won't be for another month before Dave commands his attorney to go out after the driver who killed his son, and another three months before he cashes in all his family chits by calling on everyone his father knows to make this lawsuit the biggest story that has hit Rhode Island in years. Only after he makes sure that it is all over the TV news and a regular feature of the *Providence Journal*, that the world knows that this is no accident, will he start to ease his sense of helplessness. But until then, all Dave Kennealy wants to do is stab his hand into the center of the earth, and grab the axis and yank it out until the world stops turning.

William B. Quandt

*on the peace process
in the Middle East*

George W. Bush never set out to be the president who would remake the Middle East. During his campaign for the presidency in 2000, he spoke of pursuing a “humble” foreign policy and expressed doubt about nation building. According to one of his cabinet members, Paul O’Neill, Bush was deeply skeptical that anything could be done to improve prospects for peace in the Middle East: in a January 2001 National Security Council meeting, he reportedly said, “If the two sides [Israel and Palestine] don’t want

William B. Quandt, a Fellow of the American Academy since 2004, is Edward R. Stettinius Professor of Politics at the University of Virginia. As a member of the National Security Council staff, he was active in the negotiations leading to the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. His publications include “Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967” (third edition, 2005) and “Between Ballots and Bullets: Algeria’s Transition from Authoritarianism” (1998).

© 2006 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

peace, there’s no way we can force them.”

How, then, did Bush become the first president to explicitly support the creation of a Palestinian state?

Part of the answer, of course, is 9/11. While Bush and his closest advisers strenuously deny that the stalemate between Israelis and Palestinians had anything to do with the Al-Qaeda attack on the United States, or with the broader phenomenon of Islamist radicalism, it is nonetheless noteworthy that after 9/11 the administration began to unfold a policy seemingly designed to give moderate Palestinians some hope of achieving a state of their own in the West Bank and Gaza.

During Bush’s first term, however, little was actually done to advance the President’s so-called two-state solution – with a new state, Palestine, peacefully coexisting with Israel – because Bush lacked confidence in Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat. Indeed, he made it clear that until Arafat was gone, he would not be willing to promote a peace settlement.

Bush and his advisers were not the only ones who thought that Arafat was the primary obstacle to peace. After the failure of President Clinton’s intensive attempt to broker an Israeli-Palestinian peace in 2000, apparently Clinton himself told Bush on January 20, 2001, that Arafat was to blame for the negotiations’ collapse. Clinton’s chief negotiator, Dennis Ross, expressed the same sentiments in *The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace*, a voluminous account of the negotiations of the 1990s.

Not all of the American participants in the negotiations shared the Clinton-Ross view. Robert Malley, the Middle East expert on Clinton’s National Security Council staff, argued in an August 9,

2001, *New York Review of Books* article that Arafat alone was not at fault for the failure of the 'peace process.' His boss, Sandy Berger, also assigned blame to a number of different parties, while another writer went so far as to place much of the blame on Ross himself.

And one recent publication claimed the divergent negotiating styles and subcultures of Palestinians and Israelis were key reasons for their inability to reach agreement. My own view is that all of the leaders – Clinton, then-Israeli Prime Minister Aharon Barak, and Arafat – contributed to the failure through tactical and strategic choices that – though understandable in a narrow sense – showed more sensitivity to domestic concerns than with the imperatives of statecraft. Nonetheless, the Clinton-Ross view formed the Washington consensus about Arafat, preventing any real progress toward peace during Bush's first term.

Arafat died on November 11, 2004, in somewhat murky circumstances – many Palestinians believe to this day that he was poisoned. His successor, chosen in a relatively free election in January 2005, was Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazin), a moderate and an elder statesman who denounced the use of violence by Palestinians and spoke convincingly of peace with Israel. With his rise to power, many were convinced that Israeli-Palestinian peace was once again a possibility. After all, if Arafat had been the main obstacle, nothing would prevent the revival of the peace process now.

Since Arafat's death, some progress has been made. For example, the level of violence between Israelis and Palestinians in 2005 and early 2006 has dropped significantly. Bush also held a cordial meeting with the new Palestinian president, during which he spoke in strong terms about the importance of a

viable Palestinian state, going so far as to imply that such a state should have borders that approximate the 1949 armistice lines, i.e., nearly all of the West Bank and Gaza, a condition totally rejected by Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Despite such intriguing hints of continued diplomatic activity, the basic story by late 2005 involved a new Israeli determination to act unilaterally, not to negotiate. Israel's decision to withdraw from Gaza in August 2005, which some hoped would begin a new round of peacemaking, seemed instead to reflect Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's vision of the future – one that does not involve a negotiated peace with the Palestinians. Rather, his plan was to have Israel establish "facts on the ground" that both sides would eventually come to accept as the new reality. These "facts" include a barrier that Israel is rushing to complete, which will define a *de facto* line of separation between Israeli-controlled areas and Palestinian population centers. On the Israeli side of the barrier, which will include at least 10 to 15 percent of the West Bank and most of east Jerusalem, settlement activity shows no signs of abating. As for Jerusalem, Sharon said many times that there is nothing to negotiate. His likely successor, Ehud Olmert, reiterated this same point after Sharon's incapacitating stroke early in 2006.

The unilateralist Israeli 'vision' has little in common with the one that Bush purports to uphold, yet Bush has shown no indication of having a strategy for coaxing Israeli leaders into showing more flexibility. In reality, it is the Israelis who have been setting the pace for developments on the ground. For example, according to the Road Map, a Palestinian state with "provisional borders" should have been established by

the end of 2003, a date now redefined as the end of 2006 or 2008. However, many Palestinians see this as a trap, preferring to negotiate an overall agreement that includes permanent borders.

With diplomatic prospects already cloudy early in 2006, a further complication arose with the surprising Hamas victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections. With about 45 percent support among Palestinian voters, Hamas managed to win 56 percent of the seats in the Legislative Council, enough to form a government on its own should it seek to do so. While the process of putting together a new government may take some time and may end up with a broad coalition, there is no doubt that Hamas will play a major role in setting the agenda for the Palestinian side.

What will this mean for negotiations and peace? At first blush, the prospects seem dim. Hamas does not recognize Israel's right to exist, and both Israel and the United States see Hamas as little more than a terrorist organization. With time, Hamas may moderate its behavior and its views, but there will inevitably be a period of doubt among Israelis and their friends. This probably means that Israeli unilateralism will be reinforced, that negotiations will be discounted, and that the Bush vision of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace will fade from the scene – an ironic casualty of Bush's insistence on bringing democracy to a Middle East still convulsed with issues of occupation, terror, and identity politics.

This situation is unfortunate for Bush, whose grand design for transforming the Middle East – through regime change in Iraq, the 'global war on terrorism,' his advocacy of democracy as the solution to the region's ills, and his rhetorical support for Israeli-Palestinian peace – is not going well. It is unlikely we will

see the hopes raised by Bush's inflated rhetoric about Israeli-Palestinian peace fulfilled. Bush's views on the importance of resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict have evolved in recent years, but the facts on the ground have made it increasingly difficult for both parties to reach a peace agreement.

The peace process in the Middle East

Norbert Schwarz

*on judgments of
truth & beauty*

Poets and scientists alike often assume that beauty and truth are two sides of the same coin.* From John Keats's famous assertion that "beauty is truth, truth beauty" to Richard Feynman's belief that "you can recognize truth by its beauty and simplicity," beauty has often been offered as a heuristic for assessing truth. Yet the history of science is full of beautiful theories that proved wrong. Nevertheless, the assumed relationship holds considerable intuitive appeal for most people.

Norbert Schwarz is professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, professor of marketing at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business, and research professor at the Institute for Social Research. His research focuses on human judgment, in particular, the interplay of feeling and thinking, as well as the nature of mental construal processes and their implications for social science methodology. He has been a Fellow of the American Academy since 2004.

© 2006 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Why? Recent psychological research sheds new light on this issue.

A growing number of experiments show that judgments of beauty and judgments of truth share a common characteristic: People make them, in part, by attending to the dynamics of their own information processing. When an object is easy to perceive, people evaluate it as more beautiful than when it is difficult to perceive; similarly, when a statement is easy to process, people are more likely to accept it as true than when it is difficult to process. Psychologists refer to the ease or difficulty of information processing as 'processing fluency.' Its shared role in judgments of beauty and truth renders it likely that we find the same stimulus beautiful as well as true.

In an influential series of experiments, Robert Zajonc observed in the 1960s that the more often his participants saw unknown graphical stimuli, like Chinese ideographs, the more appealing they found them. Later research traced this finding to the role of processing fluency. Previously seen stimuli are easier to recognize, and ease of processing generates subjectively positive experiences. As Piotr Winkielman and John Cacioppo observed, psychophysiological measures can capture this positive affective response, which feeds into judgments of liking, beauty, and pleasure. In short, we like things that make us feel good – but that feeling often derives from the dynamics of our own information pro-

* For a fully referenced, extended discussion of this material see "Processing Fluency and Aesthetic Pleasure: Is Beauty in the Perceiver's Processing Experience?" (with Rolf Reber and Piotr Winkielman) in *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, published in 2004, and "Metacognitive Experiences in Consumer Judgment and Decision Making" in *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, also published in 2004.

cessing rather than from the stimulus itself.

Because we can manipulate ease of processing in ways that are independent of the actual stimulus, a host of different variables can influence the perceived beauty of an object, as my students and I have found in diverse studies. For example, Winkielman, Rolf Reber, and I showed participants simple drawings of everyday objects, like a desk. Some participants had to identify the object as fast as they could, whereas others had to judge its aesthetic appeal. When a subliminal presentation of its outline preceded the drawing, the former participants recognized it more quickly – and the latter participants found it prettier.

Other studies have shown that any variable that facilitates fluent processing also increases aesthetic appeal, from previous exposure to a related word to figure-ground contrast. In fact, a review of variables known to influence aesthetic appeal – like symmetry, good form, or the gestalt laws – revealed that all of them share one feature: they expedite processing. From this perspective, beauty is neither in the object nor in the eye of the beholder. Instead, it arises from the perceiver's processing experience, which is a function of relatively haphazard situational influences as well as object and perceiver characteristics. As a result, a drawing of a shovel seems prettier after encountering the word 'snow' – provided you live in a place where snow and shovel are closely related concepts.

In addition to affecting judgments of beauty, processing fluency serves as a basis for many other judgments, including the familiarity or novelty of an object. In general, familiar things are easier to process, but not everything that is easy to process is familiar. Nevertheless, people erroneously infer that a stimulus

is familiar when it is easy to process because of some other variable, such as the way in which it is presented. Conversely, they infer from difficulty of processing that the stimulus has to be novel, even if the difficulty merely derives from a hard-to-read print. In one study, Hyejeung Cho and I asked participants to read a description of an electronic gadget that combined features of a cell phone, MP3 player, and global positioning system. As expected, they judged the product as more innovative when the description was printed in a more difficult-to-read font. That is, they concluded from the processing difficulty imposed by the print that the product had truly novel and unfamiliar characteristics – or else its description wouldn't have been so difficult to process.

This fluency-familiarity link influences judgments of truth. As Leon Festinger noted, we often rely on social consensus in making truth judgments – when many people believe it, there's probably something to it. Alas, we may feel that we've 'heard this before' for the wrong reason: a statement may only seem familiar because other variables make it easy to process. Supporting this conjecture, Rolf Reber and I found that people were more likely to accept a statement when it was easy rather than difficult to read against a color background. Similarly, Matthew McGlone and his colleagues showed that of two substantively equivalent statements people were more likely to believe the one presented in a rhyming rather than non-rhyming form. "Birds of a feather flock together" is certainly true – but "birds of a feather flock conjointly" just doesn't do it.

Unfortunately, this fluency-familiarity-truth link has many undesirable consequences. Not only does mere repetition of the same statement make it like-

ly that the statement is accepted (as advertisers and politicians have known for a long time), but, repeated enough times, even warnings can eventually turn into recommendations. For example, Ian Skurnik, Carolyn Yoon, Denise Park, and I presented older participants with health claims of the type, “Shark cartilage is good for your arthritis.” Half of the participants were explicitly informed that the FDA had determined that the statement was false. When tested immediately, they usually remembered the falsity of the statement, and the more so the more often they had heard that it was untrue. But after three days, the details of the message faded until all that was left was a vague sense of familiarity when they read the statement again. Now, participants were more likely to believe the statement the more often they had been told that it was false. Accordingly, educational campaigns should never repeat misleading information in order to educate people about its falsity. All such campaigns achieve is making the false information seem more familiar when it is encountered again, effectively turning warnings into recommendations. A more promising strategy is to limit information to what is true, making the truth as ‘fluent,’ or familiar, as possible.

As these examples illustrate, the subjective experiences that accompany our thought processes are informative in their own right. Far from drawing only on what comes to mind, or what we read or hear, we also draw on the metacognitive experience of how easy this information is to process. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to tell why some information is easy or difficult to process, and we erroneously attribute this experience to the wrong source. Hence, we may feel that something is familiar, and therefore conclude that ‘there’s probably some-

thing to it,’ simply because it is easy to read.

In addition, fluent processing ‘feels good’ and elicits a positive affective response. Again, we often misread this positive feeling as a result of the object’s characteristics and conclude that it is really pretty and appealing. Thus, fluency of processing can serve as an experiential basis of judgments of beauty and truth. This shared basis is probably one of the reasons why beauty and truth seem like two sides of the same coin, despite the many beautiful theories that have been sent to the graveyard of science for failing more diagnostic tests of truth.

Letters to the Editor of *Dædalus*

On scientists as professionals

February 20, 2006

To the Editor:

An egregious example of the ongoing misunderstanding between scientists and society is on view in the Summer 2005 issue of *Dædalus*, devoted to the professions, in which scientists are not even mentioned. The introductory article by Howard Gardner, a distinguished Harvard professor known for his work on ‘multiple intelligences,’ and Lee S. Shulman, emeritus professor of education at Stanford (currently president of the Carnegie Foundation), lists physicians, lawyers, and accountants; architects and engineers; journalists and educators as ‘professionals.’ They do not include scientists in the list and – it is interesting to note – they do not include creative artists, like Picasso or Beethoven. These authors define professionals as “individuals who are given a certain amount of prestige and autonomy in exchange for performing for society a set of services in a disinterested way.”

The primary orientation of both scientists and artists, of course, is not to serve society but to an impersonal goal – to seek some form of truth. Let us not overlook the possibility that Gardner and Shulman simply wished to perpetuate the ‘two cultures’ distinction made famous by C. P. Snow a half-century ago. The implication would be that scientists are simply technicians, incapable of participating in the higher culture. In Harris

polls, on the other hand, the nonacademically oriented public lists scientists as the ‘most admired’ profession.

In reality, scientists serve society in many ways, and this service is, for the most part, disinterested. One distinguishes ‘fundamental (basic)’ scientists, who try to find explanations for the phenomena of the natural world and work for the most part in academic institutions, from ‘applied’ scientists, who address such practical problems as developing a vaccine against SARS or flu or building a better airplane and who find a home in industrial laboratories. ‘Inventors’ use existing knowledge to create commercially useful products or processes, which, in most cases, can be patented. The same scientific approaches and rules of evidence, even the same methods, govern the search for fundamental facts and relationships and the solving of practical problems.

Doctors and engineers, as professionals, use the findings of basic science in the practice of medicine and the solution of architectural and environmental problems. In the process, however, they also make significant discoveries. Doctors used clinical knowledge as a basis for the fundamental discovery that a major form of diabetes is driven by an ‘autoimmune’ response in genetically predisposed individuals. Examples abound of engineering accomplishments leading to, rather than following, scientific discovery: the invention of the steam engine, prompting the development of thermodynamics; the successful

flight of the Wright brothers, driving knowledge of aerodynamics.

The role of scientists in advising both governmental and nongovernmental bodies, which involves essentially the entire community of established scientists, may be seen as another disinterested service to society. The American public simply has no idea of the vast advisory network that provides continuous input to the executive and legislative branches of government and their many subdivisions, as well as to nongovernmental organizations and the private sector. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) alone has some 270 'study sections' (panels of scientists), which advise on applications for research grants, each meeting two or three times a year for several days at a time. 'Congressional Fellows,' supported by various scientific societies, provide another channel of scientific input to legislators (and now to most agencies of the executive branch). More than 1,600 Science and Technology Fellows of the American Association for the Advancement of Science have worked, since the program was started in 1973, as 'special legislative assistants,' in legislative and policy areas requiring scientific and technical input, on the staff of members of Congress or congressional committees. The program has been highly commended by senators and representatives from both Democratic and Republican sides of the aisle.

One of the most important rewards of science is the satisfaction of getting answers to difficult and potentially important problems. The contemporary public does not understand this and thinks of high-profile awards, such as the Nobel Prize, mainly in terms of the large sum of money that changes hands. Yet a recent study, published in *Science*, showed that two-thirds of science and engineering researchers at universities, ranging

from Harvard to Texas A&M, evinced little interest in patenting their discoveries (over the period 1983–1999), although they might have made a good deal of money by doing so.

Let me close by noting that research, in fact, has an artistic side. Nature is complex, but the scientist finds a piece of Nature's jigsaw puzzle – and it has its own beauty. If he keeps working on the same problem, he may find additional pieces, which fit together to create a beautiful whole.

Byron H. Waksman, M.D.

Byron H. Waksman, a Fellow of the American Academy since 1979, is professor emeritus of microbiology and biology at Yale University and visiting scientist in neurology at Harvard University.

On Social Security & the aging of America

February 27, 2006

To the Editor:

In "Measuring Social Security's financial outlook within an aging society" (*Dædalus*, Winter 2006), Jagadeesh Gokhale and Kent Smetters set forth a concise and clear account of the standard financial framework for understanding Social Security's financial problems that is generally subscribed to by academic experts and the Social Security Administration's actuaries. Gokhale and Smetters criticize this formulation and offer a refinement from which to better assess reform proposals. I contend that the standard formulation, as well as their refined version of it, is deeply flawed from the perspective of social justice. Basically, this formulation has led to all of the reform proposals requiring that a large

fraction of the population forgo, in financing their pensions, the very substantial benefits provided by return on investment on their payroll taxes.

Congress, in managing Social Security, set pension levels for people retiring in the early years of the program much higher than their payroll tax payments would justify. This has evolved into the present situation in which people retiring during the last few years receive pensions of reasonable size relative to the money they paid in – in payroll taxes, and the return on investment of these payments. Unfortunately, the portion of these pensions that would normally come from return on investment is coming from the payroll taxes paid by younger workers. As a result, the Social Security trust fund, the investment vehicle for Social Security, is at about \$1.7 trillion when it should be around \$13 trillion to cover future pensions. Although the details are complex, my contention is captured in the following two ways of responding to this state of affairs.

Gokhale and Smetters respond with:

Unfortunately, the windfalls awarded to prior generation of retirees do not come for free: future generations must pay for them by receiving lower rates of return on their payroll taxes compared to the rates they could have earned if they had invested their contributions in government bonds instead. In fact all future generations are worse off.

In present reform proposals, “lower rate of return” turns out to mean negative rate of return. I have been preparing a paper entitled “A Strategy for Reforming Social Security’s Pension Program.” Quoting from this paper:

Step 2: Completely solve the problem for workers retiring after 2045. The Social Security Administration should set up a

second Old Age Survivor and Dependents Insurance (OASDI) program for these workers keeping present benefits levels. Their payroll taxes are invested in Treasury bonds and their payroll tax rates are reduced (probably about 25 percent) to a rate making the system financially sound, that is, so that at all times the Trust Fund balance equals a reasonable estimate of future liabilities. Failure to immediately put this into effect is obviously inexcusable. *There is no reason these workers should be called upon to make a greater contribution to the federal shortfall due to their reduced payroll taxes than the general taxpayer.* The additional money needed to fund benefits for earlier retirees should come from income and corporate profit taxes rather than from payroll taxes.

Investment in Treasury bonds and corporate stocks and bonds in retirement programs such as Social Security are all about the same – none is free lunch. The community at large pays the return on investment. The bottom line in any Social Security reform is how are benefits modified and what fraction of pensions comes from payroll taxes and what comes from the community at large via return on investment. Once it is agreed that workers should get a fair shake for their payroll taxes, reform is easy.

Edgar H. Brown, Jr.

Edgar H. Brown, Jr., a Fellow of the American Academy since 1974, is professor emeritus of mathematics at Brandeis University.

February 28, 2006

Jagadeesh Gokhale and Kent Smetters respond:

We appreciate Edgar H. Brown, Jr.’s thoughtful response to our paper. We

agree that a fully funded Social Security system, where each generation pays for its own benefits, would have more than \$12 trillion in assets. After initially establishing Social Security as a funded system, however, Congress chose to transform it into a mostly pay-as-you-go system. As a result, younger workers pay for the benefits of older retirees instead of saving for themselves. That transformation produced windfalls for previous generations that cannot be recovered since most are no longer alive.

Although we don't deal with social justice in our paper, we agree with Mr. Brown that future generations should not be asked to shoulder the entire burden of closing Social Security's total financial shortfall – current generations should contribute as well. But it is inescapable that current and future generations must collectively share the load. The appropriate distribution of this cost sharing across generations is a moral choice that our alternative (or, indeed, any) accounting framework cannot decide. But our framework does indicate the full value of the financial shortfalls that must be addressed, and it could be used to show how particular policy choices would differentially impact current and future generations.

AMERICAN ACADEMY
OF ARTS & SCIENCES

President

Patricia Meyer Spacks

Chief Executive Officer

Leslie C. Berlowitz

Vice President and Chair of the Academy Trust

Louis W. Cabot

Treasurer

John S. Reed

Secretary

Jerrold Meinwald

Editor

Steven Marcus

Librarian

Robert C. Post

Vice President, Midwest

Geoffrey R. Stone

Vice President, West

Jesse H. Choper

Dædalus Board of Editors Committee

Steven Marcus, *Chair*, Joyce Appleby, Russell Banks, Stanley Hoffmann, Donald Kennedy, Martha C. Nussbaum, Neil J. Smelser, Rosanna Warren, Steven Weinberg; *ex officio*: Patricia Meyer Spacks, Leslie C. Berlowitz

Committee on Publications

Jerome Kagan, *Chair*, Emilio Bizzi, Jesse H. Choper, Denis Donoghue, Jerrold Meinwald; *ex officio*: Patricia Meyer Spacks, Steven Marcus, Leslie C. Berlowitz

Inside back cover: Édouard Manet, "Argenteuil," oil on canvas, 149 x 115 cm, first exhibited in the Salon of 1875, though completed the year before. In the summer of 1874, Manet had vacationed in the countryside near Argenteuil, where he spent time with the poet Stéphane Mallarmé and the painters Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Claude Monet. Like the impressionists, Manet offered paint on the canvas as something to be admired in itself. See Thomas Crow on *The practice of art history in America*, pages 70–90: "The 'initial commotion' entailed in the making of an art object survives – as does no other creative act – as a unique, physically sensible pattern." Photograph © Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.



manet

coming up in *Dædalus*:

on body in mind Antonio & Hanna Damasio, Jerry Fodor, Carol Gilligan, Gerald Edelman, Jorie Graham, Raymond Dolan, Arne Öhman, Mark Johnson, Jacques d'Amboise, and William E. Connolly

on identity Akeel Bilgrami, Wendy Doniger, Amartya Sen, Stephen Greenblatt, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Sydney Shoemaker, Joseph Koerner, Susan Greenfield, David A. Hollinger, Carol Rovane, Ian Hacking, Todd E. Feinberg, and Courtney Jung

on nonviolence
& violence William H. McNeill, Adam Michnik, Jonathan Schell, James Carroll, Breyten Breytenbach, Mark Juergensmeyer, Steven LeBlanc, James Blight, Cindy Ness, Neil L. Whitehead, Mia Bloom, and Tzvetan Todorov

on sex Joan Roughgarden, Terry Castle, Steven Marcus, Elizabeth Benedict, Brian Charlesworth, Lawrence Cohen, Anne Fausto-Sterling, Catharine MacKinnon, Tim Birkhead, and Margo Jefferson

on capitalism
& democracy Joyce Appleby, John C. Bogle, Lucian Bebchuk, Robert W. Fogel, Jerry Z. Muller, Peter Bernstein, Richard Epstein, Benjamin M. Friedman, John Dunn, and Robin Blackburn

on life Anthony Kenny, Thomas Laqueur, Shai Lavi, Lorraine Daston, Paul Rabinow, Michael S. Gazzaniga, Robert George, Robert J. Richards, Jeff McMahan, Nikolas Rose, and John Broome

on the public interest William Galston, E. J. Dionne, Jr., Seyla Benhabib, Jagdish Bhagwati, Adam Wolfson, Alan Ehrenhalt, Gary Hart, and others

plus poetry by Kevin Carrizo di Camillo, John Kinsella, Charles Simic, Lawrence Dugan &c.; fiction by Dorian Gossy &c.; and notes by Michael Cook, Joel F. Handler, William Galston, Richard Morris, Robert J. Sharer, John Felstiner, Daniel G. Nocera &c.