

VIEWPOINTS

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American Council of Learned Societies

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VIEWPOINTS:

Excerpts from the ACLS Conference on
The Humanities in the 1990's



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On March 16-18, 1989, ACLS and the National Humanities Center sponsored a conference at the Center's graceful building in Research Triangle, North Carolina. The conference was supported by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The theme of the conference was "The Humanities in the 1990's: Perspectives on the Liberal Arts, Research, and Education."

Despite its grandiose title, the conference was a success. The level of conversation, both in the formal sessions and outside them, was very high, and the sponsors agreed that some attempt ought to be made to extend those exchanges beyond the necessarily limited group of scholars, university administrators, and foundation officials fortunate enough to gather in North Carolina last spring.

Stephen Graubard's keynote address, "The Agenda for the Humanities and Higher Education for the 21st Century," appeared as the eighth in ACLS's series of Occasional Papers. This tenth Occasional Paper offers several of the other conference presentations that raise particularly important and, we believe, pressing questions for the entire humanities community in this country. The selection of material to be included in this publication was particularly difficult because the quality of all the discussions at the conference was so uniformly high. In selecting material for inclusion we have aimed to represent the conference proceedings by choosing what seemed to us to be the main issues that received discussion. Other participants might well have made other choices.

As a result, we have also included the conference program here for the benefit of readers. At all events, the views expressed in this publication, like those in all our Occasional Papers, are those of the several authors and do not represent the views of the ACLS staff or Board of Directors.

ACLS has also prepared a summary of the individual sessions which, while not suitable for publication, can be obtained upon request. ACLS invites commentary from readers upon these and other issues facing the humanities in the next decade. If the volume of such commentary is sufficient, ACLS will consider publishing it in another Occasional Paper or in the ACLS Newsletter. For the moment, our colleagues at the National Humanities Center join us in recording our gratitude to all the participants in the conference and to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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**“The Humanities in the 1990’s:
Perspectives on the
Liberal Arts, Research, and Education”
March 16–18, 1989**

Thursday, March 16:

5:00– 7:30 Registration, Cocktails, and Dinner at National Humanities Center

7:30– 8:30 **Keynote Address:**

“The Agenda for the Humanities and Higher Education for the 21st Century”: Stephen Graubard, Editor, *Daedalus*, and Professor of History, Brown University

Friday, March 17:

8:30– 9:00 Continental Breakfast at National Humanities Center

9:00–10:00 “The Demography of University and College Faculties in the 1990’s,” Harold Hodgkinson, Senior Fellow and Director, Center for Demographic Policy, Institute for Educational Leadership

10:00–10:30 Break

10:30–12:00 **Texts and Contexts in Contemporary Humanistic Discourse(s)**

Chair: Patricia Meyer Spacks, English, Yale University, and Fellow, National Humanities Center

Masao Miyoshi, Literature, University of California, San Diego

David Hollinger, History, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Richard Rorty, Philosophy, University of Virginia

Gerald Graff, English, Northwestern University

12:00– 1:30 Lunch

1:30– 3:00 **Analysis, Narrative, and the Structure of
the Past**

Chair: Michael Kammen, History, Cornell University

Peter Conn, English, University of Pennsylvania

John Higham, History, Johns Hopkins University, and
Fellow, National Humanities Center

W.R. Connor, Chair, Council on the Humanities, Princeton
University

Martha Vicinus, English, University of Michigan, Ann
Arbor

3:00– 3:30 Break

3:30– 5:00 **Contemporary Challenges to Traditional
Categories of Analysis in the Humanities**

Chair: David Bromwich, English, Yale University

Robert Berkhofer, History, University of Michigan, Ann
Arbor

Barbara Fields, History, Columbia University

Barbara Herrnstein Smith, English, Duke University

Thomas Crow, Art History, University of Michigan, Ann
Arbor

7:00– 8:30 Cocktails and Dinner

8:30–10:00 **“The West,” the Liberal Arts, and General
Education**

Chair: Nathan I. Huggins, History and Afro-American
Studies, Harvard University

Frederic E. Wakeman, Jr., President, Social Science
Research Council

Sabine MacCormack, Classics, Stanford University

James Tatum, Classics, Dartmouth College

Joyce Appleby, History, University of California, Los
Angeles

Saturday, March 18:

8:30– 9:00 Continental Breakfast at National Humanities Center

9:00–10:30 **Graduate Education in the Humanities and the Undergraduate Curriculum**

Chair: Arnold Thackray, History of Science, University of Pennsylvania

Theodore Ziolkowski, Dean of the Graduate School, Princeton University

Nannerl Keohane, President, Wellesley College

Ernest S. Frerichs, former Dean of the Graduate School and Director, Program in Judaic Studies, Brown University

Nathan Scott, Religious Studies and English, University of Virginia

John H. D'Arms, Dean of the Graduate School, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

10:30–11:00 Break

11:00–12:30 **The Humanities in the University**

Chair: Anne Firor Scott, History, Duke University

Bliss Carnochan, Director, Stanford Humanities Center, Stanford University

Catharine R. Stimpson, Dean of the Graduate School, Rutgers University

James Freedman, President, Dartmouth College

Margaret Wilkerson, Afro-American Studies, University of California, Berkeley

12:30– 2:00 Lunch

Luncheon Speaker: Lynne V. Cheney, Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities

2:00– 3:30 **The National System for Supporting Research
in the Humanities**

Chair: Douglas Greenberg, Vice President, American
Council of Learned Societies

Robert Hollander, Comparative Literature and Romance
Languages and Literatures, Princeton University; Member,
National Council on the Humanities; Chairman of the
Board, National Humanities Center

Neil Rudenstine, Executive Vice President, Andrew W.
Mellon Foundation

Charles Blitzer, Director, Woodrow Wilson International
Center for Scholars

Joel Conarroe, President, John Simon Guggenheim
Memorial Foundation

3:30– 4:00 Break

4:00– 5:00 **Plenary Session**

Stanley N. Katz, President, American Council of Learned
Societies, presiding

Observers:

Celeste Colgan, Deputy Chairman, National Endowment
for the Humanities

John Hammer, Executive Director, National Humanities
Alliance

Jerry Martin, Director, Division of Education Programs,
National Endowment for the Humanities

James Morris, Program Director, Andrew W. Mellon
Foundation

Kent Mullikin, Acting Director, National Humanities
Center

Ruel W. Tyson, Jr., Director, North Carolina Institute for
the Arts and Humanities, University of North Carolina,
Chapel Hill

Fellows of the National Humanities Center

The Humanistic Intellectual: Eleven Theses

Richard Rorty
University of Virginia

1. We should not try to define “the humanities” by asking what the humanities departments share which distinguishes them from the rest of the university. The interesting dividing line is, instead, one that cuts across departments and disciplinary matrices. It divides people busy conforming to well-understood criteria for making contributions to knowledge from people trying to expand their own moral imaginations. These latter people read books in order to enlarge their sense of what is possible and important — either for themselves as individuals or for their society. Call these people the “humanistic intellectuals.” One often finds more such people in the anthropology department than in the classics department, and sometimes more in the law school than in the philosophy department.

2. If one asks what good these people do, what social function they perform, neither “teaching” nor “research” is a very good answer. Their idea of teaching — or at least of the sort of teaching they hope to do — is not exactly the communication of knowledge, but more like stirring the kids up. When they apply for a leave or a grant, they may have to fill out forms about the aims and methods of their so-called research projects, but all they really want to do is read a lot more books in the hope of becoming a different sort of person.

3. So the real social function of the humanistic intellectuals is to instill doubts in the students about the students’ own self-images, and about the society to which they belong. These people are the teachers who help insure that the moral consciousness of each new generation is slightly different from that of the previous generation.

4. But when it comes to the rhetoric of public support for higher education, we do not talk much about this social function. We cannot tell boards of trustees, government commissions, and the like, that our function is to stir things up, to make our society feel guilty, to keep it

off balance. We cannot say that the taxpayers employ us to make sure that their children will think differently than they do. Somewhere deep down, everybody — even the average taxpayer — knows that that is one of the things colleges and universities are for. But nobody can afford to make this fully explicit and public.

5. We humanistic intellectuals find ourselves in a position analogous to that of the “social-gospel” or “liberation theology” clergy, the priests and ministers who think of themselves as working to build the kingdom of God on earth. Their opponents describe their activity as leftist political action. The clergy, they say, are being paid to relay God’s word, but are instead meddling in politics. We are accused of being paid to contribute to and communicate knowledge, while instead “politicizing the humanities.” Yet we cannot take the idea of unpoliticized humanities any more seriously than our opposite numbers in the clergy can take seriously the idea of a depoliticized church.

6. We are still expected to make the ritual noises to which the trustees and the funding agencies are accustomed — noises about “objective criteria of excellence,” “fundamental moral and spiritual values,” “the enduring questions posed by the human condition,” and so on, just as the liberal clergy is supposed to mumble their way through creeds written in an earlier and simpler age. But those of us who have been impressed by the anti-Platonic, anti-essentialist, historicizing, naturalizing writers of the last few centuries (people like Hegel, Darwin, Freud, Weber, Dewey, and Foucault) must either become cynical or else put our own tortured private constructions on these ritual phrases.

7. This tension between public rhetoric and private sense of mission leaves the academy in general, and the humanistic intellectuals in particular, vulnerable to heresy-hunters. Ambitious politicians like William Bennett — or cynical journalists like the young William Buckley (author of *God and Man at Yale*) or Charles Sykes (author of *Profscam*) — can always point out gaps between official rhetoric and actual practice. Usually, however, such heresy-hunts peter out quickly in the face of faculty solidarity. The professors of physics and law, people whom nobody wants to mess with, can be relied upon to rally around fellow-AAUP members who teach anthropology or French, even if they neither know nor care what the latter do.

8. In the current flap about the humanities, however, the heresy-hunters have a more vulnerable target than usual. This target is what Allan Bloom calls “the Nietzscheanized left.” This left is an anomaly in America. In the past the American left has asked our country to be true to its ideals, to go still further along the path of expanding human freedom which our forefathers mapped: the path which led us from the abolition of slavery through women’s suffrage, the Wagner Act, and the Civil Rights Movement, to contemporary feminism and gay liberation. But the Nietzscheanized left tells the country it is rotten to the core — that it is a racist, sexist, imperialist society, one which can’t be trusted an inch, one whose every utterance must be ruthlessly deconstructed.

9. Another reason this left is a vulnerable target is that it is extraordinarily self-obsessed and ingrown, as well as absurdly over-philosophized. It takes seriously Paul de Man’s weird suggestion that “one can approach the problems of ideology and by extension the problems of politics only on the basis of critical-linguistic analysis.” It seems to accept Hillis Miller’s fantastic claim that “the millenium [of universal peace and justice among men] would come if all men and women became good readers in de Man’s sense.” When asked for a utopian sketch of our country’s future, the new leftists reply along the lines of one of Foucault’s most fatuous remarks. When asked why he never sketched a utopia, Foucault said, “I think that to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system.” De Man, and Foucault were (and Miller is) a lot better than these unfortunate remarks would suggest, but some of their followers are a lot worse. This over-philosophized and self-obsessed left is the mirror image of the over-philosophized and self-obsessed Straussians on the right. The contempt of both groups for contemporary American society is so great that both have rendered themselves impotent when it comes to national, state, or local politics. This means that they get to spend *all* their energy on academic politics.

10. The two groups are currently staging a sham battle about how to construct reading lists. The Straussians say that the criterion for what books to assign is intrinsic excellence, and the Nietzscheanized left says that it is fairness — e.g., fairness to females, blacks, and Third Worlders. They are both wrong. Reading lists should be constructed so as to preserve a delicate balance between two needs. The first is the need of the students to have common reference points with people in previous

generations and in other social classes — so that grandparents and grandchildren, people who went to the University of Wisconsin at White-water and people who went to Stanford, will have read a lot of the same books. The second is the need of the teachers to be able to teach the books which have moved them, excited them, changed their lives — rather than having to teach a syllabus handed down by a committee.

11. Philosophers of education, well-intended committees, and governmental agencies have attempted to understand, define, and manage the humanities. The point, however, is to keep the humanities changing fast enough so that they remain indefinable and unmanageable. All we need to keep them changing that fast is good old-fashioned academic freedom. Given freedom to shrug off the heresy-hunters and their cries of “politicization!,” as well as freedom for each new batch of assistant professors to despise and repudiate the departmental Old Guard to whom they owe their jobs, the humanities will continue to be in good shape. If you don’t like the ideological weather in the local English department these days, wait a generation. Watch what happens to the Nietzscheanized left when it tries to replace itself, along about the year 2010. I’m willing to bet that the brightest new Ph.D.’s in English that year will be people who never want to hear the terms “binary opposition” or “hegemonic discourse” again as long as they live.

The “West,” the Liberal Arts and General Education

Sabine MacCormack
Stanford University

Let me begin my discussion of tonight’s theme by mentioning two interdependent questions which are often implied in current discussions about the humanities, but are rarely considered in their own right. First, there is the question of how the components of the cultural tradition we ascribe to “the West” have been assembled, and how therefore we understand the origins of the culture of “the West.” Second, what authority should we attribute to this cultural tradition, and with what weight should we endow it in relation to other cultural traditions? Whether one agrees, for instance, with Lynne Cheney, that texts from the Western tradition should be read “for their transcendent truths,”¹ or whether one agrees with Hillis Miller, that diverse or contradictory contemporary theories of reading are making available to us “new readings” of those texts,² some attitude toward our two questions underlies those divergent views.

Regarding origins, let me start with one of those playful yet serious anecdotes Plato was so fond of telling. In the *Timaeus*, he recounts how the Athenian legislator Solon visited the Nile delta and told myths of the first foundation of Athens to the Egyptian priests he met there. Although in Solon’s view these myths went back to a very remote antiquity, one of the priests pointed out that Egyptian historical traditions were older. “You Greeks are always children, there is no such thing as an old Greek,” the priest teased Solon. “You are young in soul,” he continued,³ by way of comparing Greek historical traditions to the infinitely more ancient and grander traditions of Egypt. The priest then related to Solon the true story, as he saw it, of the origins of Athens which he said the Athenians themselves had forgotten. This “true” story of Athenian origins, told by a foreigner, provides the framework for Plato’s discussion in the *Timaeus* of God and man, of space, time, and eternity.⁴

Plato’s anecdote is one of many Greek stories, both legendary

and historical, recounting what had been learnt or borrowed from elsewhere. The Romans likewise, whether for reasons of their own or under Greek influence, looked far afield to the Etruscans, the Greeks, and even the Trojans, to explain their history and culture.⁵

Influences and borrowings moving from one culture to another are of course a worldwide phenomenon. What I wish to highlight here is the interest that Greek and Roman mythographers, philosophers, and historians repeatedly demonstrated in taking stock of cultural imports. Their preoccupation with this issue shows that otherness was part and parcel of Greek and especially of Roman cultural self-definition.

This is not to say that the Romans, like the Greeks before them, did not often experience and act on xenophobia. Nonetheless, they did not choose to rewrite their history in such a way as to eliminate the memory of foreign contributions. Indeed, ongoing foreign contributions served to document a certain connectedness, a sense of cultural belonging and identity on the map of human achievements that the inhabitants of the Roman Mediterranean world carried in their minds.

In the field of education, however, the Romans did not look beyond Greece. Young Romans studied a corpus of Greek and Latin epic poetry, history, philosophy, and political oratory that changed little between the first and the fifth centuries CE. Some Greek classics were translated into Latin, but we know of few translations from languages other than Greek. The most important of these is the Hebrew Bible, which was, however, translated for Jewish and Christian religious use, and not for any cultural or educational purpose that was recognized as valid in Roman society at large. We are thus faced with a dichotomy in Greek and Roman attitudes to cultural identity and education. While cultural identity was delineated in relation to landmarks on a farflung canvas of earlier civilizations, in education what counted was the authority of Greek and Roman authors.⁶ For education provided the means of projecting to Roman subjects the hegemony of Rome backed by the culture of Greece.

This position was modified once Christianity became the dominant religion of the Roman empire. Christians were able to build on earlier Jewish endeavours of integrating the history and culture of Israel with those of Greece and Rome. But unlike the Jews, Christians looked for

converts. For Christians, God's covenant with Israel, described in the Hebrew Bible, was merely the prelude for his covenant with all human beings. As a result, Christian revisions of the Greco-Roman past in the light of their own preconceptions were more ambitious and far-reaching than Jewish antecedents. It is difficult to underestimate the vast change in the content of culture and in styles of cultured expression that Christian interests and preoccupations entailed. To render the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian histories and cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world compatible with each other proved to be a complex and controversial enterprise that occupied men of letters in Europe from the fifth century down to the 18th and indeed beyond.⁷ In the 16th century, moreover, this European discussion expanded into a discussion among exponents of religions and cultures worldwide. Besides Greece and Rome, there were now the civilizations of the Americas, of India, China, and Japan to claim the attention of the learned. The outcomes of their thinking affect us still, for it was in the 16th century that the question of hegemony — be it political or religious, cultural or economic — once more entered the arena of general education.⁸

Throughout Christian medieval Europe, general education covered two branches of learning, the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian. The Greco-Roman canon of texts was reworked into the seven liberal arts that constituted the core of medieval education, while the Judeo-Christian branch of Europe's heritage from classical antiquity became the separate discipline of theology. The liberal arts trained mind and imagination, and theology was expected to teach one religious truth.⁹ But it did more than that. Theology was anchored in the study of the Biblical texts, most of which expressed the ideas and values of ancient Israel, a polity that differed profoundly from the Greek city states and the Roman empire. The Biblical texts were vehicles of revealed and sacred knowledge, and at the same time broadened the scope of what was knowable in strictly secular terms. This is why, even during the Renaissance and as late as the 17th century, European historians and political thinkers derived exemplars of how power should be exercised both from the Greco-Roman classics and from the Hebrew Bible. Moses was as much a statesman as Caesar and Augustus.¹⁰

The sacred texts of the Bible were therefore read both as theology and as history. Their authority was twofold. They guided the soul. But

frequently, they were also called upon to guide secular affairs.

Given that the Bible is *inter alia* a sacred text, capable of conveying a more far-reaching authority than the secular Greco-Roman canon, some scholars have thought that it should be studied according to different rules from those applying to other writings. Where thus Renaissance and later scholars enquired freely into the chronology of Greek and Roman historians, the same freedom did not apply to the study of Biblical texts. For such enquiry raised questions regarding date and authorship which were liable to undermine the Bible's sacred and prophetic authority. We have for instance learnt that, contrary to appearances, the *Book of Daniel* was not written in the sixth century BC, but in c. 164 BC, and that therefore most of its prophecies are retrospective. This is only one of many areas where a scholarly and secular approach to the Bible was in conflict with but prevailed over a theological and devotional interpretation.¹¹

Nonetheless, a theologically oriented reader of sacred texts is still likely to endow them with an authority higher than and different from that attributed to them by a secular reader. Also, secular and theological readers will learn from such texts in different ways, because secular and theological reasoning use different procedures. Finally, precisely because sacred texts are endowed with a more absolute authority than secular ones, a sacred canon or corpus of texts tends to be more rigorously defined than a secular one.

In the course of late antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, not to mention subsequent centuries, the corpus of secular texts being studied by cultured persons underwent far-reaching changes. In particular, from the 14th century, all over Europe, vernacular texts were added to the established corpus of works read in Latin. By contrast, during the same period the canon of the Christian Bible changed hardly at all.

“The West” is thus heir to several distinct approaches — sacred or secular, universal or specific to one culture — to the task of compiling and agreeing upon materials that should figure in general education and general knowledge. Although we are considering a very long period indeed, one can still pinpoint some trends. For example, the secular component of general “Western” education has changed more profoundly than the sacred one. A late antique and a contemporary Ameri-

can Christian are unlikely to agree on many topics, but they will be reading more or less the same Biblical texts. But if the same two individuals turned to the secular corpus of texts they share, they might at most both know Homer, Plato, Vergil, and perhaps Cicero. While even this much continuity is astonishing, we must recognize that it does not cover a large area of thought and experience. The issue is, the secular corpus of authoritative texts has shifted over time to reflect the profound changes the societies of “the West” have undergone. Different texts were selected at different times to sustain ideas capable of rendering change intelligible. The first major transformation of the secular corpus occurred after Roman imperial rule came to an end in Western Europe. The corpus of authoritative secular texts that came to be studied in post-Roman Europe reflected the new social and political order.

Perhaps the changes now confronting us have something in common with that transformation. Or perhaps what we are seeing resembles more closely the inclusion, during the 14th century, of the new vernacular literatures into the purview of general culture and education.¹²

At any rate, new texts are now competing for space in a corpus or canon which is all too easily regarded as more rigid than it ever was in reality. With new texts come new interpretations that reflect changes in our self-definition and political experience. Perhaps we should recognize here the recurrence of an ancient tension in how Western cultural identity has been perceived. We could then try to reformulate the old Greek and Roman dichotomy between locating part of one’s cultural identity beyond the confines of one’s own society while at the same time focusing education exclusively on texts produced within that society. We might do this by taking stock of conflicts over participation and hegemony within American culture without either discarding that culture’s Western components or smothering the new with the old. Seeing how vitally other cultures have in the past contributed to Western self-perceptions and achievements, now is the time to re-learn an old lesson.

Finally, in discussing liberal arts and general education, I am discussing what has become, beginning in the Renaissance, a secular enterprise. This is why whatever “transcendent truths” may be discernible in a given text seem to me to be dependent on the historical situation in which that text is read, and on whatever sacred or theological value may from time to time be attributed to it.

The fact that we, or some of us, might nowadays be able to see a transcendent truth in, say, Plato's writing, is the outcome of a certain continuity or possibly only a perceived continuity between his world and ours. Although many basic notions which Plato took for granted are next to unintelligible to the unschooled contemporary reader, there do remain a few of these basic notions which he and we ourselves do still share. It is much harder for us to see any transcendent truth in, say, the writings of Confucius or the sayings of Buddha, both near contemporaries of Plato, for our culture as it now stands is in no sense continuous with their cultures.

A further issue arising here concerns the fact that concepts such as "transcendent truth" are more at home in theology than in the secular world of general education and the liberal arts. To resort once more to Plato, a method of opening up a question for discussion which he used more than once was to challenge and indeed to dispose of a "transcendent truth." The Egyptian priest who, according to the anecdote with which we began, spoke to Solon and called the Greeks children, apparently meant to criticize the Greeks for having historical memories so much shorter than the Egyptians did. Yet this same priest also praised the ancestors of the Greeks for their noble achievements. Possibly, therefore, it is not entirely off the mark to see in the remarks of the Egyptian priest a certain admiration for the very naiveté, for that childlike boisterousness of the Greeks which overtly he criticized. Perhaps we are able to learn from this Greek quality ourselves.

Notes

1. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 8, 1989.
2. *ACLS Occasional Paper* no. 6, p. 29 f.
3. Plato, *Timaeus* 22 b2 ff.
4. Martin Bernal, *Black Athena. The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilisation, Vol. I*, Rutgers (1987).
5. Arnaldo Momigliano, How to reconcile Greeks and Trojans, in his *Settimo Contributo alla Storia degli Studi classici e del Mondo antico*, Rome (1984), pp. 437-462.
6. R.A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language, The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley (1988).
7. E. Auerbach, *Literal Language and its Public in Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, London (1965); F.E. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods*, Cambridge, Mass. (1959).

8. J.H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492-1650*, Cambridge (1970); B. Bucher, *Icon and Conquest. A Structural Analysis of the Illustrations of De Bry's Great Voyages*, Chicago (1981); S. MacCormack, The Fall of the Incas. A historiographical Dilemma, *History of European Ideas* 6 (1985), pp. 421-445.
9. B. Smalley, *English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century*, Oxford (1960).
10. Two seminal political thinkers, Machiavelli in *The Prince* and Hobbes in *Leviathan*, thus illustrate their arguments with examples from the Old Testament.
11. See Arnaldo Momigliano, The Origins of Universal History, in his *Settimo Contributo*, pp. 77-103, reprinted in his *On Pagans, Jews and Christians*, Middletown (1987). For one of the most incisive early modern critical evaluations of the biblical texts, see B. Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, chapters 8-11.
12. E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, Princeton (1953).

Texts, Contexts, and Contingency

David Hollinger
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

I suspect that we historians have more to learn about texts and contexts from our colleagues in literature and philosophy than we can offer in return, but one thing we historians can offer, I believe, is an acute awareness of the contested character of contexts. Historians have no monopoly on this insight. But the insight may come more easily to us, who have always addressed texts in relation to contexts and are accustomed to worrying about just what constitutes the salient context in the case of a given text. Scholars in other callings for whom “the context” is an exciting new discovery may be too quick to assume they know what the context is. Perhaps my remarks should be entitled, with apologies to Stanley Fish, “Is There A Context in This Class?”

I want to identify and to comment briefly upon certain conventions by which humanistic scholars construct “contexts,” especially when talking about canons and curriculum. I want in particular to talk about those conventions which have attracted the most notice from newspaper reporters, student groups, academic administrators, and government officials such as William Bennett and Lynne Cheney.

The conventions I have in mind have to do with the categories of race, gender, ethnicity, and class position. To classify an author in terms of these categories is one way to construct a context. A construction of just this sort is often implied when calls are made for more attention to works written by blacks, females, arabs, or workers. It is the author’s membership in groups denoted by one or more of these labels that is presumed to define the “context” of his or her work. If the work were autonomous from such contexts, the point of asking for more black voices, more female voices, etc., would diminish, because the voices in the texts would be less resoundingly black, less resoundingly female, etc. Hence the debates over canon and curriculum that swirl around us do translate with very little remainder into the terms of text and context.

A convenient and close-to-home example of this easy translation is the on-going exchange between the leadership of the National Endow-

ment for the Humanities and scholars informally authorized by the American Council of Learned Societies. The NEH's document of September 1988, *The Humanities in America*, repeatedly invokes a contrast between the universal human "truths that pass beyond time and circumstances" on the one hand, and on the other, "the accidents of class, race, and gender." It is the latter which constitute, for the NEH, "the context." In a response made under the aegis of the ACLS in an Occasional Paper of early this year, *Speaking for the Humanities*, George Levine and his co-authors treat as a quaint conceit Lynne Cheney's affirmation of timeless wisdom, but they largely accept Cheney's understanding of what it means to take time and circumstance into account. Race, gender, and class define example after example as the ACLS scholars point to the inevitability of ideological particularism, and as they espouse cultural pluralism. This same sense of what "context" really means informs the most recent contribution to the exchange, Lynne Cheney's rejoinder to the ACLS bunch, as published in the February 8, 1989 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and as mailed to the participants in this ACLS-sponsored conference with the cordial compliments of the NEH. If you've read that little statement, you may have noticed that Cheney affirms context-free "transcendent truths," to which she contrasts the perspectives of gender, race, and class.

Now, don't worry. I'm not going to be stupid enough to deny that these social categories are enormously important. I certainly don't think they are mere "accidents." It is easy to document the power of color, ethnicity, gender, and class in differentially constraining and enabling individuals, especially in determining the extent of their civil rights and their education. And it is easy to find in many texts the marks of these differentials and of the struggles attendant upon them. The study of them has been, on the whole, a great advance in humanistic scholarship. But I do believe that some people are taking too much for granted when it comes to constructing contexts out of these differentials. The problem is not that too much attention is being paid to context instead of to the universal humanity ostensibly found in great texts; the problem is in the privileging of certain contextual elements at the expense of others, and the presumption that any feature of a text that appeals beyond the lines of gender, color, class, and ethnicity must be context-free.

The privileging to which I refer can happen in regard to texts

written by white males, as when it is observed portentously that Newton's *Optics* were white and male, but it more often happens when the author of a text is female, dark-skinned, or associated with a recognized ethnic group. Surely there is a double standard, similar to the one criticized by Barbara Fields in her well-known commentary on prevailing conceptions of race.

Fields complained of the convention "that considers a white woman capable of giving birth to a black child but denies that a black woman can give birth to a white child." A little blackness can go a long way toward putting a person in one race rather than another. Hasn't the same way of thinking been applied to texts? We might paraphrase Barbara's sardonic observation by asking, Do we consider black authors to be capable of writing texts that speak in a "voice" that isn't "black"? There may be a spectrum of color, but we sometimes divide texts, like people, into distinctive racial categories. We continue to deny the argument made 20 years ago by Albert Murray to the effect that the American "mainstream is not white but mulatto."

Murray's heuristic provocation about American culture has the virtue of directing our attention to the contingent, mixed-up, dynamic character of the contexts that generate what are often called "black culture" and "women's culture" and "worker's culture" and "chicano culture," and "elite culture," or, as it is more often put, "hegemonic white male culture." In the name of cultural pluralism these cultures are being absolutized, and to each is being implicitly attributed a comparable structure so that each may be glued into the static mosaic we are told must replace the melting pot. This threatens to leave out "the syncretistic nature of so much of American . . . life," Werner Sollors has warned. "Instead of accepting the possibility of a text's many mothers," Sollors continues, "pluralists often settle for the construction of one immutable grandfather." Advocates of "the multi-ethnic paradigm," complains William Boelhower, "now often repeat the essentialist errors of their monocultural predecessors in attempting to trace out a blueprint of clear and distinct and ultimately reified ethnic categories."

Happily, in my view, there are number of signs that a post-pluralist, post-particularist perspective on contexts and texts is now coming into being. I have in mind especially some recent writings of the historian Linda Kerber and the critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Gates's widely-discussed project of establishing a distinctive canon of African-American literature might seem to be at odds with the drift of my own remarks, but Gates's book, *Figures in Black*, and his piece entitled "Whose Canon Is It, Anyway," in the February 26, 1989 *New York Times Book Review*, both display a commitment to the more complicated context, to the more complete, messy historicism that I want to uphold against the pristine cultural pluralists on the one hand and against the Bennetts and Cheneys of this world on the other. Gates justifies a black literary tradition not simply on the basis of the color of its authors, but on the basis of analyses of the texts they wrote. He explicitly acknowledges the multi-colored ancestry of his texts, and as an anthologist of black literature he defends a "thoroughly integrated canon of American literature" just as anthologists of American literature as a whole have defended larger, integrated canons of English and of Western literature.

Kerber's warnings against overdetermination by gender are more pronounced than Gates's warnings against overdetermination by color. In the June 1988 issue of *The Journal of American History*, Kerber enters a series of powerful caveats against the idea of separate spheres, especially as expressed in the celebration of a distinctive "women's culture." To continue to use even the "language of separate spheres," Kerber warns, "is to deny the reciprocity between gender and society, and to impose a static model on dynamic relationships."

Any apparently middle way risks being conflated with one or the other of the positions on either side. The messy historicism I advocate, with its complicated contexts and its refusal to affirm the timelessness of our truths, might be seen by some as an unwitting front for cultural pluralist orthodoxy. Yet this same historicism might be feared for its potential ability to overwhelm with multiplicity and contingency the specific voices that have so recently won the ears of the academic establishment in the United States.

These risks are worth taking in the interests of neutralizing a number of suspicions and counter-suspicions visible in the NEH-ACLS dispute and elsewhere. Beyond these suspicions and counter-suspicions may lie a more thorough-going historicism incorporating the new sensitivity to gender, color, class, and ethnicity while in turn acknowledging the historicity of these very distinctions and while recognizing that human history is not exhausted by their ordinance.

Narrative and the Making of History

Peter Conn
University of Pennsylvania

The fourth chapter of W.E.B. DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) is called "Of the Meaning of Progress." In the chapter's 10 pages, DuBois recalls his first teaching experience, two summers in the late 1880's when he set up school in a one-room shack in rural Tennessee and gave instruction to the children of the local black sharecroppers. The point of the chapter's title is ultimately ironic: for America's black people, especially in the South, progress is a delusion. In the years before and after the turn of the century, progress had been annulled by a multiplying Jim Crow system, and history refused to go forward.

Significantly, DuBois's grim meditation takes the form of a narrative, an exemplary tale that opens with the phrase "Once upon a time" However, in place of the assurances promised by that fully deliberated fairy tale formula, DuBois presents a story of disillusionment and death. In short, he has methodically dismantled the fairy tale, that elementary and even reductive instance of narrative predictability and ideological tidiness, in order to emphasize the burdens of reality.

DuBois's pages might serve as a compressed emblem of more recent reconsiderations of narrative and the structure of the past. (Parenthetically, may I say that I instance DuBois to remind us that our recent ways of reading have indigenious as well as Continental lineage.) It has been suggested that the idea of progress was the commanding trope which — for several centuries — gave shape and coherence to history (and indeed to visions of the future as well). History (as explanation) has provided myths of coherence: transformations of the contingent into the necessary and natural; bridges over the gap between the opacity of events and the clarity of order. "Narrativity assures us in advance that it will all make sense someday" (Hans Kellner). In partial consequence, all historical statements, including descriptions, are heavy laden with ideology and intention.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois anticipated our contemporary

feelings of belatedness, the dislocations that attend what Joel Colton has called our “post-imperialist, post-Auschwitz, post-Hiroshima, post-Vietnam, post-Gulag-Archipelago era.” Guided by his earlier, unmystified understanding of history’s suppressed political implications, DuBois sought both to resist the idea of a universalizing, totalizing “progress,” and to replace it with the contrariety of American black experience. DuBois also anticipated the shared project that links much of contemporary social history with new historicism — whatever their differences: a desire to give voice to utterance that has been “mistranslated” or silenced.

In a somewhat analogous way, the title of this session [Analysis, Narrative, and the Structure of the Past], which would, a generation ago or even more recently, have signified an item of consensus, now denotes an area of conflict. To put it simply, the past has no structure, at least not in the sense of a separate, objective, “given” reality, independent of our contemplation, patiently awaiting our discovery of it. Rather, the past is increasingly conceived as the malleable outcome of a set of transactions — dialogic, perhaps, or contestatory — in which meaning issues from the convergence of event, imagination, and our modes of discourse. New historicists “textualize” contexts by treating them in terms of documents, anecdotes, customs, mass movements, or cultural practices that mediate between history and the literary text. In *Rethinking Intellectual History*, Dominick LaCapra argues that “the very opposition between what is inside and what is outside texts is rendered problematic, and nothing is seen as being purely and simply inside or outside texts.” The documents and documentary traces in which individual and social life is embedded are never merely neutral records.

So, when literary scholars, eager to re-situate their texts in significant (and connectable) contexts, turn to history, and try to improve on an older, more mechanical, foreground-background model, they discover that many historians, having decided to subject their textual evidence to rigorous inquiry, have turned to literary theory. Both find themselves interrogating systems of discourse. The 19th century dream of scientific precision, whether in literary or historical analysis, has given way to an acceptance of shared limits. Absolute standards of judgment have been challenged by the idea that norms are themselves the construction of communities; “truth” represents the protocols, con-

ventions, and beliefs that prevail in a specific society at a specific moment.

Like all upheavals, the collapse of boundaries between, e.g., the “factual” and “fictional,” between the “documentary” and the “imagined,” between the metaphorical and the conceptual, is unsettling. Until recently, it was possible for readers to approach different sorts of texts under the guidance of different categorical and generic assumptions, assumptions that simplified (and economized) the tasks of analysis. The poems of Keats demanded explication, while the diaries of 19th century American frontier women could be adequately served by summary and paraphrase. Insofar as one takes note of the linguistic turn in historical and literary study, such interpretative certainties are challenged, perhaps abolished. More important — and the resistance that newer cultural studies evoke is a sign of that importance — it is clear that transformations in the assumptions and methods of literary and historical scholarship entail changes in the way in which literary and historical reality is conceived.

Our foundational critique has generalized our reconstructions, for instance of literary canons. The critique is central because we cannot proceed indefinitely by expansion alone: Joan Kelly’s question, “Was there a Renaissance for women?” succinctly implies how much more is at stake than merely “adding women.” At some level, perhaps most obviously in the syllabi of our unyielding 10-week quarters and 14-week semesters, every addition eventually involves a subtraction. (I refer to syllabi here, by the way, because they are perhaps the most rudimentary narratives in our professional discourse; they tell certain stories and exclude others. In American literature, to give only one familiar example, the sequence of readings traced an unfolding tale: from Benjamin Franklin to Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, through Mark Twain and Henry James, to Hemingway and Faulkner. If I understand Nina Baym’s analysis of this situation, the principal significance of our curricular narratives was not even that these texts were denominated “the best” that had been thought and said in America, but that they incarnated a representative, an “essential” American character.)

Stage one of our redefinition was to incorporate the texts of, e.g., women, or black Americans — and thus to tell a different story. But our

inclusions have been somewhat miscellaneous. Stage two, which is currently underway is harder to specify, but may consist of some version or other of what Gerald Graff calls “teaching the conflicts”: in which the issues that interest and indeed exercise scholars in literature and history (and anthropology and sociology and so forth) become themselves the focus of pedagogical energy. Not to “tame the barbarians” nor to “double narcissism,” to quote two phrases I heard just a few hours ago, but to acknowledge the discords that in fact mark the current situation.

Or, we may develop cultural studies courses of different sorts, which take as their subjects thematic categories which link the disciplines, and which cut across what have been understood as texts and contexts, respectively — such subjects as childhood, sexuality, education, and the city, in which culture itself is presented as conflicted.

However, it is well to acknowledge what the politics of the academy predict: that such courses may not be sites of genuine conflict. They will be taught by faculty on one “side,” as it were, of the controversy. Indeed, as one article on Graff’s proposal has argued, the faculty on one side of the issue may refuse to concede that a genuine controversy exists, and may be logically impelled to that refusal.

In any case, such collaborative and collective experiments are worth all the effort they may take, if only to encourage our students and our other publics to question the view that texts are untouched by history, and that history is just one damn thing after another.

Categories of Analysis? Not in My Book

Barbara Jeanne Fields
Columbia University

I should admit at the outset that I may not have been an appropriate choice to serve on this panel [Contemporary Challenges to Traditional Categories of Analysis in the Humanities], because I have no intention of speaking on behalf of *any* “categories of analysis” — traditional, contemporary, or otherwise. I must say, in fact, that the phrase itself — categories of analysis — has a dry, ugly sound to my ears. It brings to mind a bore starting to read a paper at an academic meeting, clearing his throat as he settles in for the long haul, knowing that the audience has no choice but to sit there. When I encounter the phrase “categories of analysis” in the opening pages of a book that I am not professionally obligated to read, I put the book down immediately.

Parents who want their children to be accepted in polite society should see to it that the children are well-dressed, well-disciplined, and well-spoken. And that is what the humanities have a right to expect of the parents of new — or, for that matter, old — categories of analysis. So I am taking the liberty of reversing the question I was asked to discuss and talking instead about the challenge posed *by* the humanities *to* categories of analysis — whichever and whosoever they may be.

I speak as a historian; and in practice, all historians know who the usual suspects are in discussions of this kind: race, class, and gender, the mismatched troika that appears so often in the titles of conferences or of sessions at annual meetings. The reason for the troika is easy enough to identify and surely worthy of approval: it is meant to draw the attention of historians to neglected portions of humankind. And, in truth, no history deserves the name that relegates large portions of humankind — let alone a majority — to oblivion. Only one agenda entitles historians to count ourselves among the humanities, the only social science that has a muse. That agenda is the highest possible development of humanity’s potential — all of humanity, not just one privileged part of it or the part of it that happens to be most familiar or closest to home.

That is more than a statement of moral preference — though I admit that it *is* my moral preference. Nor is it the Baskin-Robbins principle: that we must study 31 flavors of humanity to make sure everyone's favorite is included. A serious intellectual issue is at stake. Men and women, the familiar and the alien, the wretched of the earth and the privileged of the earth, are alter egos; you cannot understand the one if you do not understand the other. Just as you cannot map the area occupied by the continents without knowing the area occupied by the oceans, so you cannot map the space occupied by any portion of humanity without knowing the shape and dimensions of the space occupied by the rest. One of the most perceptive accounts of slaves that I know of appears in the biography of a slaveholder. Similarly, a recent book about plantation women in the Old South offers a profound analysis of men in the Old South and of men and women in the North as well.¹

“The highest possible development of humanity” is not the same, however, as “the highest possible development of categories of analysis.” Categories of analysis must look out for themselves, and I confess that I cannot arouse in myself a passionate interest in what happens to them. If not kept strictly in their place, they get above themselves and go masquerading as persons, mingling on equal terms with human beings and sometimes crowding them out altogether. When categories of analysis do that, they have forgotten their manners and need to be taken sharply in hand by their parents and reminded when it is appropriate and when inappropriate for children to be seen and heard.

Categories of analysis are surely seen and heard inappropriately when they become a shorthand referring to people, as when the phrases “paying attention to class,” “paying attention to race,” or “paying attention to gender” are taken to mean studying and writing about working people, Afro-Americans, or women. Writing about *gender* is not the same as writing about women. Relations that link women with other women or women with men are not necessarily gender relations. Let me offer an example. A male slaveholder who took sexual advantage of a female slave not only was not involved in a gender relationship with her, but acted as he did precisely in order to sever sex from gender.²

Nor should *race* stand in as shorthand for *minorities*. (*Minorities*, by the way, is itself an invidious and illogical euphemism that should be discarded, since those thus collectively referred to — people of

Asian, African, Latin American, or Oceanic descent — constitute, in the Archbishop of Canterbury’s phrase, “the two-thirds world.”³) If my colleague Eric Foner disagrees with the chairman of my department — an Englishman — about departmental policy, everyone would call that a professional or collegial matter. (I hope I need not say that this is a purely hypothetical situation.) If I have the same dispute with the chairman, does the matter automatically acquire a racial or gender dimension, simply because I am female and have a brown face? If a working-class, male, Irish-American student disputes the grade I have given him on the mid-term examination, is that automatically a troika conflict — race, class, and gender?

Human beings can never be reduced to the categories of analysis that may (or may not) help us to understand them. We not only demean them and ourselves but we botch the intellectual task at hand when we forget that. To the extent that the world around us habitually does the same thing, it is our job to call it as well as ourselves to order. Let me give you two examples.

A recent article in *The Columbia Spectator* began with the following sentence:

[The] Reverend James Forbes, Jr., a professor of preaching at Union Theological Seminary, was recently named Riverside Church’s *first black senior minister*.⁴

Churches designate their leaders by many titles but neither Riverside Church nor any church I have ever heard of uses the title “*first black senior minister*.” So the unthinking identification of the person with his supposed category of analysis has produced a ludicrous piece of misinformation. Worse, it has produced an insult that is, in the strictest sense of the word, racist. Had the Reverend Dr. Forbes been white, he would have been identified by his most striking qualification and the sentence would have read this way:

The Reverend James Forbes, Jr., a professor of preaching at Union Theological Seminary *who is described as “electrifying” in the pulpit*, was recently named senior minister at Riverside Church.

The second example comes, I regret to say, from the Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Clayton Yeutter. During his confirmation hearing, Mr.

Yeutter warned the members of the Senate Agriculture Committee that the drought in the midwest would drive many rural families off the land. But, in his tendentious phrasing, these families would be obliged to “diversify their economic base.”⁵

That last example should remind everyone that the troika categories are not the only offenders. *Economy, free market, monarchy, presidency, demography, ideology, variable*, and similar abstract nouns do the same kind of damage when permitted to wander at large among human beings, as though they were active and sentient just as human beings are. Yet more egregious are those abstract entities that are not even full-fledged nouns, but adjectives wearing noun camouflage: *pluralism, socialization, modernization, urbanization, ethnicity, republicanism*, and their kin.⁶ These abstractions are a convenient shorthand for denoting the patterns we detect in the decisions human beings make and the actions human beings carry out. But when the abstraction acquires a mental capital letter and is alleged to “take on a life of its own,” as a fatuous but very common formula has it, then a metaphorical conceit has gotten out of hand. We have no business personifying these abstractions, apostrophizing them, and attributing to them not just life, but life everlasting — something that no real living thing on earth possesses and no human hand has ever fabricated.⁷

The primary task of historians is to try to understand the past, to explore its meaning for the present, and to help others do the same. It is not the elaboration and vindication of models and theories — which are the means rather than the end — or the microscopic examination of our own subjectivity. Whatever our motives or purposes for undertaking a particular investigation, whatever our wrestling with the tools needed for the work, yea and whatever our categories of analysis, we should be drawing our audience’s attention to the past, not to ourselves. What belongs on display is not the categories of analysis, but the new understanding of the past that our categories of analysis have guided us to.

If I contract with someone to do the plumbing in my new house, I surely hope that the plumber is fully conversant with tools, materials, and sound technique. But when I show the new house to my friends, I do not expect the first exclamations to be: “What glorious solder! What uncommon flux! What stylish elbow fittings!” Categories of analysis are

the tools of our trade. But when they live and breathe and jostle human beings in our finished work, we are inviting our guests to gape through holes in the walls of the new house and marvel at the pipes and fittings. In that case, we have not only forgotten what the tools were for, but why we wanted a new house in the first place.

Notes

1. Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press (1982); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press (1988).
2. Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, p.374.
3. Barbara J. Fields, *Humane Letters: Writing About Human Affairs in English Prose*, (forthcoming).
4. *The Columbia Spectator*, February 13, 1989.
5. *The New York Times*, February 3, 1989.
6. Fields, *Humane Letters*, discusses this offense against logic and style, common in writing by historians, social scientists, and journalists.
7. The error, it should be unnecessary to emphasize, lies not in using abstractions, which are essential, but in using them naively or taking them literally. *Mountain*, *ocean*, and *tree* are abstractions; so is *equator*. But they are at different levels of abstraction. *Mountain*, *ocean*, and *tree* abstract from the unique, individual characteristics of physical entities to emphasize the characteristics they all share. *Equator* is an imaginary concept, useful in making sense of the physical landscape as long as we do not confuse the one with the other. *Human being* and *class* or *race* or *free market*, similarly, are abstractions at different levels. *Class*, *race*, and *free market* are imaginary concepts that we use to map the human social landscape. The usefulness of these concepts ends, like that of *equator*, the moment anyone is naive enough to confuse the imaginary concept with the landscape itself. Treating *class*, *race*, *free market*, and the like as abstractions on the same level with *human being* is as elementary an error as believing that you can crash a car into the equator as you can into a tree.

Contemporary Challenges to Traditional Categories of Analysis in the Humanities: The Margins and the Centers

Thomas Crow
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I want to speak about the topic more or less entirely from within the practice and profession of art history, forswearing, for the moment at least, distant and impressionistic pronouncements on other disciplines in the humanities or on their totality. My own seems to me to offer some special perspectives on the subject of creativity and renewal in one subject in relation to the emerging transdisciplinary universe evoked in *Speaking for the Humanities*, in part because its standing is so uncertain and apt to shift with point of view. In the eyes of its disciplinary neighbors, art history seems both an embarrassing distant relation and a fascinating, charismatic stranger; it is denigrated at one moment, surrounded by an aura the next.

The first aspect is easy to describe: the received image of the discipline is of a genteel, barely intellectual pursuit, untouched by theory or even self-reflection, more about black-tie openings than shirt-sleeved intellectual debate, tainted by snobbery, social climbing, and the art trade, historically the soft option among the humanities. This is a common enough perception among our extra-departmental colleagues, a perception that has been sharpened in recent years by its repetition among art historians themselves. Such a picture has been given currency by, among others with wide influence, the administrators in charge of the new Getty Center for Art History and the Humanities. It would have been interesting to have included them in the writing of *Speaking for the Humanities*, for, unlike the directors represented there, they explain the mission of their resident center not in terms of the health of its core discipline, but of its decrepitude. The strong implication of their pronouncements has been that only by means of large infusions of money, organization, and intervention from wise outsiders, can this discipline be saved.

I find that this line rings false for a number of reasons. First among them is that the confidence with which the critique of old-fashioned art history is being linked to professional power and visibility obscures the real origins of the critique itself. The most immediate of these were the achievements of a particular, eccentric strand of art-historical research that, as it emerged in the late 1960's and early 1970's, moved social practices to the center of the explanatory enterprise. The recent appearance of a self-advertised new historicism in literary studies seems to me to involve a rehearsal of a project that emerged some 20 years ago in the margins of the theoretically-moribund discipline of art history — long before support existed in prestigious institutions for any serious critique of orthodox art history.

Now a version of that critique has been prominently empowered as the agenda of “the new,” but it could not exist today without its having been maintained in fairly lonely opposition for quite a long period before. During that time, in 99% of what went on in the discipline, it was irrelevant, particularly within the established, dominant departments. There was simply no oxygen for it there; it died before it could find a voice.

No overt repression was necessary; the necessary repression had already been successfully concluded. Challenges to the art historian's accepted routines of attribution, dating, and iconographic categorization had been mounted in the 1930's and 1940's but had since been forgotten, complacently dismissed if anyone bothered to mention them at all. Even the great Meyer Schapiro, who in 1939 had single-handedly laid the Marxian and psychoanalytic foundations for most latter-day new art histories, no longer wished to talk about it — or did so in code, couched in a particularly intricate form of exegetical scholarship.

But his example was there to be excavated, and it was crucial to those of us that belonged to a second generation of the unsocialized — unsocialized because of a number of barriers: we belonged to the wrong region, graduate department, political and theoretical enthusiasms, or all of the above. For me and a small but since-influential cohort of contemporaries, this took place in southern California, a place which was then far from the scrutiny or even awareness of the centers of the discipline in the northeast. By the early 1980's, a number of similar strands of work converged to form what amounted to a new critical

mass. And shortly thereafter, it became clear that an ambitious new resident center oriented to art history, one intended to establish a new standard of professional success, could not justify its existence without borrowing the language of antagonistic critique.

An important factor in this has been the exponential growth in glamour and wealth invested in the art world since the end of the 1970's. The stodginess of older art history had been noticed even outside academia and had become an embarrassment to those overseeing that investment. The now-official denigration of the discipline, along with the search for interdisciplinary glamour and refurbishment, answers this dissatisfaction. It ignores, however, the ways in which the achievements of the 1970's were based on a recovery of the discipline's own buried strengths, strengths that might have looked like its signal weaknesses.

The first such weakness was art history's notorious hostility to theory and speculation. Its principal compensation for that absence has been an obsession with primary historical research. Traditionally-trained art historians had substituted empirical discovery — of unknown drawings, variants, contracts, recorded iconographic programs, original locations of objects — for any activity of interpretative criticism. That sort of work tended to consume months stretching into years in foreign archives and collections; approached with new questions in mind, this became an extraordinarily rich and rigorous kind of discipline. We became our own historians.

The second apparent weakness lay in the sphere of art history that goes under the name of connoisseurship, that is, those modes of concentrated attention to objects which had degenerated since the 19th century from a tool of explanation into a highly imperfect and failure-prone technique of cataloguing. One of the scandals of the newer work was how useful its practitioners found this previously-mystified form of expertise, how easily it could be mastered and what else it could be made to do. In general, it became clear that the traditional tasks of connoisseurship could be performed better when they were correlated to a reflective and informed historical interpretation. More than this, connoisseurship techniques provided an ability to talk about form as a marker of historical experience that the social historians from outside art history didn't possess — and generally haven't yet acquired. Waiting

to be discovered — and the young Meyer Schapiro had known this — was a rich interdisciplinary synthesis embedded in the very repressions that had created the moribund, fragmented state of the post-war discipline. 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. When these categories of analysis were put back together during the 1970's, they sparked a startlingly productive enterprise of interpretation, a collective release of pent-up energy, a making-up for lost time, that has given art history much of the anomalous prestige it now enjoys.

I want to conclude by speculating on what this might mean for the future development of innovative art history in this new era of considerably enhanced institutional support for non-traditional approaches to the humanities. The stagnation of the discipline has been overcome in large part by a deep immersion on the part of some scholars in the very conditions of its degenerated state, an inescapable engagement, over years, with resistances that outsiders would have belittled or ignored if they had been aware of them. But there was never any going around them; on the contrary, the way to a newer art history had to pass back through the old. The result was certainly interdisciplinary, but our incorporation of non-traditional tools and knowledge was improvised, ad hoc, and unsanctioned. We are now seeing the repetition of an old story: the refurbishment thus lent to a discipline of great social and economic importance is being appropriated from the margins into new forms of institutional empowerment. The project of critique and innovation is becoming subject to institutional habits of shaping, inclusion, and exclusion.

Critique gains legitimacy but at the cost of a certain sequestering and control. Further, there may be little pressure to extend the reach of this intellectual renewal beyond a sophisticated minority; there may in fact be counter-pressure against such extension. To take as an example the increasing prominence of centers for resident scholars, such as *Speaking for the Humanities* advocates, time spent in them will, of course, be a welcome respite for writing, but it will not be time for much primary research.

Further, the priorities of such centers and the attractions of their culture may divert some of the most able art historians from the frustrat-

ing but necessary work of community-building within the profession. Part of the continuing problem for us is that the project of a renewed art history (meaning simply an art history of some vividness, self-awareness, and explanatory drive) is drastically incomplete. With a majority of the field still operating according to unexamined routine, the questionable assumption is that insights gained on high can be passed down to those below without common participation. In its place, for the sophisticated minority, will come greater personal interchange with other humanists and social scientists for whom the past and present resistances of art history have little reality. Though these colleagues will doubtless be stimulating and informative in all kinds of productive ways, they will rarely be in a position to offer fundamental challenges to the way a discipline conducts itself. Official interdisciplinarity can become a substitute for just such challenges.

Humanities Graduate Education and the Undergraduate Curriculum: Concert or Conflict

Ernest S. Frerichs
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The scholars emerging from humanities graduate education are often viewed by colleges and universities as misfits in undergraduate education. "Overspecialization" is charged, and the new humanities instructor is seen as helpless before the demands of generalization in the introductory course and at ease only in the graduate seminar. Of equal concern, however, are a series of issues which will determine the quality of those entering humanities scholarship and the departmental labels they will wear. The content of the humanities undergraduate curriculum will also bear the scars of several academic battles, the initial phases of which are just beginning. My concern is to focus our attention on these other issues.

Although graduate educators have considerable concern for the financial support of humanities graduate students, many of these educators anticipate a return to relative normalcy in the 1990's. The prospect of a limited employment market, a spectre which haunted the graduate years of doctoral students in the last decade, seems to recede with the assurances of appointments available through the large-scale retirement of the humanities professoriate. Reports of increases in graduate applicants (my own institution is registering a 30 percent increase in graduate applicants this year) and a neutral to positive view of the quality of applicants (e.g., the assessment of the quality of candidates in the pool for the Mellon Pre-Doctoral Fellowships and the Javits Fellowship Program) both provide some confirmation that students are again viewing the prospects of a scholarly career favorably. There is a certain caution (to be investigated by further studies) about the apocalyptic views of the last decade: 1) there would be a large void in the pool of potential applicants in the 1990's, and 2) the applicants for senior professoriates in the late 1990's would come from a mediocre stock of academics who had replaced the "best and brightest" in the normal progression of scholarly generations.

Despite the above, however, we need serious studies assuring us, or denying, that the pool of new research doctorates will be adequate for the needs of the 1990's and beyond. If graduate education is the reproductive system of scholarship, the relative fertility of graduate schools has been fairly uniform, despite the severe difficulties of the past decade. From a high of 34,000 research doctorates in 1973-74, our productivity declined to a low of some 30,000 and increased to 32,278 in 1987. The ability of graduate schools of arts and sciences to regulate Ph.D. production in short-range terms has been less successful than the nation's regulation of hog production.

Recent studies such as that of Syverson and Forster from the National Research Council on *New Ph.D.s and the Academic Labor Market* (1984) argue that there is no shortage of Ph.D.'s to fill academic jobs. The data of that study suggested that there was a 5 to 7% demand for replacement. Based upon such a demand rate, the current faculty would be renewed in 15 to 20 years, a rate sufficient to meet future demands of the academic labor market without an increase in Ph.D. production. A contrary view suggests that research doctorate production will not be adequate for the needs of the mid-1990's. If the contrary view determines graduate school policies, there will be large ramifications with respect to such questions as the competitive attractiveness of a scholarly career and the financial support of humanities graduate students. The image of the unemployed or partially employed scholar from the late 1970's and early 1980's (the "gypsy scholar") is still vivid in the views of the scholarly life projected by academics to their students. If such a view of the scholarly life is coupled with the image of the humanities scholar spending a lifetime repaying educational debt, we can understand the enormity of the effort needed to alter those images. The absence of an accepted solution to the financial support of humanities graduate students is not encouraging for a rapid change in students' understanding of the situation.

It is important to note that the pool for academic hires is not only new research doctorates, but also doctoral persons initially employed outside of academic institutions. Additionally, it includes doctoral recipients inside the university, but serving either as post-doctorals or on some form of soft money funding. Although some of these potential hires will have discarded the prospects of a scholarly career within

academic employment, or will be eliminated from searches on other grounds, some portion of these persons will enter the pools of future searches for faculty appointments. An attempt was made to measure the severity of loss which direct academic employment in the field of the doctorate experienced in the National Research Council publication, *Departing the Ivy Halls: Changing Employment Situations for Recent Ph.D.s* (1983).

Alongside of the important questions of quantity and financial support is the perennial question of quality. Here we can commend the actions of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to fund a program for the pre-doctoral humanities to attract the "best and brightest" and to insure that 125 of the best students each year would have an adequate program of financial support for a significant part of their graduate career. The Mellon program is not primarily concerned with a lack of Ph.D.'s; it is concerned to insure that the best minds will be attracted to the scholarly profession with obvious consequences for scholarship and the undergraduate curriculum. Before the 1989 Mellon grants to students, some 706 awards had been made and 605 Mellon Fellows were pursuing graduate education in 40 North American graduate schools.

A further program of support for doctoral students has been the neglected Jacob J. Javits Fellowships, operative under Title IX of the Higher Education Act of 1965. Initially mandated by Congress in 1980, the Javits program intends to support annually 450 graduate students of outstanding ability in the social sciences, humanities, and the arts. The Javits program, however, was not operative till 1984. In the operational years of 1984 to 1987, 509 awards have been made at a cost of \$9.7 million. A further \$6.7 million was mandated by Congress for the current year.

If these are the certainties and the uncertainties of both supply and support, what additional concerns should one have?

1) There are the uncertainties about the behavior of professors who will face no retirement cap after 1992-93. Presuming good health and reasonable effectiveness, what will be the effect if the economy heats up and inflation rates rise, frightening the retiring professor into continued service?

2) It is also clear that there will be little, if any, expansion of the

professoriate. The administrative lesson learned from recent years is to reduce faculties if possible and, if necessary, to replace senior professors with junior professors. The latter has important implications for the nature of graduate education. If the standard response of the departmental faculty is to clone retiring distinguished professor x, it will be a bitter pill to secure at best a bright new Ph.D. In the event of such alternatives, it will be a time when endowed professoriates will be an important protection for the continuation of senior status and the preservation of certain fields of scholarship. Endowment will be a necessary weapon to preserve those fields of scholarship which cannot survive or prosper on the basis of student enrollment.

The next decade will be an important moment for administrations to assess the relative importance of various humanities graduate programs. Those assessments will include not only traditional commitments, but also the changing winds of recognition reflected in reputational studies such as the Jones-Lindzey-Coggeshall study of the early 1980's. Decisions will be required to determine whether certain newer fields (e.g., comparative literature, religious studies) will be adequately staffed for graduate studies and what the graduate education future will be for fields less attractive to graduate students (e.g., German studies). Enrollment concerns, especially in those public institutions in which graduate education has depended heavily on teaching assistantships as the standard form of graduate student support, will be a further factor in the evaluations of growth and decline in the professoriate and in specific programs of graduate education.

3) Beyond the question of replacing senior professors lies the question of reallocation of faculty resources in a steady-state faculty.

Senior administrators have not failed to note that this is their first serious opportunity in more than a quarter of a century to restructure their faculties. This restructuring is a university-wide question with ramifications for every field. But even if we confine our attention to the humanities, the questions for administrations will be to determine what should grow, what should decline, and what should plateau. What "new combinations," to use the term of another Mellon program, should become a part of the undergraduate humanities program in the 21st century? Which fields will have first priority access to the resources of the university, a priority often reflected in departmental status, and

which fields will continue in the form of committees, programs, and centers? This latter question is not directed to the issue of the overspecialized Ph.D., but rather to the question of what will be there at all.

In 1980-81, a new reputational study was conducted by Lyle Jones and Gardner Lindzey, updating by a decade the Roose-Andersen study of the early 1970's and the early study in 1966 of the late Allan Carter. When the initial instruments of survey arrived in graduate deans' offices, it was clear that the field of biology and its nomenclature had changed so dramatically in a decade that the surveyors had to create a new survey instrument for that field. By the criteria used in the Jones-Lindzey study it was clear that the field of geography would not be included (and it was included only after the geographers agreed to pay for the survey costs of including the field). Growing fields in terms of doctoral production such as comparative literature and religious studies that met the criteria of the Jones-Lindzey study for inclusion were excluded because their absence from previous studies meant that no statistical comparisons were possible.

4) Graduate education is a very conservative segment of university education. There is a built-in resistance to radical experimentation, and the autonomy of departments is the single most important influence on educational policy in graduate education.

When "new combinations" arrive on the academic scene, there is a certain imposition of the seniority rule by the existing departments. Who got here first is often very determinative of the degree to which newer fields of study (e.g., black studies, women's studies, Judaic studies, archaeology) will be given a seat in the academic circle. Given the limited resources for the support of graduate students, a fresh combination seeking support for graduate students is somewhat like the person who approaches a theatre to learn that all the tickets have been sold and the doors are closed. Indeed, there is no room in *any* performance for the newcomer. Especially when the newcomer is from the humanities and the assurance of grants and contracts from external agencies is slight, the newcomer feels that an academic cold shoulder is being extended. The combination of limited resources and traditional commitments lead to strong affirmations of the status quo and considerable opposition to change.

5) All this suggests that there will be little encouragement from traditional departments to encourage the growth of “fresh combinations,” new departments — especially if the price of those creations is a redistribution of resources from previously established units in terms of faculty, graduate students, or fellowships. Barbara Herrnstein-Smith spoke in this conference of “disciplinary self-transformations,” a highly desirable change, though I doubt that administrations, existing departments, or graduate schools will encourage the forms of self-transformation which lead to fission and the creation of new departments.

6) The problem will become worse in the graduate schools with the lengthening of the time needed to complete doctorates. According to the most recent National Research Council report (1987), the time spent in completing a humanities doctorate has gone from 5.5 years in 1967 to 7.1 years in 1977 to 8.4 years in 1987. For all fields in 1987 the length was 6.9 years. This is a further strain on the financial resources of graduate schools and a further deterrent to encouraging new doctoral programs. New resources or the redistribution of existing resources are the obvious alternatives.

Stanley N. Katz’s statement to the members of this panel presupposed that “. . . today’s graduate students tend to be ill-equipped for and frequently disinterested in the task of general education.” If the typical teaching experience of a doctoral candidate is a section of 15 students in History 1 or English Composition 1, and that experience is repeated for two or three years of the graduate student’s enrollment, it is easier to understand the results in Stan Katz’s statement. Departments need to become more adventuresome in enabling the advanced graduate student to teach a course independently which is intended for freshmen and sophomores. The opportunity to do this with supervision from a master teacher can do much to dissipate the notion that graduate students are fit for teaching only graduate seminars.

In conclusion I wish to suggest that significant change in the areas of this panel’s title [Graduate Education in the Humanities and the Undergraduate Curriculum] is less likely in the 1990’s. Departments will be struggling (especially those not in favor with the enrollment choices of students) to maintain their strengths in size and in the relative seniority of their faculties. These departments will be resistant to any significant changes in the repertoire, including the introduction of “fresh

combinations,” which threaten their continuation in at least the strength they have achieved. The assaults on the humanities will come from senior administrators creating or changing staffing plans which control more effectively the expression of particular department faculties. Here lie the battlefields of humanities departments in the 1990’s, rather than in major reformations of graduate education in those fields.

Queen for a Day

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What would I do with the humanities if I were Queen for a Day? Here is my fantasy.

First, I would modify William Carlos Williams' apothegm "No ideas but in things" to "No ideas but in institutions." Changing the ideas of the humanities entails changing the institutions that give them shelter. In the late 20th century United States, the primary institution that cooks up, serves, and services the humanities is higher education and such necessary companions as the library and the foundation. Within higher education, academic disciplines, which find their homes in departments, have day-to-day responsibility for the administration of scholarship and teaching. In the 16th century, being a humanist meant being a student of classical learning; in the 17th century, a student of cultural and human affairs. Today, being a humanist tends to mean having a disciplinary affiliation and a departmental office. One is in Comp. Lit., or History, or, in a defiant leap, Interdisciplinary Studies.

As Queen, I prefer expansion to contraction, moving out to holing up. Reflecting this mood, my ukases decree at least four increases:

1) Since the 1960's, volatile social and intellectual forces have revitalized humanistic theories, methods, and knowledge. This renewal has stimulated the study of groups (African-Americans, for example, or intellectuals in a colonial society) that humanistic disciplines had previously ignored or distorted. This renewal has simultaneously investigated the mechanisms of knowledge that would permit such exclusions and distortions. So doing, we have asked, again, ancient questions about the ways in which human beings represent the natural world in which they find themselves and the social worlds they create. This renewal has also provoked a many-splendored resistance to its presence. To resist, however, is a form of scholarly malpractice, an equivalent of teaching physics without mentioning quarks or leptons. This Queen for a Day would ask for systematic faculty development programs —

on all educational levels — to explore these fresh interpretations of history and culture. In more daring moments, I suggest that participating in faculty development programs could join teaching, research, and service as a criterion for tenure, promotion, pay increases, and other benefits.

2) We now tend to organize humanistic study by focusing on specific sets of cultural products. Historians look at the past; literary scholars at texts; anthropologists at organized societies; art historians at fine objects; film critics at films; philosophers at concepts and structures of thought. Humanists, however, might organize their work around the study of literacies, the investigation of huge systems of meaning. The study of literacies imposes at least four demands:

- Asking who gets to read and who gets to write in a particular society and what having these privileges has meant and means — socially, economically, morally, culturally.
- Learning a natural language other than one's "native tongue." How can another language be read, written, spoken? What is its grammar? What are its jokes? Yes, our Queen for a Day wants to restore language requirements in education.
- Investigating the language of science and mathematics. Our Queen would also impose a course about the history of science and technology as a graduate requirement for anyone who wants an A.A. or B.A. degree.
- Mapping the verbal, visual, and musical languages of mass consumer societies, in brief, in texts, spectacles, and sounds of the modern, a period that now has a plenitude of candles on its birthday cakes.

If the humanities were to accept all of these demands, their curriculum would bring the quadrivium back into balance with the trivium.

3) The "pool" of people who might wish to make the humanities their vocation is too narrow and shallow. In addition, the experiences of faculty members in the pool are far less diverse than those of their actual and potential students. Clever fish do swim in the pool. Wise frogs do perch on its lily pads. Nevertheless, it waits for new streams and springs to feed it. Institutions that exist because of the humanities,

like the disciplinary organizations and the National Endowment for the Humanities, should work together to show people that the humanities can be a desirable vocation. They might, for example, tell junior high school pupils and their parents about an academic future. This future would be even more appealing if these institutions were to end the cheap professor-bashing of the 1980's that has sneered at faculty members and labeled them lazy wastrels, obsessive specialists, and left-leaning wimps.

4) During her day, the Queen often feels a tremor of fretful weariness with members of various disciplines who fetishize their institutional and intellectual borders and then refuse to peep and peer review beyond them. Give the Queen ambassadors who write up treaties and trade agreements among the disciplines. Even more fretfully and wearily, the Queen has noted the reluctance of academic humanists to recognize audiences beyond the academy. Lynne V. Cheney has reminded us of the importance of a "parallel school." Consisting of such institutions as media, libraries, museums, and the state humanities councils, the "parallel school" nurtures and teaches the humanities to many publics in many settings. The tracks of higher education and the "parallel school" must intersect with each other, not simply run side-by-side.

As the Queen nears the end of her day, she meets with her Treasurer. The Treasurer is not a bad person. Indeed, before getting a M.B.A., s/he has been an English major and read Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*. Now, however, s/he insists that institutional tubs stand on their own bottoms. Even if the humanities cannot be profit centers, they must be self-supporting. In higher education, the Treasurer argues, the business school and the medical school should not have to maintain a welfare state for the liberal arts. In the "parallel school," the Treasurer goes on, each group ought to raise enough funds to keep its projects and programs going. Let the market care enough to get touched in order to sustain the very best.

Perhaps because the day is almost over, the Queen cries out. Of course, principal need not be a principle; capital need not be an exclusively moral rule. Nevertheless, principal cannot destroy principle. Interest points cannot wholly dominate interesting points. Turning to the Treasurer, I rule that general revenues in higher education must support the academic humanities and that general revenues in the republic must

support the parallel school. This, I say, is for the “common good.” The Treasurer, who keeps up to date, asks if the Queen is not dabbling in essentials and universals. “What,” the Treasurer asks, “can you possibly mean by ‘the common good?’” I stare out at the horizon, where day and night commingle in the ambiguities of dusk. “Fund,” I say, “a symposium on the subject. Have reports from its conversations published in both *Representations* and *Reader’s Digest*.”

Both days and panels do end. I trust that my Queen for a Day has not been like the Red Queen whom Alice stared down in Wonderland — haughty, imperious, or, woeful fate, simply silly.