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AMERICAN SOCIETY, THE TRANSNATIONAL UNIVERSITY, AND THE THREATENED LITERARY CANON

Introduction: The Current Decline of Literary Studies

Some of the leading literary critics believe that literary studies at universities is steadily eroding away. Sir Frank Kermode of Oxford University, in his *Forms of Attention* (1985), has noticed the problem of the possible loss of the literary tradition if the trend not to teach it continues. There have been large scale discussions turning into debates in books, such as in Cary Nelson's and Dilip Gaonkar's *Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies*, and in prestigious academic journals, such as in "Forum: Thirty—Two Letters on the Relations between Cultural Studies and the Literary" and also a special issue on the teaching of literature (both in *PMLA*).

Consider the views of J. Hillis Miller, former President of the Modern Language Association and Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine, who is sometimes referred to as one of the former Yale deconstructionists:

Whatever the protestations of those running the universities about the eternal values embodied in the Western canon, the news has got through to them that the actual culture of the United States is multifarious and multilingual. Moreover, they know now that you can no longer trust professors to teach Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and the rest in the old ways. New ways of reading them have shown that these authors, read from a certain angle, as professors seem perversely inclined to do and to teach their students to do, are what some governing the university consider to be dynamite that might blow up the social edifice. So the more or less unconscious strategy is to welcome the self-destruction of the traditional literature departments as they shift to cultural studies and then gradually cut off the money¹.

Traditional literature departments are teaching classic works less — works of the Western canon — and instead are teaching works in cultural studies, which change is destroying the departments. Equally recognized and more controversial than Miller is Harold Bloom, Sterling Professor of Humanities at Yale University and Berg Professor of

English at New York University, who would concur with Miller's main points:

Originally the Canon meant the choice of books in our teaching institutions, and despite the recent politics of multiculturalism, the Canon's true question remains: What shall the individual who still desires to read attempt to read, this late in history? The biblical three-score years and ten no longer suffice to read more than a selection of the great writers in what can be called the Western tradition, let alone in all the world's traditions. Who reads must choose, since there is literally not enough time to read everything, even if one does nothing but read. Mallarmé's grand line — "the flesh is sad, alas, and I have read all the books" — has become a hyperbole. Overpopulation, Malthusian repletion, is the authentic context for canonical anxieties. Not a moment passes these days without fresh rushes of academic lemmings off the cliffs they proclaim the political responsibilities of the critic, but eventually all this moralizing will subside. Every teaching institution will have its department of cultural studies, an ox not to be gored, and an aesthetic underground will flourish, restoring something of the romance of reading².

Both critics see the decline of literary studies into cultural studies through the steady elimination of classic works from the university programs. Miller approaches the problem as a high-level administrator in the field through articles and lectures warning fellow professors to act to avoid the near destruction. He sees social conditions in America and the world as forces changing the university into a transnational source for the exchange of information, with consequent changes inevitably occurring now in the teaching of literature. Bloom acts as an elite erudite knowing his views cannot become a popular movement toward change while also believing strongly enough in the cause of literature to author a 578-page book defending the reading of classic literature. (Besides gaining the feeling of having acted toward an aesthetically just cause, Bloom got an advance of \$600,000 for it.) These efforts of Bloom in *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* raise questions so important that they should be considered by any teacher of literature. In the following essay I evaluate Bloom's efforts in the cultural context by asking these questions:

Part I. Why is American society in particular a context for the decline in literary studies?

Part II. Why is the new transnational university a threat to the literary canon?

Part III. How can the literary canon and the teaching of it be preserved?

I. American Society: The New Context for the University and the Decline in Literary Studies

The Old American Context

D.H. Lawrence once began an essay by commenting on the feeling Americans have of lacking a cultural past and needing to borrow it primarily from Europe. I might add that this is the Europe that ultimately goes back to the culture of ancient Greece and Homer – in short, the Western tradition. He asked them to look to themselves to form new cultural works they could really call their own (*Phoenix: Posthumous Papers*, Penguin, 1936).

In these ideas are two opposite tendencies of American universities. On the one hand, America borrowed its model of the university from the rich cultural past of Europe: namely, from the model of most Western universities, that of Wilhelm von Humboldt's University of Berlin, formed in the early nineteenth century in a Germany which had a very definite sense of national identity going back centuries³. This university had its two philosophical ideals of education to seek out the truth in all fields, not only the sciences with direct technological application, which was not an idea current at that time but one that would progressively emerge during the century, but also literature, the humanities and the new emerging social sciences of mankind; and the second ideal was to serve as means of educating men (women did not attend) in the culture of their nation so that they would become cultured and productive citizens.

These two ideas, along with the general outline of the programs of studies as we shall see, were taken over by the early organizers of American universities, but since the cultural situation of American society was not identical to that of the strong nationalistic German speaking people the ideals could not form exactly the same type of university and in fact the American university developed differently. Unlike Germany which had a single set of values and ideals and perhaps more importantly a tradition of national literature in which they had been partially created, America had always been a constitutionally created association of people from many different cultures with their own national literatures behind them giving them their identities which they were bringing to the New World. Germany found itself to have a national literature and values; the United States agreed to have certain values

based on the different cultural feelings of its immigrants and only after the political unity was established did people in the nineteenth century ask, What is our national literature? How can we define ourselves in a new national literature? From the beginnings of American universities, it was thought necessary to base literature departments on the language and the national culture, though ironically the single identity of the culture was not given but was to be sought in the literature – as a reason for the subject being taught in the universities. A consequence for American departments of literature is that they would tend to teach all or most works their own authors had produced because they did not have a long tradition of great writers who had already chosen a selective list of the best.

This important consequence for the survival of literature today manifests the second opposing tendency in American culture that has direct ramifications for its university. Besides the feeling of having to borrow its culture because it does not have any, America at the same time feels it must make its own culture, start from nothing and do the best it can, as when Lawrence called for Americans to look to themselves for culture. But he, I would suggest, meant that culture must always be created if we are to have it, or it must become a part of us through much study; no one can just borrow it, or take it from some other people but rather an effort is needed to learn it thoroughly and then to form one's own new cultural works. Stealing the Elgin marbles does not thereby assure the British that they have assimilated Greek ideals any more than does making American university buildings look like the Parthenon assure us that America has assimilated all of the past Western culture and is now making a new step forward on its own. Of course the probably intelligent and sincere early founders of the American university did not think so naively, yet when there is the tendency in literature departments to teach whatever works are American and not the works of previous cultures the question of their value in relation to the admittedly vast Western tradition becomes a secondary matter at best and the selection of books to teach is a matter of second guessing what is most American, since that is what the works are supposed to mean according to a predominant way of thinking still current today.

"We are the final inheritors of Western tradition", declared Bloom. "Education founded upon the *Iliad*, the *Bible*, *Plato*, and *Shakespeare* remains, in some strained form, our ideal, though the relevance of these cultural monuments to life in our inner cities is inevitably rather remote" (32). To the ambivalent self-awareness of not having any culture but having the right to make it as one sees fit, there can be added the all-too-

common attitude of Americans that they as the final inheritors are the judges of what is culturally valuable in the past, what is now, and what is to be. The assimilation of past culture is taken for granted because America has come historically at the end, or the idea that the past can simply be "borrowed" when it is useful prevails.

I intend to emphasize certain general cultural attitudes that are also present in the university and have helped to lead to the current situation detrimental to literary studies.

The New American Context

Although America "borrowed" the ideals of the university from Humboldt and transplanted them into a different cultural context, the two main ideals could not in the end have the same guiding influence, especially because the context has changed from what it was in three ways: the civil rights movements of recent decades, the end to the Cold War, and economic difficulties.

Starting in the 1950s civil rights movements of all kinds helped to lessen the belief of academics in a single national literature. Instead, there arose Black Literature, Jewish Studies, Women's Studies, Chicano Studies, Gay Studies, and Black Lesbian Studies and the dividing of literature continues to extremes. These facts are well known, and so I am simply calling to attention the fact it was not always this way, and so this way might not be the only right or natural way; the past tends to be forgotten if culture is not built on it.

These movements had a related "negative" effect on literature departments, if they are considered from the standpoint of the government. The government would want a literature to create a sense of national character or identity or unity, as when E.M. Forster describes the usefulness of writers as "government advertisers"⁴. Writers and academics started to become more antigovernmental and more divisive of the social body from the 1950s onward, with the generation of the Beats. Thus, they did not work towards the definition of a national character, just the opposite. And the new power of the media could do this on a much larger scale, with much more persuasion, and under more governmental control.

As another change in the American context in the late 1980s, Miller points out how the Cold War helped American universities and literature departments in particular (10). The Americans had to be the best in everything, in national defence, and even in literature, which of course was understood as giving a people a sense of unity and values. Without the threat of communism, or without the threat of being seen as second best, there would be less need for the government to fund otherwise

useless literature programs. Miller cites reductions in several areas: the National Endowment of the Humanities, as well as other similar programs, governmental appropriations for universities, and loans for students.

A third change in the American context is the steady pressure imposed by economic difficulties. Since there was less external threat, the United States could dwell on itself more and had to think about balancing the budget. When economic factors become the criteria for university policy, the departments with no immediate direct application suffer the most. Miller cites the case of cutbacks in the very large University of California system and the need for it to seek funding from private pharmaceutical corporations among others (7). This is a trend for universities to seek funding from private corporations. Aesthetic and humanistic values, however, do not seem to add up well in terms of monetary profit.

These three changes in the American context make its university, especially its literature departments, even less capable of fulfilling the two ideals of the traditional university founded by Humboldt. More than ever the question is why is literature needed in the university today?

II. The Transnational University: A Threat to the Literary Canon

External Economic and Technological Causes of the New Transnational University

As Miller points out, there are *economic* causes of the change of the traditional national university into the new transnational organization. The decrease in funding by the government leads to the need for funding by private corporations, which are increasingly multinational. These financial sources do not need literature departments to discuss national cultural values, and they have much more of a specific interest in what the universities could do for them, with the result that this source of funding is bringing the greater control of programs. More than the long literary tradition, corporations would need intercultural communication. Besides this, literature can be used for prestige; for example, the word has been applied by businesses to mean information leaflets describing their products, technical manuals of all kinds, articles in research publications, or almost anything written technically. And the term "computer literacy", while not linguistically inaccurate in its formation, demonstrates how literature can be used to give value in domains outside of it, for the term suggests the use of computers is as important as reading or perhaps the first step toward the replacement of reading books. Literature departments will have lost a battle when they become

more interested in the methods of computers for instruction than in the aesthetic values of literature. The means of instruction is currently replacing the ends.

Besides this decrease the government funding and the shift to funding by corporations, literature departments are becoming smaller for other reasons. With the decrease in college-age people born in the postwar baby boom, less tuition money is received and fewer professors are needed. Then, fewer graduates of the baby-boom period can find jobs in their field, a process which started in the late 1970s, and so fewer start to enter the literature programs. If fewer enter, then fewer professors are needed, and so the decline is self-augmenting. The situation is worse for literature departments than for those with immediate technological applications for corporations.

Hand in hand with the economic causes go the technological. The university is being "wired" or interconnected with other organizations throughout the world, both public and private, educational and profit, civilian and military. Interconnection requires assimilation of methods of operation to some extent and eventually of ideals. The internet causes this as does the use of business values in the university setting; for example, the hiring of performance experts by new university administrators to increase the productivity of its programs, an action which calls into question what the maximum productivity and efficiency of a literature department would be. The result of these two external causes is a new transnational university serving American society by being a center of information exchange on a global scale (Miller 7).

Internal Social Causes of the Decline in Literary Studies and Attacks against the Western Canon

The values of society outside the university have been partially internalized in the professors, as they are after all a part of the greater community, with the result that literature departments are insidiously giving into values which are not those of the traditional teaching of a literary tradition, in the sociological process called cooption.

Throughout history the cultural values of art or literature have been "opposed" to those of society in the sense that the former are a distinct set of values with a role in human life which must obtain a place provided for by the society at large. All too often when society provides the resources for the arts, it also requires some control over their values. The arts and sometimes sciences have had to prove their piety to the church or their appreciation of rich patrons. In spite of the apparent compromises and periods of defeat, culture survived. The situation today is somewhat unprecedented, for the supposed preservers of culture are

themselves leading to its erosion. Rather than being an ethical failing, the cooption indicates the greater interdependence of all elements of society today.

The compromising of literary values for social ones by the professors themselves has been noticed both by Miller and Bloom and many others. The consequent decline of literary studies means a decrease in both the quantity and the quality of teaching. The decrease in the size of the programs has been mentioned, and this process is expected by most sources to continue because of changes in the programs' quality. In general literary studies are changing into cultural studies, so that fewer works of the literary tradition are taught. This change is a decrease in the quality of the program and even worse, administrators can see a reason for cutting the funds for literature programs because the same social aims and research can be performed by sociology, psychology, and others, perhaps it can be argued more scientifically, effectively.

How does the change from literary studies to cultural studies occur? Let us consider an example given by Bloom in an interview:

[*Newsweek's* Ken Shulman asks:] If the classics you have grouped together as the "Western Canon" are no longer to be studied, what will replace them?

[Bloom replies:] A hybrid form, partly formed from the staples of popular culture and partly from, to use that dreadful phrase, politically correct works. A dear friend who teaches English at the University of Chicago told me with great gusto how she had led the fight to replace the stories of Ernest Hemingway with the works of the Chicano-American writer Gary Soto in her introductory course on literature. Now Hemingway at his very best, is just about as good as Chekhov or Joyce – that is to say about as good as a short-story writer can be – while Gary Soto couldn't write his way out of a paper bag. When I told her this, she replied that she and I could go home and read whatever we wanted to but that her students were growing up in the United States and would grow up as better citizens if they read Gary Soto on Chicano-American life. I find her attitude a kind of social fascism as if esthetic considerations were all right for us, but are not proper for all students. I find that outrageous"⁵.

Bloom points out, instead of teaching the traditional works, departments teach a hybrid of popular culture and politically correct works. Literary studies are being divided into many types, a process which he calls "Balkanization" (517). The term signifies the partition into

smaller units. These units do not teach the literary canon, and even are against it. With the dividing of departments into factions by professors who are socially and politically motivated, there is the tendency for departments to only hire professors who belong to the same faction, even a complimentary, warring one, rather than professors who only teach the classics ("We Have Lost the War" 60). Ironically enough, those professors who fight hard to replace the teaching of the traditional works do not realize that it is only those which are the distinctive subject of literature departments and give them their reason for being.

The Balkanization of literary studies is more extreme in America. As one reason, American literature departments began with no classics, with no past, no tradition, and so had to define some of the works being written as valuable, as their "classics", the American classics. Whether the best of these measure up to the best of the tradition of Western literature must be subordinate to the selection of some works that are American. Americans identify more with popular feeling than with the attitudes of an aristocracy or an elite, and the advent of popular culture intensified the anti-elitist tendencies. Then, as a related reason for Balkanization, Americans have an extremely strong feeling of democracy, almost to the extent that it is believed there has finally formed a classless society. In the political domain this American trait should be highly praised; in the domain of the university, however, it has become associated with the ambivalent American attitudes toward culture described above. Is "culture" or "literature" democratic too? That is to say, is American literature just as good as the previous literatures just because it is a literature of a people and all people are ideally equal? Or considered as a matter within American culture, are books from all different groups, whether racial, gender, ideological, or some other, equally American and therefore equally good aesthetically?

To a European, as I am slowly becoming after having lived many years in Greece, such an excessive or misapplied sense of democracy in the cultural domain must seem at first strange or naive and then vulgar. But it is exactly such attitudes that are gaining currency in the university in the name of multiculturalism and political correctness. The social past of America with its just introduction of more rights for citizens and the current reality of a very democratic life lead many academics to put literature in the service of politics or to reduce it to one dimension of political discourse. Then, rather than to support many different literatures within America, Bloom thinks this is "The worst of all time for literary criticism". (22) While I do not share his fatalism expressed in the title of an interview "We [few literary critics who defend traditional literature] Have Lost the War," the steady decline is undeniable. In summary, the

process is something like the phrase, Divide and Conquer, though it actually means, Let's Divide and Be Conquered.

Bloom epitomizes the movements against teaching the canon in the phrase "The School of Resentment," which engages in various forms of cultural criticism such as the Feminist, the Marxist, Gay, Lesbian, various ethnic, Black, American Indian, afrocentrist, Foucault-inspired new historicist, and deconstructive, among others which use amateurish, watered-down versions of theories from other fields. The main principle is "what is called aesthetic value emanates from class struggle" so that literature should be in the service of social aims (23). Teachers of the School of Resentment prefer "writers who offer little but the resentment they have developed as part of their sense of identity"⁶. The group – which seems to include almost everyone except Bloom – resents canons, "the aesthetic value of literature", and its difficulty⁷.

Despite charges of being a purist or an elitist, Bloom criticizes many academics for wanting to demystify or to open up the canon of standard work. Espousing popularist beliefs, many say that literature should be accessible to everyone and such writers as Shakespeare are not. Bloom counters the view with the fact that the best is the most difficult and it was always the case that the fewest understood it (520). Selection based on criteria of aesthetic value are essential; it cannot be the case that whatever I like is art or art is whatever I like.

Mass culture, popularist tendencies, and materialism in the U.S. make the anticanonical feelings stronger. According to Princeton sociologist Michèle Lamont, "American legitimate culture is less related to knowledge of the Western humanist culture, is more technically oriented (with an emphasis on scientific or computer information), and more materialistic than the French legitimate culture"⁸. As a consequence, members of the American upper-middle class may display their high position by buying a big boat whereas the corresponding class of some other countries, such as France, could achieve prestige by "consuming" cultural works, in other words by attending concerts, going to galleries, buying and discussing new books of intellectuals.

In America it is easier to reject the great works of the past because America has a shorter history and so always felt as if it were making a new start and doing so is legitimate ipso facto. Sinclair Lewis in his novel *Babbitt* describes a civilization which has no tradition and which only amuses itself with rubbish. Forster understood the serious consequence of this situation when he wrote that amusement becomes something meaningless and whatever gives the least bother: the power to understand the past will be lost, as will the ability to improve upon it⁹.

...the past, and the creations that derive from the past, are losing their honour and on their way to being jettisoned. We have, in this age of unrest, to ferry much old stuff across the river, and the old stuff is not merely books, pictures and music, but the power to enjoy and understand them. If the power is lost the books etc. will sink down into museums and die, or only survive in some fantastic caricature. The power was acquired through tradition" (paragraph 4, "Does Culture Matter?").

How is a power acquired through tradition? People learn the language that has been developed through thousands of years of civilization, giving to them the capacity to think in a modern world, yet without the help from others who pass on this tradition individuals cannot invent language on their own, as children lost in the jungle and later found were unable to do. In the case of our subject matter, if people do not study the literary tradition they will not gain the accumulated knowledge provided by it, they will be less able than their forerunners to discern what is good, and they will suffer a regression in whatever spiritual benefit literature has yielded in the development of human feelings and aesthetic values. Therefore, a power can be acquired through tradition because each new step accumulates all of the past in principle, not in the retainment of every detail, and the principle acts as a formative law.

As many writers on work and recreation have thought, modern work is a frenetic, uninteresting activity which requires its opposite as a complement: a passive, meaningless pleasure in recreation. Forster believes the dissatisfying schism can be repaired by taking an interest in the past and thus in culture so as to engage in intelligent leisure (paragraph 5 of "Does Culture Matter?"). Ernst Robert Curtius in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* also writes about the value of the cultural tradition for everyday life: "It [literature] is a reservoir of spiritual energies through which we can flavour and ennoble our present-day life" (page X).

In order for Bloom to convince those in the School of Resentment that the literary canon is still worth teaching he might have to convince them of its social role. Miller felt that literature professors who still wanted to save their disciplines from virtual destruction should first become aware of the problem and then try to convince the sources funding the university, not the professors, of the indispensable value of literature today (12). It would be hard if not impossible, he felt, to defend literature as offering the old, no longer needed values of formulating a sense of national identity or giving universal values of culture. Hardly does Bloom

attempt to prove the utility of literature for aims other than the aesthetic. Sometimes he denies or seems to deny any political or social value, as when he clearly declares: "But as for finding the social utility in literature, that more than ever seems to be a fictitious notion" ("We Have Lost the War" 60). In a milder tone he supports the views of Oscar Wilde "When the divine Oscar Wilde said that art is useless, I believe he meant that figuratively. For my part I am very unhappy with current attempts...to put the arts and literature in particular in the service of social change" ("We Have Lost the War" 60). A canonical work is described as a "larger form" than any social work, by which he means that literary works are more fundamental in the creating of human nature and cannot relinquish their prerogative to values other than the aesthetic (28).

To some extent, Bloom does think the best literature has an effect on everyday society, at least an indirect one on the higher classes: "canons always do indirectly serve the social and political, and indeed the spiritual, concerns and aims of the wealthier classes of each generation of Western society" (33). Through this indirect and partial means Shakespeare and the canon "invented all of us" – and so eventually even those not in the higher social classes (17 and 40). I can also add the idea that the social influence is delayed. As Forster writes, "The legislation of the artist is never formulated at the time, though it is sometimes discerned by future generations. He legislates through creating" ("Art for Art's Sake", paragraph 13).

Bloom does not argue for the social influence of the literary tradition because he does not believe this is its primary value. Surprisingly for a sociologist, Lamont noticed both the cause of the decline in literature departments and the remedy: in the U.S.

the legitimacy of literature departments had been consistently weakened by the increased pressure for academic research oriented toward social needs. In this context, those departments tended to reaffirm the 'distinctive features' on which their prestige was based, that is, high culture; a conversion to instrumental knowledge was excluded by the nature of their intellectual project¹⁰.

She continues the passage by saying that some departments under pressure to make their programs more socially useful maintained their legitimacy, their reason for being, by using "high culture signals" such as interpreting only "the most canonic texts."

As was done by a few departments, it is hard to defend aesthetic values in the contemporary world – not which ones, just the fact that what is aesthetic has value. The aesthetic may actually have a reduced

role in contemporary societies; this is the point made by sociologist Philip Slater in *The Pursuit of Loneliness* and by philosopher F.S.C. Northrop in *The Meeting of East and West*. According to Slater, aesthetic or artistic values have been eclipsed by concerns for productivity, speed, efficiency. According to Northrop, modern societies have sacrificed feeling and intuition, more dominant in previous ones, in order to structure life according to abstract, logical, and almost geometric patterns of behavior.

Ironically, few professors attempt to save their departments by maintaining their own values in the face of demands for changing them to satisfy social needs but this may in the end be the only strategy. This approach is the one chosen by Bloom: to defend literary studies on the basis of aesthetic values formed through the tradition of literature. To do this, he wrote his 578-page answer to those who no longer want to teach the canon, or perhaps to the few left who still believe in it and might join him in its defence.

III. Saving the Literary Canon: By Improving Bloom's Idea and also by Restructuring Literature Programs

An Improvement of Bloom's Idea of the Literary Canon

Though *The Western Canon* is not the first book to attempt to state the literary canon, it is among the few, and certainly the only major attempt in the new social context for the transnational university. An early attempt was by Ferdinand Brunetière in his *Manual of the History of French Literature*, originally published in 1898, which, however, is not as comprehensive as Bloom's attempt. A later more comprehensive attempt was by the superb writer Ford Madox Ford, student and coauthor sometimes with Joseph Conrad. Ford's similarly massive *March of Literature: From Confucius' Day to our Own* (1938) is 878 pages long and has an appendix called "Synchronized Table of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Authors". Ford attempts to interpret works insofar as they belong to the movement of literature, as the title suggests that literature moves forward, and is a single developing human activity (734). Ford attempted, however, to define the influence of one author on another less than Bloom does in his career. Implicit in the projects of both might be the assumption that the whole of literature could belong in one book, one interpretation. In Ford's novel *The Good Soldier* one character attempts to write "the" book of democracy, one that would include everything, and of course it is a project without end. Another attempt at canon formation is by Ernst Robert Curtius in his works and especially in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*,

where he was seeking "the Latin continuity of the Middle Ages" and he uses such terms as "literary biology." Other more recent attempts at stating particular connections within the canon are by the Russian Formalists and their followers: Viktor Shklovsky, Yury Tynyanov, Boris Eikhenbaum, Tzvetan Todorov, and Mikhail Bakhtin. (Some of these names have been spelled in many ways in various bibliographies.) By comparison, Bloom carries out a project which further defines the idea of what a canon is. The Formalists and their followers such as Todorov have some profound ideas which would constitute a start for making a canon, and in many of his works he states particular sequences in a canon, but there is no attempt at forming the entire canon.

Like Ford's *March of Literature* which has a large appendix, Bloom's book has a 36-page appendix listing 850 writers, of whom there are nearly 100 living Americans. His editors urged him to include this, hoping to generate controversy as to why some figures were included and others not, and the idea has worked ("Western Values: Required Reading" 109).

The appendix attempts to fulfill the promise of the subtitle, "The Books and School of the Ages," taken from an apt phrase by Stefan George, who called Dante's *Divine Comedy* "the book and school of the ages" (7). Bloom changed George's singular "book" to the plural "books", for the list of 850 writers in the appendix, not to mention the chapters on twenty-six writers, is a long reading list. Bloom rejected the idea that the book is a lifetime reading list, reserving for it a more thoughtful argumentative purpose (517). Bloom himself qualifies the selection in a rare moment of humility: "No one has the authority to tell us what the Western Canon is, certainly not from about 1800 to the present day. It is not, cannot be, precisely the list I give, or that anyone else might give" (37). One wonders whether the project of writing the canon is the ideal for the career of a literary critic which, however, cannot be achieved in practice.

On a more general scale, the table of contents and the structure of *The Western Canon* offer more reason for discussion. One would expect, after having read Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* (1973) or *A Map of Misreading* (1975) that the canon would be a linear, homogenous series of one author writing the anxiety of his/her relation with the preceding canonical writer, the work being the expression of a literary process of progressive individuation. Instead, *The Western Canon* does not draw a line of sequential influences; it discusses twenty six of the writers most exemplary of canonicity, most authoritative. Not only that, the list included writers of the various genres, poetry, drama, the novel, and the epic (if considered as a fourth); it includes critics, and even Freud.

More doubtful and perhaps arbitrary is the structuring of the canon

into three phases or ages, based on ideas of Giambattista Vico; the Theocratic Age leads to the Aristocratic which leads to the Democratic, out of which a new Theocratic Age would emerge. For a critic calling for purity in principles of literary interpretation it cannot be consistent to rely on non-literary ones. Perhaps it is a flamboyant yet fresh reversion to the tendency of literature programs to group works into historical periods, a process which helps to give a sense of their complete mastery through classification. This structuring of the series of canonical writers could merely be a matter of packaging and accommodating for the reader, perhaps it was not initiated by Bloom though designed by him.

These issues are merely so many steps to the central concern: what is the literary canon? What value does it have?

A main definition used so far in this essay has been the main definition of Bloom's: "the choice of books in our teaching institutions" (15) and "a catalog of approved authors" (20). Bloom distinguishes his uses of the term from its original meaning in religion as canon law or as prescriptive of behavior (17). More than a mere list, the Canon gives to people the memory of the past and it is suggested a power to judge aesthetically: "the principal pragmatic function of the Canon: the remembering and ordering of a lifetime's reading. The greatest authors take over the role of 'places' in the Canon's theater of memory..." (39). This statement assigns a greater role to criticism and reading than does Sartre's when he states that scholars are like the caretakers of graves (In *What Is Literature?*). Various other definitions occur throughout the large project, though in each context the reader is not confused. Some definitions are the following: "The Canon... has become a choice among texts struggling with one another for survival, whether you interpret the choice as being made by... or as I do by late-coming authors who feel themselves chosen by particular ancestral figures" (20); "canon" means well-over 3,000 books in the Western tradition (37); it means works that make the tradition (28-9); it means authoritative (2); and, the most difficult it means "achieved anxiety" (526), which as Bloom explains in previous works means the anxiety about being apparently excluded from the canon by one's predecessor.

An unexplained further comment of his on the canon as a whole is that it is not "a unity or stable structure" (37). Ideas mentioned in previous works by Bloom present his theory that is only assumed by and referred to in *The Western Canon*: mainly the idea that a canonical writer is constantly redefining the nature of literature and its tradition at each main stage of a poetry or "the stationing context" or the "continuum" of all literature (*The Anxiety of Influence*).

To understand Bloom's sense of the canon it is necessary to try to

understand how it is "an achieved anxiety." Only a few pages in "An Elegy for the Canon" refer to the theory of the anxiety of influence, and the central discussions cannot present it very much either because they are not related sequentially, from predecessor to successor. At any rate, Bloom can assume some knowledge of his theory first stated in 1973 and repeated in various forms and applications in the next twenty one years¹¹.

The strongest test for canonicity is to see if a work or a body of work overwhelms the tradition and subsumes it through a process occurring as a change from within the tradition, an alteration of its structure yet a continuation of it in an analogous way (28-9). This process of comprehending the tradition and surpassing it can be clarified by a related idea: "The deepest truth about secular canon formation is that it is performed by neither critics nor academics, let alone politicians. Writers, artists, composers themselves determine canons, by bridging between strong precursors and strong successors" (522). There is a pattern in the development of poetry.

The idea that poetry or any genre is governed by a pattern, by rules, is one of the most important features of Bloom's criticism, for it is the condition of standards of value and it is the condition of a canon, of a series of works satisfying the same conditions, which originally meant religious laws. A canon comes to mean a set of rules for defining what is literature and for stating that works fitting the definition are better than those which do not. Only with a canon could there be standards and could literary criticism be more than a mere matter of choice. The same opinion is held by Sir Frank Kermode in *Forms of Attention* (1985) when he writes. "Canons...negate the distinction between knowledge and opinion" (Bloom, *Western Canon* 4). In earlier works Bloom defines each poetry as a cycle of gaining independence from a precursor while creating better poetry that is analogous but not identical. The process is repeated through a series called the canon. The cyclical nature of a body of literary work is essential to the notion of a canon.

The cyclical nature of literature makes clear the value of the canon: without it a person cannot become a great poet, for the power is passed on through the tradition. The explanation of the value is something like circular reasoning: a person wants to enter the canon to become a great poet and when the person becomes a great poet the reward is understanding the nature of the canon.

There are other ways, though, to explain the value, whether for the poet or for critics and readers, and in *The Western Canon* Bloom does give some new ideas. One is the idea of "individuation," (27) of the poet's individuating himself/herself from the previous great poet, and of creating

an individual vision through the labor of poetry. In a rough way the idea—not explained by Bloom — resembles the psychological ideas of self-actualization or of self-realization, in which the self achieves the state of its greatest possible development thus fulfilling its nature. Bloom's meaning is not this general one, however, but a specifically poetic one: a person achieves the highest possible knowledge in poetry which, although similar to that of a predecessor, is yet higher in level or better or more "inner". The image of standing on the shoulders of someone gives the sense of building on the past while improving on it. This value of the canon can only be for a very few great poets. (All of Bloom's work prior to *The Western Canon* indicates that the list is much smaller and more selective than it is in the Appendix.)

Another new idea about the value of the canon defines the value not only for great poets but also for their readers, and this is a more crucial one for justifying the teaching of literature and for explaining the role of literature in society and life generally. As Bloom writes, "The utility of literature is to teach us not how to talk to others, but how to talk to ourselves..." A proper use of Shakespeare and Dante and Tolstoy and Cervantes and the other writers of the very highest hour is to teach us both to fill out and to temper that conversation with ourselves" ("We Have Lost the War" 60). The notion of learning how to talk with oneself is expanded when he writes, "The reception of aesthetic power enables us to learn how to talk to ourselves and how to endure ourselves. The true use of...is to augment one's growing inner self. Reading deeply in the Canon will not make one a better or a worse person, a more useful or more harmful citizen. The mind's dialogue with itself is not primarily a social reality" (29-30).

The first question to be asked is, does the learning how to talk with oneself improve the learning how to talk to others and thus improve social behaviour? Also, what is said when one talks to oneself (through the poems)?

Bloom offers no more explanation of this ultimate value of the literary canon, though it is clear that it should be taught because we can learn how to talk with ourselves. These statements do not rule out other values.

In an attempt to explain Bloom's idea I could speculate about the process of talking to oneself. I do not think he means it teaches us to be aloof or elitist or solitary as Bloom himself has been accused of being and as he himself seems to claim in various passages of *The Western Canon* (e.g. "the self, in its quest to be free and solitary" 524). If we were to think of his claim and the western intellectual tradition immediately Socrates' advice "Know thyself!" comes to mind. In the case of that wise, socially confrontational teacher the words ask us to think, examine our

thoughts, and in this process to improve them, for those words contain, I believe, the assumption that thought contains the means for its own improvement. True enough, Bloom's talking to oneself would first of all be an improvement in poetic ability; secondarily, it would improve non-poets' ability to be subjects, to be human beings, feeling creatures, aesthetic creatures, to be individuals who live for a time and must decide for themselves what they will do during it. The twentieth-century philosopher Ernst Cassirer defines one of the chief goals of all culture, as self-knowledge (see *An Essay on Man*, Yale U.P., 1944). Applying these ideas to Bloom's unexplained remarks, I would say that when poetry teaches us to talk to ourselves it is teaching us a path in life toward becoming more developed beings—more linguistic, aesthetic, feeling selves. When Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney spoke in Athens, Greece, in May 1997 he defined poetry for him as a way of life perhaps meaning something not entirely unlike the idea that religion gives people a direction in life with structure, values, and an overall significance for daily events.

These somewhat speculative remarks are meant to answer the central questions, What is the literary canon? What value does it have?

In addition to these new ideas in *The Western Canon* Bloom seems to develop the theory of the anxiety of influence further or in a new way and this change is extremely important for the entire conception of his big summary-theory about literature: Shakespeare is placed at the center of the canon. Since this principle is the main one structuring the book and since it is in a way unprecedented in his life's work produced to date, it deserves careful attention:

Here they [the members of the School of Resentment, who are against the canon] confront insurmountable difficulty in Shakespeare's most idiosyncratic strength: he is always ahead of you, conceptually and imagistically, whoever and whenever you are. He renders you anachronistic because he contains you; you cannot subsume him. You cannot illuminate him with a new doctrine, be it Marxism or Freudianism or Demanian linguistic skepticism. Instead, he will illuminate the doctrine, not by prefiguration but by postfiguration as it were: all of Freud that matters most is there in Shakespeare already, with a persuasive critique of Freud besides. The Freudian map of the mind is Shakespeare's; Freud seems only to have prosified it. Or, to vary my point, a Shakespearean reading of Freud illuminates and overwhelms the text of Freud; a Freudian reading of Shakespeare reduces Shakespeare, or would if we could bear a reduction that crosses the line into absurdities of loss. (25)

To claim that Shakespeare is at the center of the canon could mean that he is historically in the middle of a series, that there are about as many great writers before him as after him, but this is clearly not what Bloom means. To be at the center could also mean that Shakespeare is more important, a better writer than all of the rest. Certainly Bloom seems to say this, since Shakespeare is "the largest writer we ever will know" (3); and after Shakespeare Bloom discusses the Bible (4), as if his works are the "Bible" of literature; Bloom says that all canonical writers had to come to terms with Shakespeare (10).

I do not think that the claim made in this unqualified way is what Bloom really means. He does mention the large amount of writing produced by him as a factor in his choice; namely, thirty-eight plays, of which 24 are masterpieces, not to mention the poetry (37). Another factor in the choice is the universal recognition which he enjoys, having been translated into almost every language (38). These reasons help persuade members of the School of Resentment to believe that some writers – especially Shakespeare who has become the symbol of high literary culture – are authoritative, are better, and lead the way in the sense of being canonical. The exaggerated emphasis on Shakespeare, or on any single figure, is made so that Bloom can make his point against the School of Resentment, as the first line of the passage indicates.

Looking beyond this argumentative rhetoric, we can see that this emphasis is an exaggeration of the theory Bloom has been espousing for more than twenty years. Consider this apparently strong rhetoric: "...what I have been moved to say throughout this book: the Western Canon is Shakespeare and Dante. Beyond them, it is what they absorbed and what absorbs them" (521). Strong as it is in its estimation of Shakespeare and Dante, it adds the milder qualification that they themselves are absorbed in the canon, which goes on beyond them. This idea that all great writers are the best for their time but help to bring about a better writer is an idea truer to the lifetime of criticism Bloom has so far produced.

Another reason for centering the canon on Shakespeare – with Dante a close second – is that these figures can become examples of the idea of a canon, and it is precisely this aim that Bloom has; namely, to defend the idea of a canon more than a specific list of books. The fact that the chapters of the book are not a sequence of writers directly influencing the next one, as was the precedent set in his previous works, shows that these chapters present examples of what it means to be a canonical writer and Bloom then is less concerned with defining exactly the line of tradition as it moves forward.

There is another way to look at the issue of whether it is right or even meaningful to have a figure at the center of a canon. The project of having one theory about all of literature is a kind of telos or final goal of any critic; it could bring out the best and the worst of the critic's ideas. Perhaps, the distortion in Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence becomes magnified in the Western Canon because of the scope of the project. According to the theory, one writer has trouble starting to write because a predecessor is deemed to be so wonderful. Most readers do not get to this stage of understanding the greatness, what Bloom calls the "strength" of a writer. Then, the person who is to become a great writer will resist this feeling, this anxiety, of being overshadowed and coming too late (belatedness—which was mentioned by Curtius and Bates before Bloom), and the person will start to redefine poetry to make room for an even better poet. The shift here in attitude is not unlike the Jungian ideas of inflation and deflation, according to which a person first has an exaggerated opinion of himself/herself and then changes it to fit reality more. In this case, the new poet inflates and then deflates or humanizes the predecessor while nonetheless repeating what was done in a better way. This theory which establishes a pattern for the succession of one poet by another could have been construed to apply to one figure in the tradition and all of the rest of the writers in human history. If we interpret Bloom's big book in this way, then it would suggest to me that there was some distortion, some invalidity in it to begin with which did not allow it to be universalized on the scope of such a project as *The Western Canon*. Consider an analogy so that the point can be made clear. Short roads can be perfectly fine even if the construction principles are not perfect. Yet, if a single road becomes long, in a hot climate it will buckle or raise up in spots and break because of the summer heat that causes the materials to expand, push against one another, push upward and damage the road. A better road would be made by someone who understands that expansion caused by heat is not a problem on a small scale but on a large scale the heat would cause enough damage to make the road a problem. Applied to Bloom's ideas, the examples show us that distortions in Bloom's theory may not be very evident on the scale of one or two writers, yet on the scale of the whole tradition it becomes evident; his idiosyncrasy, his personal deviation, his inconsistency becomes evident. This type of thinking not only applies to a change from a small scale to a large, but also from an ordinary one to a small one. If there is an imperfection in the lens by which we see, this can cause problems for both a telescope and a microscope, though ordinary eye glasses may not be so dysfunctional because the error is

not increased by the distance of daily vision. This line of thinking could begin to call into question whether all criticism is to some extent reductive or distortive of literary meaning, both on a micro and a macro-scale, an idea broached by Bloom in some of his works, by Todorov, and occasionally others among the best critics. Such a topic leads us away from the present one, though this fact shows us that Bloom is at the forefront of his field. To conclude the question of how right it is to make Shakespeare the center of the canon, I would say that the canon can only be a set of works obeying one set of laws if the laws apply to all figures. In making Shakespeare or any figure better than all the rest, the claim seems to say that no one can become better. The idea of a canon defines a progression of cycles; in other words, each great poetry is better than the previous one but yet it performs in a very similar way the process of becoming the best and in this repetition of the process there is a kind of a cycle. If Shakespeare is not limited to a cycle, a particular one, then there is no uniform law, pattern, applying to all writers. This cannot be. Nor did Bloom have such an idea prior to *The Western Canon*. It is best to criticize Bloom for exaggeration to win his case, and to admit that there must in any case be some imperfection in his interpretation, but to still acknowledge the idea of the literary canon (especially in *The Anxiety of Influence* and *A Map of Misreading*) to be far ahead of many critical theories.

One other negative feature of Bloom's idea of the canon should be mentioned. He adopts an elegiac, pessimistic tone. Yet, there always were problems for the survival of literature in society; there was always an opposition between the aesthetic values and other social values. The fatalistic tone comes at the end of his fine career just as similar negative pronouncements on the future are made by poets seeking to assure for themselves their immortal status as poets. The negativity is partially justified by the contemporary decline in literary studies, and it is also just an attitude at his station of life that would serve to assure his own importance for the future. Saying that genuine literary studies could end is tantamount to saying that anyone who would in the future engage in them would have to be like Bloom or do what he does.

In conclusion to the evaluation of *The Western Canon*, I would say that the idea of a canon required that the same criteria of what is literature and thus what is better than something else should apply to all writers. The consequence is that Bloom's book would have been truer to the idea of a canon, had it discussed a single line of influence, from predecessor to successor, up to the present day.

The Restructuring of Literature Programs Currently Based on National Literatures

As great a theory as Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence is, it still can be improved considerably. In his *Western Canon* he applied the theory to save literary studies from further decline. The book is his type of defence. Even if a book would be published curing all the ailments with Bloom's flawed but inspired defence, a book alone might not change the social forces working from without and from within to erode university literary studies.

Something else may be needed, and I would like to suggest a restructuring of the traditional literature department based on the national literature. The previous discussion indicated that the goals of such a department are less needed in society today, being replaced by as yet unclear goals of the new transnational university. (One goal of it may be to produce, if possible, some result that has immediate application for technological progress; the only type of product that comes to mind is a knowledge of communications skills.)

To re-imagine a possibility for a literature department in the emerging transnational university, I have three questions. First, what would a literature department be if it were not structured according to the language of the nation in which it was in and it did not teach exclusively the works of the nation? Secondly, what would it be if it did not group and characterize the works according to the non-literary categories of historical periods? Such classification had the usefulness of reaffirming the goal of literary studies to be representations of the national character. The classifications resulted from the assumptions about literature while they helped confirm those assumptions. Thirdly, what would a literature department do if it had to make explicit its principle, a uniform one, for the selection of writers in the curriculum?

As is the convention today in America, some American literary works are better than others, but as long as the work is American it might be considered whereas foreign ones are immediately excluded; the curriculum must be filled in any case with American works even if they are not as good as foreign ones of the same period; this question of value is never stated aloud. The administrative justification would be that the association of literature with language is so close that they naturally belong together, but stated differently this means that the classification of a literature department into one based on a nation and its language is easier for the administration, since the categories are clearcut and little or no judgment has to go into the decision of what to include and what to exclude; it is more democratic. Another justification could be that one must read the work in the original language to be an expert critic;

however, this technical expertise is won at the expense of knowing more and teaching more about literature, which it must be granted has always been an activity without borders, an ability of all people, being handed it from one nation to another.

Though I think that there is little chance in the near future for major restructuring of American literature programs to take place along the lines I am about to suggest, it is still worth making the suggestions in order to get our share of the collective imagination working to find a way for literary studies to maintain their own aesthetic values in a society that is limiting or eliminating them. The first step toward improvement is to envision alternatives.

Whether anyone makes any step in the following direction or not, literature departments are changing from national ones to international ones; at present the change is toward the worse, toward popular culture and toward cultural studies that undermine the reason for literary studies to exist in the first place (the teaching of a unique subject not teachable through other fields). How can the perhaps unstoppable trend be made to move toward another result, one that would preserve the unique teaching of the canon?

The first step would be to structure the departments according to literary principles, not according to a national unity, not according to a language. When I say not according to a language, I mean that it should not be that only nineteenth-century American novels are taught in a course on the nineteenth-century novel. Dostoevsky might be taught, albeit in English translation. If national unity is not chosen as the main principle of exclusion and inclusion, then what would? It would be those works that demonstrate the principles of a uniform literary canon. Bloom has the makings of such a set of principles; however, his theory is actually only one for poetry even though he extends it without adaption and without sufficient redefinition to all other genres. The principle for inclusion in a canon would be reproductibility: would be that the body of works by an author repeat the form of the genre passed on by predecessor but do so at a higher level of ability and complete a cycle of development that provides the seeds for yet another successor to do the same. This statement by itself is insufficient to actually choose which works to include. To do so, this abstract definition would have to become fully defined, and this could only be done by completing the definition as it takes on its specific form in a body of canonical works. To summarize the gist of these complex, too-briefly stated ideas, only those authors would be taught who were influenced directly by a previous great writer and who in turn influenced a subsequent great writer, all of whose styles can be shown to manifest analogous cycles of development.

To the second question about the grouping of authors, I would suggest that it not be done according to historical periods, such as the Renaissance or Post-War or Victorian. Instead, whenever groupings are necessary for survey courses, they could be done merely according to uniform time periods such as centuries, or according to a convenient number of authors for the type of course at hand.

Concerning the third question about the procedure for determining the principle of the canon, I think the problems would be the most difficult to surmount. The current departments are structured according to categories that require no judgment (any American works) or not a literary judgment (the books of different historical periods). In the current system professors apply a system of grading students according to which they supposedly know how to define each grade level and apply this standard uniformly; somewhat hypocritically, they do not agree on a uniform definition of what constitutes a literary work that is canonical or moves the tradition one step forward. Such a project may not have chances for success when many people must vote on its acceptance, though in politics laws do get passed that are the primary work of one legislator. The main problem is formulating a single set of criteria within one department. Any set would be better than no set (so long as the condition of canonicity is met, i.e. reproductibility in the special sense stated above. Even if not all literature departments agreed on the same criteria for the canon and, less likely, exactly the same works, still the situation would be better than it is today when there are no uniform literary standards, when the canon is not defined.

I have a few other suggestions that would help to base the curriculum on a canon. Only intertextual interpretations would be taught, that is, ones involving at least two works, though there could be more emphasis on one. It would be better to emphasize, when possible, the whole body of works by an author, because sometimes the proof of canonicity is distributed through two or more works, or it is stated less clearly in one, more clearly in another. Also, only canonical writers would be required, and they would be taught as occupying a position in a sequence of progress, with the goal in mind of following the sequence up to the present.

Finally, in these preliminary suggestions, I would like to offer some kind of solution to the large administrative one of the size of this new single transnational literature department. What if the merging of all the various national literature departments, the Russian, the French, the German, the Spanish, the English, The American, and so on, produces a very large department? My answer would be that the size might be less than we would think. Are mathematics departments too large to

administrate? Are so many people interested in literature or are they in the department because it also teaches writing? In the future this need not necessarily be in the literature department. The current large size of the English literature departments in the U.S. compared to other departments in the humanities may be because those literature departments have to offer more courses required of all students in the university; the number of graduates with a major in English may be more proportionate to other fields in the humanities. At any rate, the size is decreasing, for many reasons already mentioned. Setting these fears, aside, I would like to suggest that if the single transnational literature department is too large, it would be appropriate to divide it according to a literary principle into different departments based on genres. We could consider, in the larger universities, having a department for fiction, one for drama, and one for poetry – if the enrollment were too large, which it does not seem likely it would be. Pure literature, unmixed with cultural studies or with linguistics or with composition, is not the passion of many students, so Bloom noticed about his Yale students (519).

These few suggestions about the new structure that the transnational literature departments should take are incomplete but point out the fact that writing a book about a canon, even if better than Bloom's, may not be enough to reverse the decline in literary studies in America, and later in other countries.

Conclusion: Can the Literary Canon Be Saved?

Although America and increasing globalization are forcing universities to become transnational, resulting in a decline in literature departments, we have not lost the war. Miller recommended understanding the problem better and then learning how to persuade the corporations which are becoming significant sources of funding for the universities that literature is indispensable, and this might involve reconceiving its goals. Bloom resigned all of us to the decline, although he did defend literature in his way by writing *The Western Canon*. It is his attempt to "preserve poetry as fully and purely as possible" (18).

While I believe Bloom's idea of the canon is built upon one of the best theories of literature by a critic ever, his book presents an idiosyncratic idea of the canon that should be improved. Such an improved book alone perhaps cannot reverse the decline in literary studies. Therefore, combined with it I recommend that a restructuring of the literature departments to fit the transnational university and the idea of a literary canon is needed. To do this, we should counter the current changes from literary studies to cultural studies to a decimated literature department by

ironically but wisely reaffirming the teaching of the canon instead of giving it up. Nevertheless, the teaching of the canon— it may very well be — cannot be taught in the old way anymore. Now, it may have to be legitimated by a department that is not structured to present the character or the language of the nation where the university is.

The present crisis of literary studies is new in many respects; crises for the arts are not. Literature and the arts have always had to justify their own aesthetic values to a society on which they depend and a society which does not realize why it needs them so much.

NOTES

1. "Literary Study in the Transnational University," in *Profession 1996*, The Modern Language Association, 1996, 11.

2. "An Elegy for the Canon." *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. London: Macmillan, 1994, p. 15. Also, for Bloom's views on the canon, see "Criticism, Canon—Formation, Prophecy: the Sorrows of Facticity," in *Poetics of Influence* and Bloom's *Strong Light of the Canonical* (1987).

3. This information comes from Miller's article "Literary Study in the Transnational University," as do all subsequent references to Miller.

4. "Art for Art's Sake": An Address Delivered before the American Academy and the National Institute of Arts and Letters in New York. In *Two Cheers for Democracy*, 1951.

5. "We Have Lost the War," *Newsweek* (November 7, 1994, 60).

6. "Western Values: Required Reading," Review Article in *The Economist*, Nov. 19, 1994, 109.

7. See *WC*, 33 and 518. Also see "We Have Lost the War."

8. "Cultural Capital: Allusions, Gaps and Glissandos in Recent Theoretical Development", in *Sociological Theory: A Semi-Annual Journal of the American Sociological Association*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Fall 1988, 163.

9. "Does Culture Matter?" in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, 1951, paragraph 9.

10. "Surveying the Continental Drift: The Diffusion of French Social and Literary Theory in the United States", by Michèle Lamont and Marsha Witten, *French Politics and Society* Vol. 6, No. 3, July 1988, 17–23 (page 22 is cited).

11. I refer the reader to my previous extensive evaluations of Bloom's theory: (1) *Genetic Codes of Culture?* and (2) "Evaluating Harold Bloom's Idea of Opposition in Poetic Creation."

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SUMMARY

William Schultz, *American Society, the Transnational University, and the Threatened Literary Canon*

Νέες συνθήκες στην Αμερική εντείνουν τα εθνικιστικά ιδεώδη βάσει των οποίων διαμορφώθηκε το Αμερικανικό Πανεπιστήμιο, και στην ουσία τα καθιστούν περιττά. Το τέλος του Ψυχρού Πολέμου, η παγκοσμιοποίηση της κοινωνίας και τα κινήματα κοινωνικής μεταρρύθμισης δημιουργούν την ανάγκη ενός νέου πολυεθνικού πανεπιστημίου και πιο συγκεκριμένα επηρεάζουν τα Τμήματα Λογοτεχνίας στην Αμερική. Επειδή ιδρύθηκαν με βάση την αρχή της προώθησης του εθνικού χαρακτήρα η χρησιμότητά τους στην κοινωνία τίθεται υπό αμφισβήτηση ιδίως όταν η κυβέρνηση ελαττώνει τις χορηγίες της και όταν διεθνείς επιχειρήσεις γίνονται οι νέοι χρηματοδότες. Κοινωνικές δυνάμεις που δρουν μέσα στα Τμήματα βοηθούν στο να προκαλέσουν την παρακμή τους· οι καθηγητές/τριες δεν διδάσκουν πλέον έργα που ανήκουν στη λογοτεχνική παράδοση αλλά ευνοούν έργα που διαπνέονται από κοινωνικούς σκοπούς. Όμως τα ίδια στοιχεία που χρησιμοποιούνται για να γίνουν τα Τμήματα κοινωνικά πιά χρήσιμα, στην πραγματικότητα συντελούν στο μεγαλύτερο μαρασμό τους, διότι η διοίκηση του Πανεπιστημίου μπορεί πιο εύκολα να περικόψει τη χρηματοδότηση εάν η έρευνα έχει κοινωνικό περιεχόμενο και μπορεί να πραγματοποιηθεί από άλλα Τμήματα.

Ο J. Hillis Miller διατείνεται ότι τα Τμήματα θα πρέπει να μάθουν πώς να πείθουν τις πηγές χρηματοδότησής τους για την αναγκαιότητα της λογοτεχνίας· όμως τα παλαιά επιχειρήματα πλέον δεν ευσταθούν. Ο Harold Bloom συστήνει τη διδασκαλία του λογοτεχνικού κανόνα με βάση το δικό του *Δυτικό Κανόνα* (*Western Canon*), μια αξιοθαύμαστη προσπάθεια η οποία όμως διαπνέεται από την ιδιοσυγκρασιακή αντίληψη του τι είναι ο λογοτεχνικός κανόνας και χρειάζεται κάποια αναθεώρηση και βελτίωση. Στο κείμενο αυτό προτείνεται μια αναδιάρθρωση των Λογοτεχνικών Τμημάτων στην Αμερική. Εάν μπορεί να αντιστραφεί η τάση τους προς παρακμή, τα Λογοτεχνικά Τμήματα θα πρέπει να αναδιρθρωθούν σύμφωνα με λογοτεχνικές αρχές κάτι που δεν έχει συμβεί μέχρι τώρα. Δεν θα μπορέσουν ποτέ να ευημερήσουν εάν δομούνται σύμφωνα με ένα εθνικό πολιτισμό και μια εθνική γλώσσα· θα πρέπει να δομηθούν σύμφωνα με ένα κανόνα: ένα μοναδικό σύνολο από ενιαία αισθητικά κριτήρια για μια λογοτεχνική παράδοση. Η λογοτεχνία δεν μπορεί πλέον να βοηθεί ως αντικείμενο που καθορίζεται από εθνικά ιδεώδη ή οριοθετείται από γεωγραφικά όρια.