

In, About and Around the Olive Grove

PAT DEMERS

In Milton's evocation of "the Olive Grove of *Academe*," "teachers best / Of moral prudence . . . treat / Of fate, and chance, and change in human life" (*Paradise Regained*, IV. 262-65). Perhaps these are the perennial subjects of all education and specifically of a Humanities education. From Plato's Athenian grove to contemporary campuses, from the discourses of the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, the essays of Jan Comenius, John Locke, Bathua Makin, Mary Astell, Catherine Macaulay and Hannah More, to the critiques of Patrick Brantlinger, E. D. Hirsch, Jr. and Mary Louise Pratt, teachers, philosophers and observers of the academy have addressed a familiar gamut of topics: the elements of an examined, liberal, pluralistic life, the roles of precept and experience, the integrationist and separatist concepts of learning, value and goodness, the operation of competitive interest groups, the slippery distinctions between social identity and social modalities, and the contingent, complex responsibility of living in community. This essay will examine some of the most recent variations on these themes by Humanities professors. Because these studies offer decades of distilled practice in today's universities and feeling, probing testimonials to their successes and failures, they deserve attentive, albeit not always consenting, note. While my aim is not to lionize one argument and excoriate others, schools of thought and criticism and their corollaries of sharp disagreements and battle lines are no doubt inevitable. My own experience in chairing a large and distinguished Department of English at a Canadian university for the past three years informs many of my responses to these studies.

Jeremiads and Alarms

This will not be the last attempt of its kind coming from the distressed humanities in their search for an imaginary empire, one that flatters popular democratic tastes. (Bloom 380)

Has the Humanities curriculum lost its market value and become a synonym for "crisis?" Several diagnoses — Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins*, Annette Kolodny's *Failing the Future: A Dean Looks at Higher Education the Twenty-first Century*, John Ellis' *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities* and Alvin Kernan's collection *What's Happened to the Humanities?* — argue a gloomy prospect, their titles themselves ushering in bleakness. How accurate a reflection of the Humanities in the late nineties do these jeremiads present? Do they recall or invoke the earlier complaints and criticisms: among them, that multiculturalism and identity politics were skewing the teaching of the Western tradition (Dinesh d'Souza's *Illiberal Education*); that sixties "tenured" radicals, "defiling" reason with sophistries . . . and defrauding their students of knowledge" (Kimball 207), were now orchestrating the shift of universities to the left; and that the faddishness of computer literacy, breadth and openness were contributing to the decomposition of the university (the late Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*)? The degree of reliance on these critiques of the early nineties in the later, pre-millennial ones is mixed. The current crop, however, is not all allied with conservative, revanchist resistance; Readings and Kolodny identify themselves with the embattled, contestatory left, while Ellis, Kernan and his colleagues long for the fabled past, before postmodernism and deconstruction, when students, they affirm, read intensively.

I find *The University in Ruins* sombre, cynical and ultimately despairing. Labelling the university posthistorical "to insist upon the sense that the institution has outlived itself" (6), Readings devotes a very hard-hitting chapter to debunking the now-empty notion of excellence, "as the unit of currency within a closed field" (27), especially in light of the notorious Maclean's rankings, and the logic of contemporary capitalism inherent in performance indicators as conduits of public accountability. He concludes dolefully: "The University of Excellence serves nothing other than itself, another corporation in a world of transnationally exchanged capital" (43). His thesis about the corporatization of the university and the idea of excellence "as a non-referential unit of value entirely internal to the system" (39) is unfortunately incontestable. For substantiation, what could match the observation of the Government Relations Director at my own University, who announces "we present a researcher as a

business person, because business has a privileged position in this province" (Frank 11)? A colleague at another Western Canadian university remarks that the process of "the burgeoning commodification of the contemporary academy . . . has gone so far through managing access and corporate modelling that it now constructs the faculty member as possessive individualist entrepreneur, the student as no longer a citizen-in-the-making but a consumer on the make" (Findlay 17).

But the pervasiveness of Readings' sense of desolation impresses me as both dispiriting and disingenuous. His most consistent tropes concern loss and ruin. Not only has liberal education "lost its organizing centre" (10) and the university lost its "cultural function" (20), the idea of the University itself "has now lost all content" (39). The related concept of ruin involves both the stiffening resolve of thinking "what it means" to dwell in the university as "a ruined institution" (169) and a close-to-nihilistic existence therein "without belief, but with a commitment to Thought" (175). In addition to being riddled with petty, "vicious" (180) factionalisms, Readings' university is as desiccated and grim as a post-nuclear landscape. Community is an illusion; in its place Readings follows Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot in opting for singularities variously occupying positions of speaker and listener and "structured by a constitutive incompleteness" (185). Superbly argued though his pessimism is, it takes its toll. Only if we accept completely the thesis of the dysfunctionality of the university can we embrace the goal of dissensus, which manifests itself in "giving up the link between the university and national identity," in admitting that "real responsibility, ethical probity, is simply not commensurate with the grand narrative of nationalism" and in attending to "the prospect of deferentialization that will make the . . . activity of thinking considerably more difficult" (192). For the prognosis of the cohesiveness of the Humanities and of disparate faculties across a campus, Readings' claim, particularly its final phrase, is a sobering slap in the face. "The University is where thought takes place beside thought," he contends, "where thinking is a shared process without identity or unity" (192).

My experience of the university is more than slightly different from Readings' dystopic one. I do not wear rose-coloured glasses, nor am I a cheerleader for self-congratulatory, feel-good slogans. I do not venerate conformity, or exhausted, apathetic consensus, or the creedal reinforcement of bromides about community. I am aware of the veneer aspect of catch-phrases that can seal over contradictions and dissent. However, I have discovered that surprising commonalities of purpose and purposiveness as well as horizontal research projects and team teaching can link a Department of English not only to the usual suspects/partners of Philosophy, History, Classics, Modern

Languages, Comparative Literature, Religious Studies, Music, Drama, Art and Design and, increasingly, to Sociology, Anthropology and Psychology, but to a broader base of campus colleagues in Elementary and Secondary Education, Chemistry, Physics, Biological Sciences, Human Ecology, Earth Sciences and Nursing. The linkages I am talking about go beyond shared disgruntlement over decisions and policies of central administration. They involve real affirmations about the life of the mind, independent inquiry, the insight that can result from interlaced research protocols, and the Möebius strips of theories about dialogue, inspiration, travel, groundedness, growth and speech. While not transparent, the communications resulting from these links are based in common, unifying loyalties that subtly crisscross the campus.

In contrast to Readings' relatively dispassionate, philosophical style, identity politics and autobiography inform Kolodny's observations on her five-year stint as Dean of Humanities at the University of Arizona. We learn with admiration of Kolodny's many accomplishments: a new Humanities building, the establishment of the family-friendly campus, the inauguration of the projects RUTH (Research on Utilizing Technology in the Humanities) and SLAT (Second Language Acquisition and Teaching). Kolodny's loyalty to Brooklyn College and its contingent of "brilliant and dedicated women professors" as "welcome relief from the Ozzie and Harriet role models that the society was everywhere foisting on me" (250-51) is heartening, and so is the candour of her account of the very different study habits with which her two younger sisters prepared for College Board exams, as examples of cognitive diversity. But the world of academic leadership furnishes fewer upbeat examples. "Any sense of community in this country is in short supply" (37), she remarks. Her insistence on the need to ground educational reform in the reinvestment in troubled communities, a progressive tax system and more inclusive political and civic participation is direct and incontrovertible:

Unless we develop social programs to mitigate the economic displacements that impoverish entire neighbourhoods, disrupt families, produce violence, and stunt young people's growth, educational reform will not stand proof against civil disorder. (37-38)

Despite the impeccable socialist credentials, the highly personal, almost confessional, nature of the writing remains distracting. *Failing the Future* often reads like a martyrology, with Kolodny suffering in apparent silence yet frequently mentioning in this account the real pain of chronic rheumatoid arthritis, with the gruesome details of her own denied tenure case and its out-of-court settlement rehearsed, with intricate attention to the ways Lesley Stahl's

Sixty Minutes segment ostensibly on research and tenure at the University of Arizona actually set her up, with poignant reference to an interrupted sex life, and with the admission that things have deteriorated after her. Much as I sympathize with her plight, can vouch for the pressures of being answerable and accountable to many, and commend her unflinching concern to see university education through the lens of economic policies that enable some and cripple other communities, I also must admit that the plangency of her account is wearying. Kolodny's proposed "radical overhaul" of university decision-making "to involve a fully informed faculty and staff in day-to-day management responsibilities shared with administration" (30) either presages a surprising new era or testifies to equally stunning naiveté.

Curiously and perversely, John Ellis may have had Kolodny in mind when he exhorts deans to "emerge from their intimidated state and begin once again to act as the quality control of the academy" (230). What Ellis, a professor emeritus of German at the University of California, Santa Cruz, sees as in need of "control" is a full-scale disaster: "a startling decline in the intellectual quality of work in the humanities and a descent to intellectual triviality and irrelevance that amounts to a betrayal of the university as an institution" (228). The academy, he argues, has degenerated to "a social liability" (216), while the escalation of conspiratorial paranoia has led to "campus frenzy" (217). This alarmism may be too easily explained by pointing to an *où sont les neiges d'antan* nostalgia. In the midst of what he perceives as an attitude of "scorn" (6) for great works, Ellis certainly prefers to recall the image of the "cheerfully disorganized" (9) Humanities professor, absorbed in the idiosyncrasies of a single text and "very particular, one-of-a-kind human situations" (9). Having enjoyed the "advantages" (205) of the professoriate, Ellis is at a loss to explain the prestige-draining topsy turvydom.

A concern with exceptional minds and excellence is now dismissed as elitism, and many prefer to concern themselves with Madonna videos or gay pornography. Fine writing is no longer valued; English professors now write in a style that they would formerly have denounced as clumsy and full of jargon. Many, it would seem, no longer even like the field that once so delighted them, and they write on anything but literature. (205-06)

Although it is not a complicated task to puncture Ellis' broad claims and charges, the more difficult job is figuring out why he has made himself such an easy target. His comments on Gerald Graff's "evasiveness," "anxiety" and "underlying lack of commitment," characteristic, according to Ellis, of "the group within the race-gender-class camp" (225), includes the cautioning

observation that "Graff's penchant for ad hominem attack . . . makes him unable to understand his opponents' case" (224). Not wishing to be so accused, I must nevertheless register real disagreement with Ellis, his distorting generalizations and partial testimony. Since he finds comfort only in the backlash anti-feminism of Christina Hoff Sommers, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, Ellis reports on the perceived "excesses of feminists" (87), going as far as to complain that modernist scholar, former MLA President and Graduate Dean Catharine Stimpson and Americanist scholar and former Humanities Dean Annette Kolodny are among the leaders "distinguished chiefly by the degree of their alienation rather than by solid intellectual accomplishment" (86). Equally intemperate with New Historicists, who "preach historicism yet judge ahistorically" (103), Ellis cites only tendentious snippets from Greenblatt and Said, entirely overlooking the remarkable work of Lee Patterson, Louis Montrose, Peter Stallybrass, Mary Jacobus, Catherine Gallagher, Mary Poovey and scores more. Without doubt the prospect of queering any period would send Ellis into a tailspin. The now-hoary complaint that "literature professors . . . denigrate literature and replace it with theory" (214-15) becomes in Ellis' lexicon a version of the anti-bourgeois snobbery of political correctness as practised by critics, many of whom are "failed poets" (214) impatient with the role of mere interpreter. His denunciation of faddists who have found "platforms" (208) reduces current criticism "to those aspects he can most easily comprehend and oppose" (Carroll 27). But though Ellis slings mud, he constructs no alternative academy, offers no "explanatory framework" (Carroll 27). Instead, his argument leads to a dead-end. Under the banner of "knowledge for its own sake" and the contention that "the left is wrong," he perorates that only by resisting "the call for direct involvement in social causes" can the academy provide "upward mobility for generations of poor immigrants" (229-30). The so-called clincher of this argument actually exposes its fallacy: "On the campus, the first and last concern must be to follow where the logic of the argument leads" (230). Precisely by returning to contemporary and historical social causes, by addressing the implicated, problematic imbrication of texts and other art forms in their surrounding cultural, economic, hegemonic orders, by illuminating social possibilities and constraints for privileged as well as first-generation university students, by commenting on theoretical positions underpinning various clusters of artistic work, do Humanities professors follow the logic of their argument and their commitment.

The curricular and disciplinary consequences of such a commitment concern the essayists in *What's Happened to the Humanities?* The contributors are a prestigious crew with instant name-recognition: among them, John

D'Arms, classicist and former Graduate Dean at the University of Michigan, Denis Donoghue, holder of the Henry James Chair of English at New York University, Gertrude Himmelfarb, professor emeritus of History at the City University of New York, Frank Kermode of Cambridge, Louis Menand, professor of English at the City University of New York, and Christopher Ricks of Boston University. *Tout ensemble* they provide a chorus of lament underscoring themes of loss, impoverishment, reversal and rejection. More fully documented and wide ranging than Ellis' critique, the essays are nevertheless depressing reading. The hectoring, older-and-wiser tone puts the reader in the position of a recalcitrant child in need of chastisement. Fortunately the reader does not come to heel, but registers mounting levels of resistance and defiance.

Kernan's introductory description of a pastoral setting — he actually resorts to the exclamation *Et in Arcadia ego!* — sets the elegiac mood mourning a pure, authority-driven, stable past, before “free-speech movements coarsened the vocabulary of higher education” (4) and “democratic egalitarianism found its intellectual counterparts in pluralism, a multi-cultural curriculum, and the relativistic concept of truth” (5). In his argument the “tectonic shifts” (5) downward in numbers of bachelor's and doctoral degrees awarded in the Humanities are related, causally or consequentially, to the evidence that Humanities professors have “made themselves into the conscience of society” (6). Kernan agrees with his contributors about “thin” reading threatening “to vaporize the sense of the fullness that the older, intensive way of reading fostered” (9) and echoes Kermode's wish for “a ‘saving remnant,’ a ‘clerisy,’ [to] continue to preserve a kind of older literary sensibility that may still be perceived to have some value” (10). Alas, despite the biblical and scholarly allusions, there are no Isaiahs or Ezekiels in this edition, no Coleridgean dreamers but much genuflectional display of what a pioneering critic called “the pestiferous purple” (Wollstonecraft 99).

A wilfulness bordering on perversity marks the judgement and frequent misprision of this collection. Donoghue's claim about Latino, Thai and Puerto Rican students reading literature in a state of “recovered disinterestedness,” “standing apart . . . from the primary interests that beset them — jobs, money, responsibilities,” “a little apart from the culture that otherwise governs them” (138) is either fanciful or deluded or both. Why not start with the students' own cultural positioning? Why hive off literature from the quotidian, domestic, financial realities of readers' existence? Since, in Himmelfarb's estimate, postmodernism lacks rigour, system and objective methodology, it “reverses two centuries of scholarship designed to make of history a ‘discipline’” (144). Her discontent with the radical epistemology of feminist reconceptualising of history

and the frothy mix of New Historicist contextualising leads to tart, slighting remarks about “feminist literary critics who resurrect forgotten (often deservedly so) women writers while exposing the patriarchal rhetoric of ‘canonical’ male writers” (154). Menand's catalogue of the rejected assumptions of aesthetic and disciplinary formation comes to the saturnine conclusion that while literary history has “been done,” “academic literary criticism is now largely in the business of consuming itself” (215). Although David Bromwich does not want to “imply excessive hope” (238), his closing observations on teaching do hint — perhaps unwittingly — at some possibilities of rapprochement. He protests too much against “those who put up a flawless front of pieties” and “the programmed schools of commitment” (239). But noting that “teaching has its undemocratic side,” though “it is hard for us to say so,” he also avers that “the curriculum that does not premeditate social aims can be fertile for reform” (239). I wish the proposal I see (or, want to see) embedded here, that program commitment and endlessly variable inquiry can co-exist, were less oblique. I would wish too for a more full-throated endorsement of such an alliance. But that's wishing for an entirely different book!

Re-imagined Communities

“We grasp our lives in a narrative.” (Taylor 47)

Martha Nussbaum's *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* is a real sea change: an alert, vigorous examination of the plural, contested, broad, varied, present and past cultures of the academy. As her subtitle indicates, Nussbaum, professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago, endorses and defends educational reform. She does so not only by drawing on the vast personal experience of site visits and hundreds of interviews of students, professors and administrators at several dozens of institutions of higher learning — two- and four-year colleges as well as research-intensive universities — across the United States, but also by basing the study on her professional familiarity with the Western philosophical tradition, the Socratic concept of the examined life, the Aristotelean notion of reflective citizenship and the Senecan dictum about the cultivation of humanity. The sharpness of her criticism of shortcomings accentuates the exuberance of the declaration, “People who have never learned to use reason and imagination to enter a broader world of cultures, groups and ideas are impoverished personally and politically, however successful their vocational preparation” (297). Fully sketched examples of such enrichment include the Cultural Encounters program at St. Lawrence,

the program in Sexuality and Society at Brown, required courses on American pluralism at SUNY-Buffalo, electives on Women in Political Thought at Stanford and on Hunger and Famines in Harvard's Afro-American Studies program, and non-curricular projects such as Brown's conference on Homosexuality and Human Rights in the Major Religious Traditions. Upholding all curricular efforts aimed at "producing citizens . . . who can see the different and foreign not as a threat to be resisted, but as an invitation to explore and understand," Nussbaum illuminates the Senecan conclusion: "Meanwhile, while we live, while we are among human beings, let us cultivate our humanity" (301).

This openness and citizenship founded on critical questioning and moral judgment are vitally political and congruent with Nussbaum's earlier views. In *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* she referred to the "experience of readership" as "a moral activity in its own right" (338), and in *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* she identified the literary imagination as the main ingredient of the ethics establishing a politics of community, the "mission of imagination, inclusion, sympathy and voice" (121) ideally characterizing both poets and judges. With such credentials she minces no words, in *Cultivating Humanity*, in rebutting Bloom's "fears . . . that critical scrutiny of one's own traditions will automatically entail a form of cultural relativism" (33) and his "normative chauvinism" (132). She also subjects deconstruction to sobering, comparative analysis. "Derrida on truth is simply not worth studying," Nussbaum asserts, "for someone who has been studying Quine and Putnam and Davidson" (41). Zhang Longxi's response to Derrida's claim about exclusively occidental logocentrism assists her argument that Chinese culture reveals "a complex tradition of thought about language, thinking, and writing that is in many respects closely comparable to Western traditions" (126). In confronting the prevalence of identity politics within the academy, she directs discriminating criticism at the "false and pernicious views" of market economists who "have long powerfully promoted the idea that democracy is merely a marketplace of competing interest groups, without any common goals or ends that can be rationally deliberated" (110). Insisting on the world-citizen, not the identity-politics, form of multiculturalism, Nussbaum reiterates that "our primary goal should be to produce students who have a Socratic knowledge of their own ignorance — both of other world cultures and, to a great extent, of our own" (147).

Cultivating Humanity is so tessellated with philosophy, economics and literature that its argument prompts comparison with two other studies of the contemporary conditions of the practice of academic judgment. Although

Nussbaum's goal of world citizenship does not fetishize the curriculum, it does tease out many of the questions John Guillory has posed in *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. How, ultimately, do we distinguish between "class-based sociolects" and the "language of 'humanity'" (Guillory 80)? What are the possibilities for citizenship within an academic setting? Do concerns about professionalism preclude community? On the delusion and impossibility of community, Guillory has observed: "the 'pedagogic imaginary' . . . organizes the discursive and institutional life of teachers in excess of the simple function of disseminating knowledge by projecting a unity of the 'profession' in the ideality of its self-representation, the discourse of its own being as a kind of community" (35). I was struck recently by the pertinence of Guillory's remarks about the effects of idealizing and aggressively professionalising discourses, when a top-ranked applicant flown in to be recruited to our graduate program asked me, in all blitheness, if two refereed articles were sufficient for admission to Master's work.

The other study is Wendy Steiner's *The Scandal of Pleasure: Art in an Age of Fundamentalism*. Like Nussbaum, both Steiner and Guillory adroitly, trenchantly censure obtruse, lordly, or out-of-touch academic behaviour. As Guillory had forecast that the participants in the canon debate would be stranded "on an ever shrinking island within the university itself" (45), Steiner neatly caricatures the American right's image of the Humanities professor as "the millennium's rough beast slouch[ing] toward Bethlehem clutching a laptop computer and a research grant, [h]is way . . . lit by Marxism, feminism, deconstruction, and the New Historicism, and his lips curl[ing] in a philistine grin as he contemplates the demise of English literature and the entire liberal arts tradition" (128). She not only shows that "many right-wingers are sloppy scholars" (146), in their misappropriation of Arnold and Eliot, she also conducts a thorough exposé of *la trahison des clercs*, particularly Althusser, Heidegger and de Man, stressing the formalism, abstraction, denial and deprivation of their ascetic criticism. What remains bracing about *The Scandal of Pleasure*, as uplifting in its way as *Cultivating Humanity*, is Steiner's "ideal" of "enlightened beguilement," the paradoxical ability to "engage with an artwork's connection to ideologies—benign or hurtful—and still feel the work's brilliant virtuality" (93).

Commitments to present the adventure of reading as "the making of a social world, and of a deliberative community to think critically about it" (Nussbaum 104), to make the aesthetic and class judgments of canon formation "a much larger part of social life" (Guillory 339) and to see "the history of literature [as] a chronicle of the clash between the desire for referential closure

and the literary foiling of that desire" (Steiner 199) supply some of the unresolved excitement and tension of these studies. More than platitudes and pep talks, they generate a reformative cheer. Their forward-looking energy is attractive and sensible. Thankfully their temperaments and orientations are also far removed from what, over three decades ago, C. P. Snow labelled "that special insistence which strains the voices of priests of a dying religion" (Snow 84).

The Public Intellectual

"The world does not talk. Only we do." (Rorty 6)

My stint in administration has not led me to see deans, vice-presidents or presidents as the venal, feckless lot Jane Smiley satirizes in *Moo*. To be sure, disagreements, disciplinary protocols and research domains often separate us. But with a willingness to re-negotiate and re-think and with an acceptance that we are constantly balancing claims of multiculturalism and individualism, communitarianism and liberalism, and postmodernism and modernism, my department and campus-wide colleagues establish and conduct a form of civil society. I do not think we are unduly preoccupied with the "ironic" distinction that "liberals should more often invoke the term 'community,' reminiscent of *Gemeinschaft* — an organic relationship based on kinship, tradition and religion — while conservatives appeal to the Enlightenment concept of 'civil society,' or *Gesellschaft*" (Himmelfarb 13). Instead, I believe we swing from one camp to the other, our motives coloured by enlightened pragmatism with occasional hints or hues of altruism. This variance between particularity and universality calls to mind Hegel's observations on civil society, which I think apply with particular force to the academy: "except in contact with others [we] cannot attain the whole compass of [our] ends, and therefore these others are means to the end of a particular member" (Hegel 267). Necessarily, and happily, "a particular end . . . is attained in the simultaneous attainment of the welfare of others." His panoramic sweep of society as "that territory of mediation where there is free play for every idiosyncrasy, every talent, every accident of birth and fortune, and where waves of every passion gush forth, regulated only by reason glinting through them" (Hegel 267), can be both sobering and inspirational.

It seems to me that we need to pause not only over the glints of reason but also over the idea that universality assumes a relation to other people. The society encompassed and addressed by the academy implicates our at times complacent relation to others. The postmodern, posthistorical, postchristian, poststructuralist academy, having eclipsed, interrogated or redefined so many

ideologies, is perhaps only beginning to re-discover the role of the public, involved-in-society and -humankind, intellectual, a role familiar to the essayists mentioned at the outset. I realize that some colleagues, especially in the Humanities, find the mere suggestion of linking research to public policy abhorrent, crass and anti-intellectual. They fear academics would degenerate into civil servants or preposterous mandarins, that freedom of inquiry would be compromised, and that professors would become complicit mouthpieces for government agendas. I cannot echo their misgivings. On the contrary, I think the decision of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to devote a portion of its funding to public policy research, with any proceeds being plowed into the general research grants program, and the invitation to researchers issued recently by the Social Sciences and Humanities Federation of Canada to disseminate stories of their research to local media, such as newspapers and television stations, are valuable opportunities to inform and influence a wider society, the very people in whose intellectual, economic, psychological, aesthetic well-being we purport to be interested. Here is a chance to activate questioning rather than applauding citizenship, to show that an ethical engagement is also a political engagement, to test how art can reinvent democracy, to extend the image of belonging.

These prospects for horizontal, interlaced research to formulate alternative, possibly subversive, descriptions of community are reflected too in the reconstitution of my own Department. Thanks to the administration's early retirement incentive and faculty renewal program, we have been hiring at a rate unprecedented since the late sixties. In the past three years we have welcomed fifteen new colleagues and said good-bye to almost as many early and regular retirees — from superstar University Professor and productive researchers to plateaued Associate Professors. These leave takings have been at least publicly amiable, with emeriti being offered shared office space, continued letterhead, supplies and support staff assistance, being invited to serve on Supervisory Committees, and with a few teaching as sessionals or guest professors here and elsewhere. The hirings of the late nineties are also vastly different from those of the sixties: the market is keen and interdisciplinary; candidates are thoroughly acclimatized, presenting teaching dossiers and proposed syllabi and making no secret of their informed net-surfing during fly-in interview days. Although our advertisements have used the conventional rubrics of Canadian, American, Victorian and Postcolonial literatures, our new colleagues have brought to our curriculum and discussions expertise in Doukhobor narratives, potlatch accounts, mulatta fiction, AIDS literature, London trash, dirt and sewage systems, the eugenics movement, Aboriginal theatre, Indian diasporic literature and

Bollywood. The recruitment and interview process, the welcome and orientation of new colleagues, and the observation of their progress through first senior and graduate seminars have been the most exciting, enjoyable and gratifying experiences of my tenure as Chair.

Yes, there will be challenges to the curriculum. Text-based and cultural studies scholars will continue to square off. But the prospects are hugely hopeful — with constructive debate, civil disagreements and highly charged energy actually identifying our “territory of mediation.”

University of Alberta

Works Cited

- Bloom, Allan. *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.
- Carroll, Joseph. "In a Corrupt Shadow." *TLS*, 12 June 1998, 12.
- Ellis, John M. *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Findlay, Len. "Valuing Culture, Interdisciplining the Economic." Aldrich Interdisciplinary Lecture, 25 February 1998. St. John's: School of Graduate Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland.
- Frank, Tema. "Power Play: How Universities Are Getting On-side with Government." *University Affairs* (June-July 1998): 8-11.
- Guillory, John. *Cultural Capital: The Problems of Literary Canon Formation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Translated by T. M. Knox. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1952.
- Himmelfarb, Gertrude. "The unravelled fabric — and how to knit it up; mixed motives among the new communitarians." *TLS* (17 May 1996): 12-13.
- Kernan, Alvin, ed. *What's Happened to the Humanities?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Kimball, Roger. *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*. New York: Harper & Row, 1990.
- Kolodny, Annette. *Failing the Future: A Dean Looks at Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
- Milton, John. *The Complete Poems and Major Prose*. Merritt Hughes, ed. New York: Viking, 1957.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.

———. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

———. *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.

Readings, Bill. *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1989.

Snow, C. P. *The Two Cultures: and A Second Look; An Expanded Version of the Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1965.

Steiner, Wendy. *The Scandal of Pleasure: Art in an Age of Fundamentalism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1989.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)*. Edited by Miriam Brody. London: Penguin Books, 1982.