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HARVARD AND THE CORE CURRICULUM

For the past year or so we have been aware that Harvard is working on a curricular plan which to some extent will reintroduce the concept of a standard core of courses in general education. Dean Rosovsky prepared a thirty-six page report which is "to be read as a set of guidelines" as the Faculty Council proceeds with its development of a core curriculum.

The current Intercollegiate Press Bulletin reports that the proposal would abolish the existing General Education Program and replace it with a set of core requirements designed to provide students with "critical appreciation of major approaches to knowledge" and with "basic literacy in major forms of intellectual discourse."

What is of special interest to me is the fact that of the five areas of knowledge listed in the Harvard plan, three correspond with disciplines falling within the College of Arts and Humanities at WKU. The five areas (in contrast to the traditional triad of the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences) are:

1. Literature and the Arts
2. History
3. Social and Philosophical Analysis
4. Science and Mathematics
5. Foreign Languages and Cultures
The plan would acquaint students with important literary and artistic achievements so that they will develop a "critical understanding of how man gives artistic expression to his experience" (category one), focus on "major aspects of the present world in historical perspective" and lead students "to an understanding of the complexities of human interaction in specific situations in the past" (category two), and expand the student's range of cultural experience and "provide fresh perspectives on his or her cultural assumptions and traditions" (category five).

The Harvard proposal grants the equivalent of two years for the student's concentration, one year for non-concentration requirements and one year for electives. Considerable flexibility and free choice remains.

In summary, the proposal states, "the underlying conception of the Core Curriculum is a minimal acceptable standard of individual education focusing on how we gain knowledge and understanding of the universe, of society, and of ourselves. The Core is not meant to stand alone; conjoined with three years of other work, it will provide a solid and shared base of general and liberal education for all students."

Western is not Harvard. We have a different student body, a different faculty, and to some extent a different educational mission. This does not mean, however, that we are free to ignore a significant curricular development that our colleagues in another (and, in this case, prestigious) university are pursuing. The literature I read indicates that the pick and choose curriculum of the late sixties was to a great extent the result of a great wave of educational permissiveness that washed over the universities in the wake of Vietnam and all that accompanied that perplexing chapter of national life. If we are to some extent recovered from the turmoil of that period, it is perhaps time to join with other institutions in re-examining the curricular damage which resulted from the decade of disaster.

Robert H. Mounce, Dean
Arts and Humanities

SOME THOUGHTS ON ENGLISH 183*

Recently I appointed a special committee of the faculty to make a recommendation for some necessary textbook changes in English 183 and, while they were at it, to formulate a general statement of the goals and philosophy of the course. From some things I've heard about that committee's discussions, from what I've heard in conversations with others, and from a general "feeling" I get in the department regarding English 183, it seems clear that among us there is an extraordinary diversity of attitude and approach in the course. Variety and diversity are, of course, fine things--indeed, desirable things--in a multisection course, but there comes a point at which too much variety, too much diversity, and too much individuality becomes self-defeating. And we go off in so many different directions that "the center will not hold."

Granted, there are many things we should be doing in English 183. But by the same token, there are many things we should not be doing. So, in an effort to crystallize some thinking on the subject, I've decided to deliver myself of some opinions regarding what English 183 is and is not--or, better still, should and should not be--as I see it.

To begin with, English 183 is an "appreciation" course. By that, however, I mean something fairly specific. It is not a course which simply encourages the student to throb and twitch over literature in his own subjective juices and leave it at that. It is not a course in which he is encouraged to "wow" and "gee-whiz" over a poem and think he has "appreciated" it. Of course we hope he will be affected by what he reads--art is nothing if it does not stimulate a response. But appreciation in any reasonable and responsible sense must go far beyond the nonverbal grunts that the uncultivated sensibility can be satisfied with. Appreciation assumes at least the beginnings of an acquired body of
knowledge and the beginning development of a set of skills which make appreciation possible. Thus, it seems to me that 183 is essentially a skills course--a "how to read it" course on poetry, drama, and fiction. It may be either the first or the last literature course our students take in college. Either way, it should be a course which teaches them how to read, understand, appreciate, and enjoy respectable literature. If a student goes no farther than 183 in the study of literature, he should be able to read a poem, a play, or a story for his own instruction and delight as a result of what he has learned to do in the course--and he should be able to do it with reasonable perception and understanding of what literature is and how it works. On the other hand, if a student goes on to become an English major, he should be able to build on and develop the skills he has acquired in 183 as he continues his study. We shouldn't expect 183 to make him a polished and sophisticated critic--but it should start him on the right track.

If developing the student's "how to do it" skills in the reading and understanding of literature is the purpose of the course, as I take it to be, then it follows that the focus of the course should be on the acquisition of the tools needed for that activity and the application of these tools to selected pieces of literature. The tools I take to be the critical concepts and the accompanying "terms" of the sort one encounters in a text such as Perrine's Sound and Sense. And the application is the one-to-one engagement of the student with the poem--or story or play. That is, the student should be learning to read, understand, and appreciate on his own--to confront the poem, to engage it, and to deal with it as an entity by applying his developing critical knowledge and skill in an essentially "new critical" way. This has, I think, major implications for the way in which such a course is taught. While it is obvious that a certain amount of lecturing must be done in any course, it seems to me that in 183 the lecturing must be done only as a means to another end--that we get our lecturing done so that we can get on to the discussion. If a student is to acquire skills, he must practice them. He must be encouraged, even required, to contribute to the class, to answer questions, to think and express himself in class, to make his contribution to the common effort of the class in getting at and into the work in question. He should not be told what "the" theme of a story is. Instead, he should be guided in the ways of discovering for himself what one of its themes may be.

I fail to see how such purposes can be attempted in such a way if the emphasis in the course is on quantity. To assign twenty poems for one class meeting and then spend two or three minutes on each one is largely an empty exercise which substitutes numbers for know-how. It would seem much more appropriate to assign six poems, devote most of the class time to two or three, and raise a few questions about the others. In fact, the class may learn the most when on occasion the entire period is devoted to one poem. The measure of success should, I think, be not how much a student has covered but what he has learned how to do.

A sense of proportion is equally important in what we expect the student to learn in 183. It is tempting to demand that he clutter his mind with much of the pedantic trivia that has accrued to the study of literature over the centuries. But if he doesn't get some grasp of major principles, all the detail in Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman isn't going to make any difference. For example, being able to rattl off the types of feet and lines in poetry seems far less important to me than getting some grasp of the idea of rhythm as poets apply it to language. I don't care whether a student can distinguish between metonymy and synecdoche--but I do hope he learns that a writer who uses figurative language is setting up a relationship between things which he wants us to perceive and comprehend. It is a matter of considerable indifference to me whether a student learns the four (or five or six or seven?) types of symbols. But he should understand that a symbolic writer is asking us to participate in his way of seeing the world by operating on several different levels at the same time. I suppose I would hold out for irony--but the five types are less important. It probably doesn't matter whether a student in 183 can distinguish a villanelle from a rondeau or rime
Omniscience. Obviously one has to ask questions about something, but I think, would be almost totally out of place in 183.

My point is that 183 should provide the student with the major tools for the analysis and understanding--and, of course, appreciation--of literature and give him some practice and training in the use of them so that his experience with literature can continue to be enriching--whether he stops with 183 or goes on to graduate school. In either case, the tools and the skill level appropriate to the sophomore level are pretty much the same.

Now let me say a few words about what 183 is not--though I suppose I've been saying some of that all along. I would think that historical and biographical materials are, for the most part, out of place in 183--or at least that they should occupy a quite minor role in it. One need not know when Keats was born and died to be able to approach "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" on its own merits as a poem. A student need not be subjected to The Seventeenth Century Background or expected to know that John Donne was Dean of St. Paul's in order to be able to figure out that when Donne says, "Go and catch a falling star,/Get with child a mandrake root," he is suggesting some activities which are impossible. Tennyson's "Ulysses" is directly related to one of the poet's personal struggles, but the poem can be studied on its own merits without recourse to that interesting but, for 183, irrelevant piece of information. Furthermore, an examination emphasis on the content of works studied would, I think, be almost totally out of place in 183.

Obviously one has to ask questions about something, but it seems to me questions about content should be about content only insofar as it is related to the critical skills the course should develop. For example, the name of the central character in "Theft" seems important to me. But the story is an excellent example of limited omniscience.

English 183 can and perhaps ought to be a writing course--at least to the extent that your other paper grading load will permit it to be. But it seems to me that a research paper is totally out of place in it. One doesn't learn to swim by watching other swimmers. He may eventually learn to perfect his style in that way, but first he must jump in the water and do it on his own. I just don't see how a student can learn much about reading a poem by running off to find out what seven other people have said about it--particularly when he's not likely to understand six of them in the first place. If the course is concerned with the student's ability to engage a piece of literature, then that's what a paper assignment should bring about. A set of papers I received from my 382 class recently was very revealing. Most of the students could cover their papers (and themselves) in footnotes, but very few of them had anything to say for themselves about a poem. I'm beginning to wonder if perhaps they think the study of literature consists primarily of being told by someone else what a poem or story or play is all about. Of course library research is important. But it should be encouraged only after the student has learned something about how to deal with literature directly. English 183 is the place for the direct approach.

Another thing. I really don't think an Introduction to Literature which is a "how to read it" course should focus, except incidentally, on the great writers of Western civilization. That's the "twenty-five greatest poets" or "last chance to make him read War and Peace" syndrome. More destruction is wrought by enforced reverence for the classics than this world dreams of. It took me years to recover from being forced to read Ivanhoe and Silas Marner. The classics or the greats—at least many of them—are classics in large part because they are often so complex as to transcend their time. And they are often simply more difficult, more sophisticated, and more esoteric than sophomores in 183 are capable of grasping. I'll use one of my personal favorites as an illustration, primarily because I know him fairly well and dearly love to teach him. Yeats, for my money, is the greatest 20th-century poet (whatever that means). And "Sailing to
"Byzantium" is one of his most magnificent pieces. But I'm not all that sure that "Sailing to Byzantium" is a particularly good choice for teaching 183 students something about symbolism. Many of Yeats' poems are directly accessible to students in 183, but "Sailing to Byzantium" is something one comes to--eventually. In my experience great poems are often not nearly so appropriate for teaching students how to read poetry as some of the good ones are. And sometimes a bad poem is the best choice of all. Who can recall Evangeline without an immediate recognition of what meter is? And if a student learns how to read literature with some intelligence, some sensitivity, and some perception, he won't have to be told who the greats are. Eventually he'll discover that for himself--primarily because he's learned to read in such a way that the reading of literature in and of and for itself is a rewarding and enriching and endlessly satisfying experience. And sooner or later he'll get to War and Peace.

What does that leave us with? It's pretty simple, really. And yet, in a way, it's the most complex issue of all. We're left with the student and the literature. And our challenge is to help him learn to engage it himself for what it is and for what it can offer him. He needs some tools, he needs some guidance, he needs some practice. But most of all he needs to discover for himself that the mystery of art is still mysterious--but not quite as mysterious as he thought. He needs to be allowed to discover that some of the richness of literature is directly and immediately available to him. But at the outset all he needs is a few keys--and we've got them for him.

If I've stepped on anyone's pedagogical toes with any of these remarks, I assure you it was entirely unintentional. And I ask you to consider that I already have my neck out so far that I'm looking straight down into Barren River Lake (hyperbole). But this is a matter of some moderate importance (litotes) to us all. For a department that devotes as much of its energies as we do to the teaching of literature, we should remember also that the literature itself is the best thing we have going for us--not quantity, or facts, or history, or biography, or research, or greatness--but the literature itself. If we keep our eyes on the knowledge and the skills it takes to make that richness directly available to the student, we'll be doing him and ourselves the greatest service possible.

In any event, them's my thoughts.

James Heldman, Head
Department of English

*Several years ago I wrote a longish memorandum to the English faculty suggesting what English 183 ought and ought not to be. Reactions to my comments lead me to believe that there is pretty much a departmental agreement with my ideas, or at least most of them. Dean Mounce has suggested that the college faculty might be interested in reading my desultory remarks as a means of finding out what goes on in the course. At first, I thought I might edit the piece for more general presentation, but on reflection I've decided to leave it as originally written. Please bear in mind that the comments were originally departmental, occasional, and informal in their intent. I hope you'll find them informative.
FACULTY PUBLICATIONS

The material for this section has been gleaned from several sources including the Dean's Annual Report (1977-78), supplementary forms which the faculty submitted at the beginning of the year, and separate notices which have filtered into the office. Since it is probably inevitable that some faculty achievements will be inadvertently omitted, I have decided that for this particular issue I will limit publication to books and articles. If this one-time approach eliminates some achievement you would like to have appear in Forum, please include it on the spring request for materials.

COMMUNICATION AND THEATRE


The article "Early and Late Converts in an African Mission Field," written by CARLEY DODD, was published this summer in the Mission Strategy Bulletin.

JOSEPH FULMER coauthored an article "Turnover in TV Industry Too High" which appeared in Feedback, a quarterly publication for the Broadcast Education Association.


ENGLISH

A Lexicon of Literary Terms by RONALD ECKARD was published by Monarch in 1977.

The article "Hog Lore of the Cumberland Valley" by CHARLES GUTHRIE was published in the Kentucky Folklore Record.

Publications by JOHN LEWTER during the year have included poems in the spring issue of Poem and the winter issue of Wind and short stories in the Kansas Quarterly and Help Yourself.

Poems by MARY ELLEN MILLER were printed in the Appalachian Heritage during 1977.

FRANCES PERDUE had a poem published in the summer issue of the Kentucky Poetry Review.

"At the Tennis Court," a poem by FRANK STEELE, appeared in the spring issue of The Mossy Creek Journal.

JOSEPH SURVANT had poems published in the fall issue of Webster Review and the spring issue of Adena.

An article by CATHERINE WARD, "The Irish Penal Laws of the 18th Century," was printed in the Faculty Research Bulletin.
The article "Two Moods of Mind: Jonathan Swift as Critic and Educator," written by ROBERT WARD, appeared in the Faculty Research Bulletin.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES


"The Test as a Teaching Device," by WILLIAM NOLAN, was published in Foreign Language Annals, September, 1977.

RAUL PADILLA published "Perez Galdos: Critico del materialismo" in Boletin de filologia espanola in 1978.

HISTORY

JAMES BAKER has had two books published during the past year--A Southern Baptist in the White House and Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. His articles "From Korea: A Creative Minority" and "Merton on the Move" appeared in Commonweal and "Korea Today: The Tragic Feast" in Christian Century.

An article by CAROL CROWE, "Mary Breckinridge and the Frontier Nursing Service," appeared in the July issue of Register.

DREW HARRINGTON published "Dio Cassius as a Military Historian" in Acta Classica.

LOWELL HARRISON is co-editor of A Kentucky Sampler: Essays from The Filson Club History Quarterly, 1926-1976. He had articles published in the Register of the Kentucky Historical Society, Civil War Times Illustrated, and American History Illustrated. He also wrote "Introduction: The Formative Years" for Kentucky: Its History and Heritage.

DAVID LEE published "The Emergence of the Imperial Presidency" in America's Heritage in the Twentieth Century.

"The Emergence of the New South," Chapter IV in America's Heritage in the 20th Century, was written by MARION LUCAS.

During the past year RICHARD SALISBURY has published articles in Hispanic American Historical Review, Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives, and Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos.


"Joel E. Spingarn and Arthur B. Spingarn: A Profile," written by FRANCIS THOMPSON, was printed in the Faculty Research Bulletin.

RICHARD WEIGEL has published "A Note on P. Lepidus" in Classical Philology, "Aemilia-150 b" in Realencyclopaedie, and "L. Aemilius Paulus-115 a" in Realencyclopaedie.

INTERCULTURAL AND FOLK STUDIES

BURT FEINTUCH co-produced and edited a two-record set of documentary recordings entitled "I Kind of Believe It's a Gift: Field Recordings of Traditional Music from Southcentral Kentucky."

A paper entitled "The Hanging of Calvin Logsdon and Subsequent Rain Curse in Oral Tradition" was delivered by LYNWOOD MONTELL at the International Centenary Conference of the Folklore Society of England held in London, England.
JOURNALISM

Mustangs to Phantoms, a book by DON ARMSTRONG, has been published by Intercollegiate Press.

JAMES HIGHLAND has had numerous articles printed in the Western Alumnus and The Kentucky Press. He has also written over 200 newspaper articles in the past year.

The May, 1978, issue of The Saturday Evening Post contained an article, "Chicago: The Sound of the City," by WILLIAM MCKEEN. His article "I Want the Beach Boys to Go On Forever" appeared in the January, 1978, issue of Primo Times.

MUSIC

EMERY ALFORD published an article, "Orchestral Excerpts--A Non-definitive List for Percussion Instruments," in the July-August issue of Woodwind World-Brass and Percussion.

A composition by BENNIE BEACH, "As, Os, and Things" was premiered at the Music Education National Conference in Chicago April 14, 1978.

An article by JAMES GODFREY, "Give Your Orchestra Identity," was published in the April issue of National School Orchestra Association Bulletin.

DAVID LIVINGSTON had a medley of songs and an original composition, "Claranada," premiered at the Music Education National Conference in April.


PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION


Righteousness, by WILLIAM LANE, has been published by Scripture Union in London and Eerdmans in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

An article by LARRY MAYHEW entitled "Simplicity and Indeterminacy" was printed in the March, 1978, issue of Nous.

Answers to Questions That Bug Believers, written by ROBERT MOUNCE, was published by Baker Book House. He has written a series of ten articles on "Common Mistakes in Biblical Interpretation" for Eternity. He also wrote "A Rhetorical Analysis of Revelation Five," a chapter in a Festschrift for E. F. Harrison entitled Scripture, Tradition and Interpretation.

RONALD NASH published two articles during the past year--"The Notion of Mediator in Alexandrian Judaism and the Epistle to the Hebrews" in Westminster Theological Journal and "Truth By Any Other Name" in Christianity Today.

Two recent articles written by ROBERT ROBERTS are "Faith and Modern Humanity," printed in Christian Century, and "Kierkegaard on Becoming an Individual," which appeared in the Scottish Journal of Theology.


The article "God Is Transcendent, But Is Language?" by JAMES SPICELAND appeared in the May issue of Christianity Today.
"Where Does Theology Come From?" appeared in the December issue of Reformed Journal. The article was written by ARVIN VOS.

In addition to formal publication, there is a remarkable amount of professional creative activity by the faculty of Fine Arts. For the next edition of Forum I will be asking each department head in the Arts to write a summary of the major achievements in his area.

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