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A Revista Educação e Tecnologia apresenta um novo número, o décimo quinto.

Respeitando a sua periodicidade — semestral — número após número tem vindo a cumprir os seus objectivos e a afirmar-se no panorama das publicações congéneres, sem recurso a qualquer género de publicidade ou a técnicas de promoção; afirmação que resulta, afinal, do seu próprio valor, da expressão da globalidade dos contributos colectivos e individuais que garantem cada novo número.

Progressivamente, a nossa Revista tem sido melhorada e enriquecida, não só em termos de conteúdo específico — o que nos apraz registar — mas também com a introdução de alterações do ponto de vista gráfico.

Com este número, a Revista Educação e Tecnologia entra num novo ciclo da vida do Politécnico da Guarda, aberto com a publicação dos Estatutos deste estabelecimento de ensino superior.

Sem deixar de corresponder aos princípios consagrados no seu próprio estatuto editorial, esta Revista não olvidará, como até aqui tem acontecido, as finalidades deste Instituto, de forma a, como título consolidado, reflectir e divulgar as actividades de pesquisa e divulgação, o intercâmbio cultural, científico e técnico com instituições de ensino, nacionais ou estrangeiras.

Educação e Tecnologia não deixará, igualmente, de respeitar e garantir os valores de uma sociedade aberta, entre os quais, como apontou K. Popper, estão a liberdade, a entejuda e a responsabilidade intelectual.

TO AXE THEORY IS TO AXE THE CANON*

Walter Best**

The situation facing academic planners and administrators in institutions of higher education in the last decade of the twentieth century, in terms of what to include or exclude vis-à-vis the canon, is that of having to recognize and allow for not only a vastly increased diversity of voices, many of them misrepresented if not completely unrepresented outside the most recent past, but also of adjusting to a climate of academic discourse wherein conflict proliferates. This is not to claim that the academy up to the present time has existed in a state of perpetual harmony. The most radical disagreements in academia today, however, are taking place in the arena of theoretical discourse, most specifically around the ideas of contemporary European and North American philosophers. Moreover, an examination of the administrative structures of the ways in which the study of literature is guided and ultimately disseminated to the study body, will reveal in precise terms the way in which theoretical disagreement has come to be a hindrance rather than a boost, which I believe is what it should be, to the dynamics of the professor/student relationship. By "theory" I mean any discourse that deals with underlying principles and suppositions, or presuppositions, that enable us to pursue and justify our practices. The history of theory includes such writers as Aristotle, Sidney, Arnold, Leavis and Derrida. Thus, I am not arguing that theoretical diversity and the continuity of theoretical debate are the exclusive domain of the late twentieth century. What I see as different at

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present, however, is a situation in which the theoretical debates have taken centre stage and have become more vociferously contested on all sides.

The traditional position of universities' humanities departments within Western European, and subsequently North American, culture has been one of attempting to establish the university as a transmitter of a unified culture. This tradition holds that the university is somehow able to set up and hence disseminate a consensus on what is more profitably researched and taught. At the present time the humanities stand at a point in history where the set of ideas they represent, and implicitly the manner in which they were formed, have deep historical implications for us essentially because they have previously been held to exist somehow outside history and have been considered able to withstand the successive changes of time. What the term "humanities" designates is itself the topic of a research paper, but for the moment Giles Gunn provides a working definition of the state of the humanities in the late twentieth century:

The humanities refer, on the one hand, to those traditions of inquiry and expression where our civilization, indeed any civilization, places its own presiding assumptions, rituals, and sentiments under the most searching scrutiny in the act of giving them formal realization; they refer, on the other, to those critical methods in which civilizations attempt to repossess those traditions of understanding inherited from the past and readapt them to the changing needs of the present and the future by developing the arts and sciences of appropriate response to them. From this perspective, the humanities should not be restricted as to content and cannot be reduced to a single method. ...[t]heir value lies equally in the kinds of responses they evoke in those who study them, in the sorts of practical activities and consequences to which their study leads⁽¹⁾.

Gunn's evaluation reminds us of the necessity to avoid restrictions in both content and method, that the humanities curriculum is in no sense "fixed". The inherited discourse of the academy, on the other hand, tells us that the humanities represent a body of timeless truths based on a methodology that has been promulgated since the stratification established by Bacon in the *Advancement of Learning*. Here Bacon set out a system that differentiated three types of knowledge - Divine Philosophy, Natural Philosophy and Humane (or humanities) Philosophy. A significant buzzword in the cultural establishment of literature, "humanities" helped to make a connection between the notion of the classicist and that of someone who

(1) See Giles Gunn, *The Culture of Criticism and the Criticism of Culture*, pp.125-26.

studied human as opposed to divine matters. By the mid-seventeenth century "humanist" came to stand for the renewed interest in classical learning, together with the new interest in man in his ideal form.

As the university passed through the Industrial Revolution, the challenge was to adjust to an entirely new order of governing society, namely how to reach an accord between traditional humanism and the realities of mass production and increased access to information. The new economic realities of the nineteenth century gave rise to the dawn of professional expertise. The pre-industrial humanistic values were readily incorporated into the new market economy of the nineteenth century and a safe accomodation was established between traditionalism and professionalism. The disagreements, however strong, were kept in check more as a result of the social ties that united those who taught rather than due to any disparities in selection of material or instructional methodology. The legacy carried over from nineteenth century scholars maintained a trust in an academic hierarchy composed of people who viewed each other as essentially the same kind of person: a self-regenerating and closed elite.

Today's academy is no longer peopled by one social type, i. e. the divergence of points of view stems from the very nature of the democratic process in post-industrialist and post-modernist society. In the Unites States the post-World War II era has seen university campus populations move in the direction of being more representative of a broader cross-section of that society than at any previous point in American history. Institutions of higher learning have been democratized to allow for mass representation, and more particularly for minority-group representation. Thus, while the historical privileging of the concept of the humanities has allowed for its successive reproduction throughout the history of Western civilizations, the post-Industrial, post-modern position is forcing a major reassessment of the reception and integration of literature into the twenty first century.

Inherent within such a structure lies another legacy, that of certainty of belief in a common background of established aims and assumptions - and therein the création of special enclaves of intellectual privilege - and it is precisely this structure that no longer has a place in the academy of the present time. A ready example of the gap separating the "then" from the "now" is the status of feminist writers and feminist criticism. Feminist writers and critics cannot place themselves inside a traditionalist/humanist stance due to the basic and irrefutable fact that the very conception of their social and institutional role is founded outside the sphere of the traditionalist/humanist viewpoint. The approach to literature, from the feminist point of view, necessarily begins by negating any notion of a "common culture", because such a culture has

been constructed in exclusively male terms. Add to the feminist argument those of Afro-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans and the Gay Movement, and a more complete picture of the breakdown of any adherence to "commonality" in the study of literature becomes immediately apparent. Thus, the laissez-faire politics of the traditionalist/humanist approach that allowed for a contained discussion has now been challenged and found lacking and, most importantly, any notion of a common culture can no longer be taken seriously. Previous "marginal" groups are now in the situation of having a say in how terms such as "literature", "culture", and "cultural heritage" can be defined.

Certain arguments within current academic thinking necessarily continue to circulate around questions that have been areas of heated debate in the humanities for a long time. Questions such as how to select literary works to be taught at the advanced level and how to emphasize which aspects and why. Such a route nowadays inevitably involves broader issues of educational, cultural and social theory and also brings into play factors of historical, sociological and philosophical relevance. There are those who continue to argue vigorously that reading and teaching literature should remain a purely "literary" activity and there are those who insist, equally strongly, that the designation "literary" is inescapably a political activity and cannot be profitably dealt with in separation from larger, cultural issues. What makes the study of literature political is that questions of ideology, one of the cornerstones of literary concern, cannot be viewed in isolation from interpretative analysis within a cultural context. It is precisely this conflict that is at the root of the controversy about the canon and the Great Books. How to select works of literature for study is thus part of an equation that also includes the equally important question of how students and educators should read them. The very fact that we are no longer able to take for granted any consensus on primary principles makes it impossible to talk about specific literary works without being drawn into matters of theory and interpretation. This in turn establishes the connection between the study of theory and the make-up of the literary canon in my argument, which is that any attempt to cut back or reduce the status of theoretical production simply encourages the continuation of the traditional categorization within humanities departments which stratifies a system comprised of, on one hand, the Great Works of Literature and, on the other, the marginal texts. What constitutes a "marginal text" in today's society is a highly contentious question and is, in fact, further reason for a broader-based intellectual discussion.

Part of the reason for the current polarization concerning the role of theory in literary studies has arisen because former, secure groups have suddenly found themselves under attack

and for the first time are being obliged to fight for the survival of their territory just like everyone else. Ideas that were previously the exclusive domain of those inside the university system are now being exposed to democratic negotiation - and renegotiation - and to a debate that is on-going. The importance of democratic negotiation cannot be underestimated because it reinforces the message that in a democratic culture all thought is a political and contested activity. A refusal to come to terms with the democratized nature of the educational process at the present time is a refusal to recognize and give an adequate response to the political reality. The terms of literary analysis therefore reflect the disputed nature of the discussion of all procedures, definitions and categories in our post-industrialist era.

The profound disagreements on first principles have led to a healthy focusing of attention on the nature of literature and its reception and cultural dissemination. The outcry from some quarters has been that there is now an overabundance of discourse about theory and a deficit on literature, a truly startling objection since its declared aim would appear to be an attempt to subvert the very existence of disagreement. "Democracy" allows for the existence of disagreement. And if we were to go along with the repress-theory faction, where would such a reaction lead? Would it draw us back to an investigation on purely literary terms, and if it did, would this satisfy the multiplicity of interpretive opinion at the present time? On the contrary, the outcry against theory would seem to encourage further theoretical discourse and further open literary study up to a much wider range of cultural influences than the term "literary" is capable of answering to. As members of the academic profession we are first and foremost theorists. Any profitable discussion about a work of literature necessarily revolves around diverse opinion on methods of interpretation. Is a piece of drama, a work of fiction or a poem deemed "good" or not, and if so, on what (and whose) terms? How do we arrive at definitions of what constitutes a "great Book" or a "great idea"? It is not feasible to discuss literature without outlining and defining theoretical choices. The proliferation of theoretical positions has, of course, led to a theoretical metadiscourse which has in turn produced its own internal arguments. Indeed, the metadiscourse is further encouraged by those who object to further theoretical discussion by the mere fact that such objections themselves become theoretical positions. Whether it goes acknowledged or unacknowledged, the contention that as participants in the educational process we are always theorists, constitutes the reality of current academic thinking. Any suggestion that theoretical choices may be optional is a refusal to recognize the accountability that our profession holds towards theoretical debate.

The present situation is, therefore, one in which a

multiplicity of voices share in an ongoing debate about premises shared, about uncertainty over premises shared, and about theories of value, interpretation, education, the canon and culture. The terms by which works of literature are selected should reflect these changed circumstances. The explosion of theoretical debate within literary circles since the 1960s mirrors the societal changes that have allowed "minority" representation to gain a more prominent voice. The 1960s, whatever else they provoked, did cause a lot of self-questioning that has led to major societal changes. It took the 1960s to encourage racial, ethnic and sexual minorities to begin to establish their particular experiences in political terms. In one sense the 60s were the testing ground for new expressions of thought and ways of living that could challenge and break free of the traditional. The spirit of the era was essentially experimentalist in nature and it opened up a permissiveness that sooner or later spread to all sectors of society, including educational planning. One negative outcome came from those who suspected that such a fundamental requestioning could only lead to laxity and a decline in standards. Much the same sort of reaction continues to come from the political Right up to the present. The debate around Allen Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* does, in fact, help to highlight the problem of relativism in education, but his message of feeding students an overdose of trivial facts is hardly an appropriate answer to the need for more rigorous standards. Unhappily for our profession, the answer from university administrators during the 60s was to try to answer to all tastes by offering smorgasbord programming that allowed students to try a sampling of many varied disciplinary interests in an often unrelated context. Cultural literacy needs to be addressed, not as an unmemorable inventory of information, but rather as an open debate on material that is ripe for redefinition in the actual process of both reading and studying it.

The question of how to adapt the curriculum and the canon to take these changes into consideration in more recent times has met with mixed responses. Columbia University has undertaken a complete overhaul of its humanities curriculum, this from the vantage point of having established a prototype programme after World War I which subsequently became a model for general education courses nationally. The more recent challenge at Columbia has been to reassess how the Great Works of Literature debate can reach an accommodation with new theoretical ideas about the canon that are of prime concern to all of us. Here is an extract from the Columbia University journal, on the subject of curricular planning, dated April, 1987.

Some maintained that everything depended on how the works were taught, not on which books were chosen for the

syllabus, and enlightened teaching, however desirable, could never be legislated as long as the autonomy of the individual teacher and the sanctity of his or her classroom are assumed. Others insisted that only works written by women could satisfy the need that had been identified. Still others argued that the criterion ought to be not the sex of the author but the value and teachability of the work itself. ... In a real sense, the somewhat revisionary syllabus for 1986-87, which is now being given a two-year trial, is a compromise solution that reflects the various pedagogical, political, and ideological concerns generated by the staff's internal and beneficial critique of the books we teach⁽²⁾.

Unfortunately, the words "compromise solution" sum up the position that many university humanities faculty have reached in the 80s and 90s. An analysis of the Columbia approach reveals that while a laudable attempt is being made to satisfy competing internal interests, the end result may well be that the "pedagogical, political, and ideological concerns" are kept in isolation from each other, thereby preventing an examination of their interrelatedness and avoiding the heart of the issue, i.e. what form do the disagreements take and how can they be given a more central role in determining academic thinking. Admittedly, the "compromise solution" is an easy option and may work in a limited sense. Faculty members, for example, will be able to pursue their own research and methodological interests without declaring war on each other due to a likely scenario of many different and strongly held theoretical positions. But such a compromise differs little from the avoidance-of-conflict marriage of convenience that was set up between professionalism and traditional humanism in the nineteenth century.

The main reason why university administrative systems tend to continue to adopt compromise solutions brings us back once again to the question of what to do about the changed situation that I described earlier; the fact that the notion of a "unified culture" that the academy supposed existed, is no longer unified and consensual, and in fact never was. So the response is to create curriculum development committees in order to reach some redefinitions of what type of knowledge is most worth knowing and teaching - essentially to continue the fallacy of consensus. Unfortunately, as most of us recognize, the committee process is notoriously unable to adopt firm decisions and is more likely to take the compromise solution route. Rather than debate the causes of dissention, the administrative process functions in a way that in practice attempts to neutralize it by preventing factional divisions from breaking out. The outcome is that the *status quo* remains undisturbed. Thus.

(2) See the article in the Columbia Journal, April, 1987, by James V. Mirollo, entitled "Happy Birthday, Humanities A", p. 37.

the role of administration has come to be that of a peace-keeping force, isolating faculty members and university departments from one another in case a serious ideological or philosophical argument should erupt. The end result is that once again some of the most relevant issues in academia today - humanist, Marxist, feminist, new historicist, semiotic, rhetorical, psychoanalytic, deconstructionist - are pushed to the edge of curricular planning rather than constituting the basis for its centre.

There are some positive signs, however. Many humanities departments are beginning to alert students to the variety of theoretical positions and to new interpretative methods in an effort to make them participate in the production of intellectual culture. The English undergraduate and graduate programmes at Carnegie Mellon University, for example, now fall under the designation "Literature and Cultural Studies". The rationale behind this change in emphasis is to bring into debate a host of epistemologies, distinctive methodologies, issues, problems and challenges. Although the new focus at Carnegie Mellon is principally concerned with graduate study, it can address the undergraduate programme on the basis that exposure to theoretical and methodological dispute is equally important for both groups, though with modifications to different educational levels. Another problem, of course, is that humanities departments tend to see the coverage of every possible field of interest within their area as being part of their exclusive educational responsibility. Again, from the administrative point of view this system of organization is the least likely to lead to open conflict. By addressing disparate interests in isolation from each other, departments can offer field coverage and at the same time permit incompatible partnerships to share the same space. One can then claim that faculty are as free to discuss their methodological and ideological differences as they are to be unaware that the differences exist. But where do students fit into this dynamic of conflict? At the undergraduate level, very few universities offer students of humanities the opportunity to become acquainted with the intellectual arguments that surround faculty disagreement. Instead of taking advantage of an unprecedented chance to open up curricular planning to new critical approaches and literatures, literature departments have invariably chosen to set up specialized theory courses which are designed to take care of the "new field". Once again, the field-coverage technique of isolating disciplinary interests is being used to avoid making the reasons for intellectual disagreement a more central component of pedagogical discourse. The pattern of permitting new areas of intellectual culture to be added to the curriculum without allowing the established fields to alter their outlook and approach to any great extent is merely to give the department the opportunity to assume the pose of being in some sense

"progressive". As insiders, students need to be included in the debate, not excluded from it. The failure to debate theoretical differences out in the open results in students having little, certainly no coherent sense of what the struggles and alliances which brought those divisions into existence are composed of. This approach inevitably deprives the student of any real understanding of the complexities of current intellectual discourse and, indeed, denies them the chance to view argument as a constructive text. Thus, in the end the student is dealt a disservice. Ideological dispute as a central component in the study of literature education can hopefully become a structuring principle in the educational process and students can become agents with an active role in an on-going intellectual conversation. We can then work with the "Great Books" and "marginal texts" to show how they all give life to culture by their ability to continue to challenge the forces that bring them into being.

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