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IMPASSE OR TENSION? PEDAGOGY AND THE CANON CONTROVERSY

Jacqueline Bacon

The debate over the literary canon has generated a canon of its own, written by scholars such as Allan Bloom and Jane Tompkins, whose names and arguments have become familiar to those on both sides of the exchange. As Hugh Kenner has observed, behind any literary canon lies an intricate and controversial “narrative” (373) that establishes connections and oppositions among works and calls for decisive action. Indeed, as Patrick Colm Hogan has noted, both sides in the debate seem to present “authoritarian” and “dogmatic” positions that ignore other views and imply that a choice must be made between the extremes (183–84). This dilemma, however, may be a false one. Gerald Graff argues that a pedagogy in which we turn this apparent impasse into a defining tension by “teaching the conflicts” will give our curriculum structure and relevance (“Teach” 51; see also *Literature* 120–27). He argues primarily from a theoretical and global perspective that places educational discord in the framework of larger problems in academic culture.

Instead, I turn here to concrete issues that teachers of “the conflict” face. First, I examine four factors contributing to polarization: (1) the tension between tradition and commonality on the one hand, and multiculturalism and individual difference on the other; (2) the conflict between theory-oriented teaching and spontaneous enjoyment of texts; (3) the disagreement over the terminology and criteria we should use in the classroom to evaluate literature; and (4) the discord over whether we should use or reject disciplinary and institutional frameworks when teaching literature. Next, I investigate how two groups of teachers of literature—at the University of Texas at Austin (a research institution noted for its involvement in the debate over the canon [see Hairston; Mangan]) and at Southwestern University (a small, private liberal arts college) in Georgetown,

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Texas—approach the study of literature not as an impasse but as a dialectical interchange featuring established and emerging views of canonicity (see also Morris). Through interviews with these instructors and professors, who experience the debate as classroom teachers rather than as scholars who have made their careers as canon specialists, I show that in the teaching of literature, the four factors that inform theoretical canon debates need not—in fact should not—be resolved.

Upholders of the “traditional” canon such as Allan Bloom, Harry Levin, E. D. Hirsch, Jeff Smith, and George F. Will support the teaching of an established body of knowledge, garnered through the study of what Bloom calls the “greatest texts” (62). Critics of this traditional view such as Patricia Bizzell (662) and Joe Weixlmann (277) question the assumption that consensus can be achieved about general cultural information or canonical texts. Gregory S. Jay (267), Paul B. Armstrong (30), and Helene Moglen (60) add that the canon is not universally accepted, but is based on—and functions to maintain—the established views of those in power (see also Chambers 18–20; Froula 151; Graff, *Professing* 231; Kolodny 295–97; Tompkins 187–98). Furthermore, revisionists often observe that the canon’s delayed reaction to larger social issues eliminates any deep connection between it and students’ larger cultural concerns (see Lauter 440). The two sides in the debate suggest that a determined choice must be made: either we must propound common beliefs through the traditional canon, or we must emphasize differences among beliefs through noncanonical works.

Pedagogy too divides the two camps. Conservative critics such as Dwight Eddins maintain that emphasis on literary theory distracts students from spontaneous encounters with texts (“Yellow Wood” 571). Jeff Smith further asserts that students are “natural Hirschians” who come to us “for initiation” into the “existing public discourse” rather than for the “self-realization” that he associates with the theory-laden approach of the “Left” (26). But their opponents challenge the idea that “spontaneous encounters” are even possible; they argue that the conservative view itself is based on (unacknowledged) theoretical foundations (Knapp 586; Moglen 62–63; Schultz 67–68) and that those who pursue theory do gain pleasure from texts (Knapp 585). It seems that we are once again at a crucial crossroads: one path leads us to Eddins’s spontaneous “joy of text” and Smith’s “initiation,” while the other leads us to a more detached, though still pleasurable, treatment of literature.

A third disagreement involves what evaluative terms should guide the teaching of literature. Students may naturally question whether alternative works that challenge conventional ideas are “as good” as those that correspond to a more traditional—and thus familiar—world view. Tompkins aptly notes that asking the question “but is it any good?” assumes we can define an idea of “good” that is timeless and context-free (195–96), a premise that undercuts an evaluation of

nontraditional texts on their own terms. Tompkins, however, implicitly assumes that we must undertake either/or choices about the terms on which we consider a text to be valuable when she proposes that we must substitute for “is it any good?” a judgment of the “work” that a text does in “expressing and shaping the social context that produced it” (200).

Even within the more liberal camp, either/or choices of classroom practice seem necessary. While revisionist critics tend to agree that traditional historical, literary, and social categories hinder the addition of alternative texts to our reading lists, they offer opposing strategies for dealing with this obstacle. For example, Paul Lauter proposes that we add new categories to bring innovative works into the canon, contending that “simply eliminating historical frameworks . . . leaves us viewing discrete works in a historical void” (453). Other revisionists, however, claim that such an approach may have unfavorable consequences. Annette Kolodny fears that when we “bracket off” different groups of writers or works, they may be seen as “anomalous” and will thus remain marginalized (297). In addition, Alan C. Golding argues that institutional rubrics can lead to a “catch-22,” since the force of noncanonical works often depends on “combative rhetoric” that is rendered “culturally and intellectually harmless” when accommodated within our “cultural institutions” (301–302). An either/or question is once again posited: do we add new categories and texts, and risk diminishing their literary power; or must we somehow try to teach works without deferring to a systematic framework or falling prey to institutional assumptions?

Clearly those who teach literature today must attend to these complicated issues. However, to choose sides on canonicity *before* we enter the classroom would be to overlook the important presence of students and their ongoing role in shaping our pedagogy. As Richard Penticoff, Assistant Instructor of English at the University of Texas at Austin, notes, when theorists discuss a text’s relevance in the critical “conversation” that forms our canonical framework (see Wendell Harris’s “Canonicity” for the analogy between the canon and a “conversation” [111–12]), they often imply that the “conversation is among the works”—or perhaps among literary critics and the works—but “not really among the *students* about the works.” Susan Sage Heinzelman, Senior Lecturer of English at the University of Texas at Austin, similarly points out that although the canon debate is often framed theoretically rather than pedagogically, for teachers who dedicate their time to a careful consideration of their courses it is “very difficult to separate pedagogy from other concerns when talking about the canon.” Although all of the teachers I have interviewed are familiar with the theoretical debate through their roles as literary scholars, when they engage in pedagogical practice, the either/or choices called for in theory often turn out to be false dilemmas. Highlighting the dialectic between the opposing positions in the canon debate in their

teaching, they invite students to participate in continually evolving discussions unrestrained by absolute choices.

The strong tension, for example, between the sense of the canon as a purveyor either of “common values” or of “difference” affords a useful position from which to present literary texts. The assumption that students can—or should—share a common “frame of reference” as part of their educational experience, as Levin argues (360), is untenable. Evan Carton, Professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin, points out that “every reader is himself or herself differently ‘canoned,’ and reading is an interaction between a text and an individual’s position that he or she brings to the text.” Instead of trying to eliminate these variations, Carton strives for a syllabus “that constantly foregrounds issues of difference.” This approach to course construction, he finds, “can generate a productive self-consciousness about reading” because the differences among texts can be used as “a way to expose differences within and between readers.”

However, affirming a reader’s interaction with the text does not imply that we *totally* individualize reading experiences or that we refuse to teach a certain work simply because we prefer another. On the contrary, we cannot divorce the idea of the canon or of literature itself from an emphasis on communities, as Carton and T. Walter Herbert, Professor of English at Southwestern University, observe. If we do not take communal associations into account when we choose texts that are “traditional,” we may find ourselves using phrases like “generally accepted criteria” that, Herbert notes, “raise more questions than answers.” We have to stress that reading is a contextual experience and that the communities to which we belong and the knowledge we bring to a text must bear on our reception of it. Carton’s students often ask where his knowledge of a text originates: “Did you just come up with these ideas or did you read all the relevant criticism on this work? Why can’t we see what you see?” Carton’s answer—that “interpretations are contextual”—acknowledges that he does not bring some power of “mystical penetration” to the text; his knowledge of the Bible, of theories of language, and of critical methods and paradigms all shape his responses. Such disclosure shows students how participation in communities sharing various models of knowledge influences reading and interpretation. This honest approach to contextual reading not only demystifies the professor’s response to a text but also makes the notion of a work’s “greatness” much less vague and troubling to students.

An example illustrates Carton’s use of the interplay between individual difference and communal associations. When teaching a sophomore-level survey course entitled “Masterworks of American Literature,” he feels that it is important to include Hawthorne “in part because of his impact on the construction of American literary history,” even if this canonical choice means omitting some authors whose impact in their own time was stronger. Carton’s “self-reflexive”

pedagogy gives the students a sense both of a text's merit and of political and communal interests that should not be ignored: "You don't mystify the choice of Hawthorne as one that is aesthetic in the sense of a transcendent abstract value. Instead you emphasize that both the choice of Hawthorne and indeed what is considered aesthetic at any given time are products of a cultural history that does involve power." At the same time, Carton acknowledges that Hawthorne's influence extends from his time to later "producers of American culture."

Highlighting such choices also allows an instructor to place personal literary tastes and preferences into larger contexts (Hogan 189). While the conservative side claims that certain "universal" values certify a text's greatness, revisionist critics are reluctant to privilege certain texts. However, all teachers have preferences. Barbara Herrnstein Smith's observation that judgments of value are "radically contingent" (15) should not be ignored, but it should not stop us from making such judgments and discussing them candidly with students. Furthermore, trying to suppress the contingency of our own value judgments underestimates students' recognition of the role of our interests in our choices. As Herbert remarks, "Ask any five college freshmen whether a work of literature is great because it's great or because *readers think* it's great, and they will say the latter. We're not telling them anything they don't know."

When we use these tensions, significant pedagogical benefits are gained. Deborah S. Ellis, Associate Professor of English at Southwestern University, observes that when we show students that our selections are "radically contingent," we illustrate "that literature is open-ended and that literature asks questions; we can't just 'crack the code' of it." Our candor helps students to "consider the assumptions on which [authority] is based" and to dispel the commonly held idea that the canon is a rigid and fixed "list." Heinzelman notes that "the canon is not like a bucket; we don't put in one thing and take out another." However, since in any given course a syllabus *does* function like a "bucket," if we do not openly acknowledge that our choices in a particular course are limited, students may perceive that replacing one work with another on a course syllabus is the result of a corresponding shift in the literary canon. Such a misconception is compounded, as Ellis observes, by the fact that the press and the general public have often represented text selection as a "false dilemma" in which teachers' text selections correspond to final and extreme decisions of canonicity with no alternatives. The popular characterization of those who prepare reading lists with nontraditional works as "throwing out Shakespeare to put in Alice Walker," Ellis observes, conflates the naturally limited text selection for a particular course with larger decisions of what students might read and consider valuable during their lifetimes. A pedagogical approach that highlights the contingency of decisions of text selection allows students to view course syllabi within the context of their wider reading.

Such honesty about our choices also helps to clear up misconceptions students may have concerning the pedagogical functions of literary texts. Students can discern the presence of personal value judgments in the formation of reading lists, as Herbert observes; however, this attitude may coexist with the belief that “unbiased” judgments are possible if literary texts are contemplated “impartially.” That these seemingly conflicting views are often held simultaneously is revealed by Bloom’s *Closing of the American Mind*. Bloom (dejectedly) acknowledges the impact of the feminist movement on what works are considered “offensive” (65–66), while at the same time proposing that an unbiased approach to great works is possible if we approach a text through its “objective beauty,” which precludes the need to question its status (380). Ellis observes that students often similarly believe that literature should tell them what is “right and wrong,” and thus while they may recognize our personal involvement in text selection, they may find the idea of contingency unsettling and may feel that teachers and scholars can—and should—form the canon decisively through an “impartial” and thorough examination of the texts. Such assumptions conceal the real intricacies of canon expansion.

A student paper on Donne and Jonson illustrates these misconceptions. The student author finds it troubling that twentieth-century readers and scholars have given more critical attention to Donne since, she argues, this situation does not allow “each literary school an unbiased chance to gain [a reader’s] approval.” This student assumes that an objective choice is possible given enough (presumably unbiased) information. She also assumes that a choice must be made at all, as if the goal of literary criticism should be to facilitate readers’ final decisions as to a work’s literary merit. Furthermore, the student perceives the relative amount of available criticism on the two authors as an indication of an undesirable “prejudice” in favor of Donne, rather than as the result of ongoing contingencies in and beyond the literary community. Bringing the interplay of choice and its limitations into the classroom helps dispose of such commonly held misconceptions and the resulting fear of revising the canon.

When the distinction between reading in a single course and larger canonical decisions and issues is highlighted, students are undoubtedly capable of seeing the contingency and flexibility of canonical decisions. In an essay written for a Restoration and eighteenth-century literature course taught by Glen McClish, Associate Professor of Theatre and Communication at Southwestern University, a student author demonstrates her ability to consider a wider context of reading when considering issues of canon expansion:

With the current flood of feminist scholarship in the literary world, [Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*] would make an excellent addition to the canon. I do not think that another text needs to be eliminated to make room for it, though. Instead our thinking about the entire Restoration and eighteenth-century period needs adjust-

ment. With the addition of a text that presents the woman's experience from a woman's point of view, our perceptions of texts that exhibit the woman's experience from a man's point of view will necessarily need refocusing. For example, after reading Aphra Behn, we think of Daniel Defoe's female characters differently.

It is clear that this advanced student, who has a substantial framework of prior reading, does not find her evaluation restricted by the limits of a course syllabus.

A canon is, in fact, not defined primarily by the decisions surrounding what is included, but even more fundamentally by "what the canon excludes," so that "changes in the canon look like parts of a larger cycle of inclusion and exclusion" (Golding 283). Carton's "Masterworks of American Literature" course exemplifies this cycle. He usually teaches Henry James's *Daisy Miller*, which is in the anthology he assigns. Recently, however, accommodating Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* necessitated the exclusion of James's text from Carton's syllabus (although it was still included in the course anthology). Carton brought this issue into class, explicitly addressing the fact that Jacobs's work had supplanted James's in his course reading list, even though James may traditionally be considered a more "canonized" author and thus may more often be included on "Masterworks of American Literature" course syllabi. Carton wishes to highlight for the students that a decision about a text's value (and thus its appropriateness for a particular reading list) "is sort of like a myth in Roland Barthes's sense, the residue of social and political choices that have been 'naturalized' and thus made to look obvious." One of the ways in which such value judgments get "mythologized," he adds, is through "mystifying" the bases on which they have been made. To undercut this process, Carton makes it clear to students that the traditional choice to "elevate James over Jacobs" in syllabi for similar courses "is a product of the standard, or basis, that may be traditionally used to define literary value. However, there are other bases that can be explored leading to other choices." In contrast to an either/or dichotomy, this observation suggests a multiplicity of (not necessarily mutually exclusive) value criteria.

In the case of Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Carton notes that historical factors surrounding the text render it a "very concrete example that allows students to see the way in which a basis for value has to do with much more than aesthetic greatness." Carton tells the students that although the text was published in 1860, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* has only recently begun to be discussed and taught because no edition was available for literature teachers and students until 1987. This historical note allows students to see the impact of interconnected cultural and commercial judgments on text selection and availability, and to understand that it is only contemporary social, cultural, and political circumstances that even allow us to compare Jacobs to traditionally canonized authors such as James. Thus, Carton's inclusion of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* within his pedagogical framework and his open discussion of the selection of

this text give students “a very material basis for questioning the notion of a work’s unconditional greatness or natural canonicity.”

Carton’s reference to the “mythologized” status of the canon points to another conflict mentioned above: the canon’s delayed reaction to the larger social context surrounding students’ lives. While conservative critics may not consider such a factor problematic—since, as Bloom remarks, great texts must take us beyond the “here and now” and stand on their own (64–65)—revisionist theorists, as suggested above, see this “lag” as an inherent weakness of the literary canon that must be offset. However, the tension between the world view of canonical works and the social context of students’ lives can be marshaled to challenge student readers significantly. As Herbert points out, we can take pedagogical advantage of the energetic climate in which an unfamiliar work is received, thus profiting from the tendency of the canon to “lag” behind other social institutions.

Heinzelman uses the example of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* to illustrate this possibility. Even though the institution of slavery in the United States and the injustices suffered by African-Americans are integral to the American consciousness, the canon has been slow to incorporate works such as slave narratives that address this component of our history from the African-American point of view. This “lag” means that students who approach *Beloved* for the first time are placed in the context of rediscovering the past. As Heinzelman proposes, they are asked “to reimagine a history that they thought they knew.” The “lag” between the students’ awareness of the traditional narratives of the system of slavery and their recognition of this alternative point of view is pedagogically beneficial, Heinzelman concludes, because it gives “power to a text” by forcing the students to rethink a past with which they have “gotten comfortable.” When the students’ notions of history are undercut and opened to question, their reception of Morrison’s text is all the more forceful. Heinzelman’s observations attest to Charles Altieri’s proposal that “we need examples of the powers that accrue when we . . . enter the dialectical process of differing from ourselves, in order to achieve new possibilities for representing and directing our actions” (44).

Furthermore, the fact that *Beloved* provides readers with a previously unexplored perspective—rather than reinforcing an established view of history—illustrates that the delay in adding alternative texts to our reading lists is connected to the issue of the traditional categories through which literature, history, and culture are viewed and to the role of institutional structures in preserving and changing these categories. Golding’s “catch-22” (301)—that if we assimilate marginalized texts into our institutions, their force is co-opted—again threatens to compel those who want to teach noncanonical literature to consider only extreme solutions. It seems that a revisionist critic must choose either to avoid these texts, or to present them in a less than satisfactory way. However, this dilemma, as

Carton observes, is based on the false premise that we can read a text in its “non-institutionalized” state. Instead, Carton emphasizes, “any written product of language is institutionalized and conventional,” especially those that have been accommodated within the publishing industry. Heinzelman adds that when we bring a text into the classroom, it may indeed be perceived *differently* from the way in which it is received in other contexts, but as a product of institutions a published work *always* emerges from an “artificial environment” that “insulates the audience to some extent from shock” (see also Rodden 505–19).

Furthermore, Carton points out that the dilemma rests on a second false premise: that a noncanonical work is a “noble savage,” whose “ideality exists in its being ‘uncivilized’ and outside the canon.” Alternatively, Carton calls this representation “a myth of the ‘fall’: the ‘unread’ text is ‘innocent’ until it ‘falls’ into the canon.” Not only does this view have distinctly “paternalistic” overtones, Carton asserts, but it also “denies all of our involvement in institutions.” He astutely compares this formulation to students’ complaint that literature professors “interpret novels to death,” a concern that is similarly based on a myth that texts can be read in an “idealized” state free from interpretation.

This oft-heard complaint resembles the canon debate’s stalemate between the two apparent extremes of theory and the “joys of text.” That this argument has been particularly vehement and heartfelt (see Eddins “Yellow Wood,” “Dwight Eddins”; Knapp) demonstrates that this crucial conflict has hit a pedagogical nerve. Eddins’s comment that texts put us in a position to act spontaneously (574) is one that literary scholars know well, but we are understandably concerned with Knapp’s suggestions that Eddins’s position is anti-intellectual (586). Indeed, as Carton’s statements show, we can emphasize to students that theory and enjoyment share a dialectical relationship. As Ellis notes, attitudes toward—and preferences for—texts change as one becomes aware of theoretical perspectives. Ellis helps students in her classes become aware of this modification by encouraging them to explore how their opinions and preferences develop as their reading is influenced by their learning in the course. For example, for a class entitled “Autobiography,” Ellis allowed students to propose works that they enjoyed and that they felt were important exemplars of the genre, such as Alex Haley’s *Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Ellis’s adding these texts to the reading list helped students to understand that preferences *do* shape attitudes toward a genre. In addition, as the class read other traditional autobiographies, such as St. Augustine’s, as well as recent feminist writings on autobiography and “the personal voice,” students were able to develop theoretical perspectives which in turn modified their responses to Haley’s and Angelou’s texts.

When we address the issue of students’ heartfelt reactions to texts, we must admit that it is natural for them to ask, “But is it any good?” Tompkins’s proposal

that we substitute “the notion of literary texts as doing work, expressing and shaping the social context that produced them” (200) for the notion of whether a work is “any good” indicates that she believes an either/or choice must be made concerning the terms with which we discuss a work’s value. However, if we are to encourage students to think critically about the value judgments guiding the evaluation of literature, adopting Tompkins’s paradigm of value instead of one based on transcendent literary worth can be equally mystifying to students. Students may feel as puzzled by a judgment of a text’s relevance based on Tompkins’s proposal as they would by one privileging more “traditional” criteria. As Herbert indicates, hidden within Tompkins’s new criterion are many mysterious assumptions, such as how we decide what is of cultural interest, and when a text has done a “good” job of expressing its cultural context. Herbert comments that Tompkins is “loading the terms”—as if anything we deem a “cultural problem” is credible—even though such a formulation depends implicitly on value judgment. Although cultural and historical factors clearly influence his text selection, Carton does not assume that such a basis will seem “natural” to students. Therefore he offers to his students many perspectives on literary value, such as those guiding his discussion of *Daisy Miller* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* mentioned above. If we do not highlight that many questions can be asked about a work’s relevance, we risk replacing one idea of “good” with another (equally contingent) one, in spite of the fact that, as Carton observes, “the question of what cultural problems a text works out is no more necessarily a criterion [of value] than whether a poem scans.”

Alternatively, we could consider the question “Is it any good?” a serious one by addressing the tension between such a value assessment and other bases for judgment. Herbert recalls one student’s response to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: “I have something called my ‘groan quotient’—how many times I groan with pain reading a particular book. And I must say that I groaned a lot reading this book.” Herbert sees the futility of denying such strong reactions; after all, he has a “‘groan quotient,’ too, and talk about a work’s influence in its historical time can’t change that.” Why not use students’ spontaneous responses as catalysts for further investigation of the hidden premises guiding judgments of canonicity, assumptions that have become as automatic as a “groan quotient”? Heinzelman feels that it is important to allow students to ask questions of value so that they can be challenged to uncover their criteria for excellence. Unless they ask, “Is it any good?” and react by feeling pleased or uncomfortable, Heinzelman explains, no dialogue is prompted through which they can stand back from their premises and critique them. Horace’s dictum that a poem should delight and instruct remains relevant. Despite the modern age’s penchant for theorizing, students can remind us of a text’s inherent capability to please—or displease, as the case may be—and show us that such power does not erase theory, but works symbiotically with it.

As Hogan remarks, the “subjective element” in literary evaluation is not something that we have to separate from theory or “rational discussion”; in fact, we should recognize that “personal feeling” has its own “history” and “context” that should be recognized and addressed (188–89).

Our care not simply to replace one paradigm of literary value with another brings up an important point about our pedagogical mission. Wendell V. Harris wisely points out that “though ideologically oriented critics frequently cite the relativity of ‘truth,’ they must, of course, assume that their own social and political beliefs are, if not absolute, a great deal less relative than others” (118). If we promote what we assume to be the “right” side when we teach a noncanonical text, Carton warns, we will inhibit the open discussion made possible by its inclusion and “short-circuit the critical rigor that can be of so much value in the classroom.” On the other hand, the dialogue that ensues when we place canonical texts into “conversation” with noncanonical works in the classroom encourages students to examine critically cultural notions they may have taken for granted initially, as well as to explore alternative perspectives. In his “Masterworks of American Literature” course, Penticoff pairs John Steinbeck’s “Flight” with Rolando Hinojosa-Smith’s “Sometimes It Just Happens That Way; That’s All” (Lauter et al. 1949–57) to help students discover how interactions configured as “natural” may often hide a state of affairs very much contrived by society. The two stories have similar plots, in which a young Hispanic man gets in trouble with the law for committing murder and is forced to respond. Penticoff encourages students to explore how Steinbeck represents what ensues as almost inevitable, as if human forces are controlled by the natural world, whereas Hinojosa-Smith’s story undercuts this fatalism throughout. In “Sometimes It Just Happens That Way; That’s All,” excerpts from UPI news reports are interposed, in which the protagonist’s name is misspelled in different ways. Questioning these typographical errors, Penticoff’s students discover how an element of the text that may appear “random” hides the stark social prejudices that make the protagonist so unimportant to the community that they can misspell his name without fear of repercussion. Thus the tension between two short stories that represent conflicting views of what is “natural” and what is socially controlled in human society becomes a focus of class discussion and enhances the readings of both texts.

Bringing this dialogical approach into the classroom may be “daunting,” Penticoff admits, since it is often unnerving for professors to see themselves as “facilitators” rather than “experts.” As McClish points out, while we encourage students to examine the “masks” that authors wear, we are often reluctant to acknowledge our own. The potential benefits, however, are worth the risks. McClish believes that students will have a greater respect for those teachers who willingly encourage such scrutiny. In addition, Wayne C. Booth observes that the canon controversy can be not only productive but also healthful, a sign “that we

are alive and free in our endeavors" (77). With all the energetic scholarship devoted to questions surrounding the literary canon, it is clear that the debate gives new energy to our reading of literature. When exposed to the issues of canonicity, students find them similarly intriguing and relevant. McClish relates that many students in his Restoration and eighteenth-century literature course who had been less than enthusiastic about the reading assignments seemed to gain new interest in the literature of the period when issues of canonicity were incorporated into class discussion and paper assignments. Furthermore, student papers indicated that literary study was not removed from their personal consideration of issues such as gender or intercultural relations, but became another avenue of exploration. As Herbert comments, "the canon wars are wars about . . . aesthetic experience, about women, about minorities, about valorizing the claims of the excluded, about drawing boundaries, and these areas are all of *strong interest* to students." For those teachers committed to their students, such genuine enthusiasm is more persuasive than any number of theoretical arguments given at conferences or published in journals.

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