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### Canon Fodder in the Institutional Vessel : The Missing Voice of the Student in Literary Canon and Curriculum Discourse

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## Abstract

Are graduate students' part of the "canon wars," which have been waged among scholars and institutions for more than twenty years to determine what should remain part of the literary canon and therefore part of the curriculum; or are graduate students merely "canon fodder"? My research attempts to define the canon, then examines whether scholar-critics or academic institutions have listened to the voice of the students regarding the creation and continued teaching of the canon, and finally explores the chasm between the "accessible" and "selective" canon. I ask whether any pedagogical approach values the student when implementing the canon through the required readings. What happens when graduate students are granted authority in this conversation? Few teachers seem willing to make the leap from rhetoric to practical application; however, research demonstrates that giving students choices about what they read adds to a culture of empowerment and enthusiasm in the classroom. A student-influenced approach to the "canon wars" will not only make sense of the war, but also provide a context for future study and what it means for the canon and curricula to enter the student into the fray as more than mere "canon fodder."

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

/ Canon Fodder in the Institutional Vessel: /  
The Missing Voice of the Student in Literary Canon and Curriculum Discourse

by

Meagan J. DeJong

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

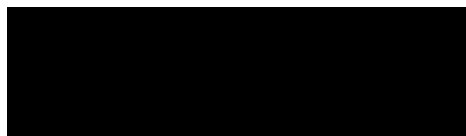
For the Degree of Master of Arts

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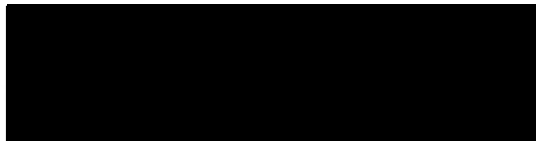
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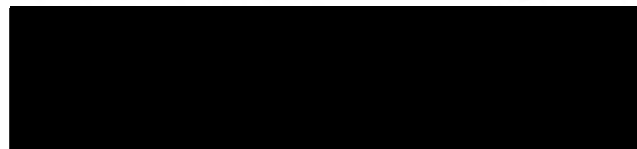
Department: English



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CANON FODDER IN THE INSTITUTIONAL VESSEL:  
THE MISSING VOICE OF THE STUDENT IN LITERARY CANON AND CURRICULUM  
DISCOURSE

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts

by

MEAGAN JANE DEJONG

Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

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### Introduction

Maybe there is, as some have argued, a Western canon that is marmoreally finished in itself, before which we need to bow down. Maybe there is such a past; maybe we should venerate it. People seem to like that sort of thing. I don't. It doesn't strike me as sufficiently interesting or appropriate or imaginative.

(Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* 26)

The Western literary canon qualifies and quantifies our knowledge of not just literature, but also academic discourse, and governs admittance to an exclusive and powerful regulator and disseminator of knowledge and culture, the academy. The canon has been the subject of great debate for the last thirty years or more among academics and scholars, mainly posing endless inquiries and inciting standoffs as to what constitutes a great work of literature. Is it Plato's ideals, that literature has the ability to confer morality and ethics, or a New Critic aestheticism that guarantees admittance, or are we seeking greater cultural representation when we examine these works? We have come closer than ever to reaching answers to these questions, but our syllabi and course offerings have done little to reflect not just these changes, but also others that would signify a conscious move into the twenty-first century. Traditional, representative, nonetheless canonical and prescribed, proscribing in its attempts to appear inclusive, the authority of the texts that are studied are not questioned by students of literature. Questioning the canon's relevance among scholars is a grand example of misdirection that offers the illusion of rebellion. It is rebellious to interrogate its relevance when we see that we have certainly expanded our canon, albeit in a very after-thought, additive way. The questioning creates a political necessity and actually reinforces the institution; and yet this outdated approach may actually lead to the destruction of the discipline if it does not abandon the empty rhetoric favoring either a closed or open canon, which became repetitive long ago, and enact a more contemporary and inclusive practice. My



argument is that any debate that is *about* students but does not *include* them is irrelevant. For the study of literature to continue, for it to have any real worth, graduate students must be more than canon fodder. We must examine the academy itself as a real and ideal space, and the role of agency (or lack thereof) within the academy, as well as the ways the world has changed in the last thirty years, and how the academy has (or has failed to) adapt to those changes.

Edward Said was part of a public panel some thirty years ago at Columbia University that would determine the sequence of courses at the college, he questioned the relevance of a “great books” type course: “I did not suggest that the course be abandoned, but I did recommend that easy equations between ‘our’ tradition, ‘the humanities,’ and ‘the greatest works’ be abandoned” (4). The argument contained in this thesis is similar to Said’s in that it initially seeks to complicate notions of tradition and what constitutes great works, but contains additional components that ask why graduate students have not been part of these debates, what models exist within the institution that reinforce this silence, and how those models might be changed. For instance, what is the student’s role, if any, in the discourse that surrounds canonical selections on the broadest scale and smallest scale within the classroom? I attempt to understand and inhabit a literary tradition by also disputing it, taking seriously the texts and pedagogical models that have come before, but also questioning these traditions at their core. This is not entirely different from what T. S. Eliot attempted to explain in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” when he stated, “You cannot value [the writer] alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead” and also clarifies that, “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.” Many students and

professors alike have responded to Eliot's proposal with the argument that it is impossible to know the whole of literary history, and this is true. Perhaps the focus, then, should be altered to understand not just the history that has been made, but the history that is being made now by writers across the world: in books yes, but also in tweets, blogs, and songs, and by our professors as well as our seventy-year-old neighbors. Specialization can be replaced with equality and expansion of what we have traditionally considered "literary." This expansion can be accomplished and managed by organizing courses and texts around what is most relevant to student's interests and eventual careers.

What is different about the discipline now, and what this thesis seeks to address, is that the past has not been considerably altered by the present where the canon or literary studies are concerned. The past remains firmly intact, while the present still seeks its voice, and the student still enjoys an approach dictating that "only compressed, difficult, and rare forms of art, forms inaccessible to anyone who did not have the requisite training, [are] worth bothering with" (Said 16). Said, lecturing at Columbia on the eve of the twenty-first century in the year 2000, fifteen years ago, saw the necessity of changing the status quo to meet a new set of challenges, recognizing that this approach becomes a "kind of professional code" that "congeals all too easily into a routine complacency" (16-17). The student is not part of this code or the resulting conduct unless it is as a passive recipient. This complacency is what I seek to complicate by questioning what tradition has come to encompass in literary studies, what methods have become code through rote pedagogical practice, and how the discipline can attempt to move forward in a way that accounts for its future practitioners and adherents, graduate students.

Addressing the student population, Said states, "in its profoundly unsettled energy, this country deserves the kind of widening awareness beyond academic specialization that a whole range of younger humanists have signaled as cosmopolitan, worldly, mobile" (81). The issue is no longer whether the canon remain traditional or be expanded: it is both, though inadequately the latter. The issue is twofold: first, that arguments favoring compression or expansion of the canon have never included the student's input in any meaningful way. Second, these arguments cling to classifications and modes of representation (both within the canon itself, and within the academy) that are no longer relevant, as they can no longer possibly hope to contain all that literature has come to both reject and represent.

It is no longer enough to say "this is the way it has always been done and therefore this is what we must do" as scholars and students. Self-awareness must replace narrowness, and the academy must react to and reflect upon this awareness in course offerings, syllabi, and classrooms to allow for necessary challenges, which lead, in turn, to change. A look at the theoretical underpinnings of canonical selection, representation, and presentation will serve as entry into a broader discussion of pedagogy and institutional responsibility, and the future of the discipline proceeding through the twenty-first century.

## Chapter One

## Heterogeneity and Hierarchy: Theoretical Approaches to the Western Literary Canon

... it is a bad method to pose the problem as: "How is it that we have progressed?" The problem is: how do things happen? And what happens now is not necessarily better or more advanced, or better understood, than what happened in the past.  
 (Foucault, "Prison Talk" 50)

The history of the definition of "canon" is saturated with the Foucauldian terms "law," "discipline," and "collection," with all of its connotations toward classification. As Foucault explains, "all offenses must be defined: they must be classified and collected into species from which none of them can escape," in this case, the classification being literature, and the species being "sacred" and "genuine," whatever that may mean (*Discipline and Punish* 98). These vague species characteristics have nonetheless been used for decades to determine which literature is classified as canonical. Traditionalist Harold Bloom even refers to the canon, in appropriately Foucauldian terms, as existing to "impose limits, to set a standard of measurement" (34). Allan Bloom's "Closing of the American Mind" was really just the opening of the conservative mind and a criticism of any type of deconstruction that might destabilize these canonical hierarchies. The revisionist canon became a power conflict in the sixties and seventies, but one that existed only within the academy, and though it appeared on the surface to dissent, it in fact reinforced its existence: few suggested during this time that the canon be abandoned, but that it be revised and inclusive. It is worth introducing, at this point, the actual lack of inclusion, by way of a specific explanation as to who represents what Alistair Fowler calls "trained readers" or alternatively, the guardians of the canon. In "Genre and the Literary Canon," Alastair Fowler explains five kinds of literary canon: the official, personal, potential, selective, and critical (98-99). The official canon is defined as "that

which is institutionalized through education, patronage, and journalism” and the personal canon consists of work we “happen to know and value” (98). The potential literary canon is the entire corpus of written and oral literature, and the selective canon is that which is selected by “trained readers.” Fowler states that selective canons with “the most institutional force are formal curricula” (99). The critical canon is “surprisingly narrow” and consists of “far more limited areas of interest marked by repeated discussion in journals—particularly those that... acquire influence. From this canon, countless considerable authors are excluded” (99).

The “trained readers” whom Fowler mentions are problematic, as they are trained only in specializations, and teach what they feel is especially worthy of study within that narrow specialization. There is an implicit suggestion of expert knowledge in the term “trained readers,” but it is unclear what this literary training consists of, or whether it is ever really complete in the sense of being finished or in having all the necessary parts. We are unsure what those necessary parts of literary completeness may include, or how they may differ from one person to another at the most basic level, and from one period to another, in the broadest historical sense. We wonder: at what level of study does one become trained, and who decides that said training is adequate enough to create a selective canon or to decide that a text enters the critical canon? Training may be considered complete upon the conferral of a degree, but this seems a rather inadequate marker of recognition for such a significant level of power as selecting literature worthy of being studied by others, or literature worthy of being examined critically. In a field of study such as literature, it would seem, we are all engaged in a type of training that

undoubtedly contains measurable achievements in terms of educational attainment, but cannot be aptly measured.

For these reasons, Fowler's canonical terminology is vague at best. Note that a definition of the classifications, the "species" of canon, is provided, and little else. Perhaps this is an approach that allows the canon, itself a vague notion, to be accessed in ways that are more appealing and reasonable, that provide a sort of justification for the unmeasurable, or a way to categorize the canon that already exists rather than question how the canonical classifications came to be. We can recognize that the texts now considered "worthy of attention" in revisionist anthologies incorporate (inadequately) the works of female authors, and authors of ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds rather than just dead white males. These authors, however, are compartmentalized in an anthology or within specific, individual course offerings, "marking a hierarchy of knowledge or ability" and so the pluralist works are still hierarchical as are the readers who decide said hierarchy (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 147). The "trained readers" are "experts" in their subjects, professors and scholars, and "the academy ensures its own survival and that of 'literature' by adopting a more pluralist canon. A revised canon provides new texts for exegesis and helps keep alive the whole interpretive enterprise... the literary academy's self-perpetuation" (Golding 36). What is seemingly a subversive gesture is, in reality, further repression. To explain further, the revised canon continues to marginalize the new, pluralist texts both in practice and through the assumption that *these* particular texts that the "trained" readers have chosen are somehow representative of an entire group of people. It is, in effect, the equivalent of a representative democracy, wherein an electoral college (the trained readers) select a

candidate (text) that they feel is illustrative of the constituency. This is in opposition to a true democracy, wherein the power is wielded by the constituents themselves to decide what is truly representative, and those choices are honored. The selection of texts is not the issue so much as the means by which the texts are selected, which does not pay attention to the largest set of voices within the academy.

A solution to the problem of text selection is not easily enacted, for the same standards of measurement are used to delineate the new texts added to the traditional canon. So long as the argument regarding what texts are studied remains fixed upon what is supplementary (contemporary or more diverse authors and texts) instead of what serves as the container (the canon as we conceive it), no real progress can be achieved. Both the traditionalist and pluralist argument do not recognize their own foundations, but does not object to using those (rather shaky) foundations of what it means to be “canonical” to defend what they believe is the importance of their collective arguments. As Foucault explains, the goal is to “shift the object and change the scale. Define new tactics in order to reach a target that is now more subtle but also more widely spread in the social body...homogenize its application,” so the acceptance into the literary canon is, in effect, a method of punishment to eliminate its difference and uniqueness (*Discipline and Punish* 89). The shifting of objects during the canon wars of the 1960s and 1970s was the shifting from the canon itself to the object that, or objection to what it contained. The scale and target of these battles became larger and more diverse student populations, and the new tactics were the propagation of the illusion of representative and inclusive canonical texts. For a college student in the 1980s and 1990s, the required readings seemed less “required,” more relevant, and more palatable. The naturalness of the text

selection process, and the idea that the readings that were being offered were “for your own good” was reinforced. Today, approximately fifty years later and despite all the rhetoric, the apparently inclusive canonical texts still occupy a submissive position in relation to the traditionally canonical texts. A look at three of the top schools in the nation, as well as some well-known public institutions, demonstrates this fact, through a view of their graduate literature programs. Both types of schools show the submissive position of inclusive texts as compared to canonical works. Graduate programs demonstrate that pluralist canons have not breached the upper echelons of higher education, where, it could be argued, graduate students are particularly suited to explore new iterations of literature that do not reify the traditional framework of literary studies. A review of the Spring 2016 semester offerings at three top Ivy League schools indicates that few courses deal with non-canonical (that is, not dead white men, but more current or culturally representative) themes or materials, as judged by the course listings and descriptions provided on each department’s website. Yale University’s Graduate English Department offers two of fourteen (“Yale University English Graduate Courses”), Harvard offers one of ten (“Harvard University Department of English Graduate Seminars”), and Princeton, three of thirteen (“Department of English Princeton University Graduate Courses”). The remaining courses are Shakespeare and Milton-heavy. Public universities offer even fewer. None of Rutgers University’s nine graduate course offerings deal with non-canonical themes (“Rutgers Department of English Graduate Courses”), the University of California at Berkeley offers one of twelve (“University of California, Berkeley, Announcement of Classes”), and the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, offers one of seven (“University of North Carolina



Greensboro Department of English Graduate Courses”). Montclair State University offers no literature courses in the Spring 2016 semester that deal with non-canonical literature. None of the aforementioned course offering descriptions indicate any semblance of student agency. No language in the course descriptions stipulate that “Students will choose the texts they will study during the semester” or “a range of literature will be discussed, and the student has the option to choose which texts are studied.” All disciplines within the humanities should foster intellectual agency, if they are to fully inhabit the meaning of the humanities. Yet literature studies in particular encourage this type of student agency for their vast array of what is possible, what Fowler called the “potential canon.” The amount of texts that exist for students to potentially study as compared to what it is that we actually study is pathetic. It is as if a history program were to focus only on war as written about by Lao Tzu, or sociology programs decided to begin and end only with the study of religion using Max Weber and an additional, select, few, dated authors. Perhaps we should take a page from the fields of medicine and science, and understand that old ideas are constantly being replaced by more relevant, applicable information as researchers pursue new avenues of thought. Instead, graduate students within literary studies, and perhaps in other disciplines within the humanities, are viewed as vessels to be filled with foundational information. This foundational information does little to forward the discipline, to move it into the future and towards discovery rather than remaining in the limited past and possibly suffering for it. As the course offerings demonstrate, few, if any, contemporary texts are studied at the graduate level. Perhaps contemporary texts have become more prevalent in undergraduate curriculums since the canon wars dealt with undergraduate, rather than graduate, reform.

Literary studies remains stagnant, mostly concerned with rankings of knowledge and of texts, rather than critically examining how these ranks came to exist and are perpetuated. As Foucault states, “the distribution according to ranks or grade has a double role: it marks the gaps, hierarchizes qualities, skills and aptitudes; but it also punishes and rewards.... Rank in itself serves as a reward or punishment” (*Discipline and Punish* 181). The concept of “rank” here serves two functions: the rank of the student and the rank of the canonical texts that they are required to read. As Foucault explains, discussing the apparatus of corrective penalty, “The agent of punishment must exercise a total power, which no third party can disturb; the individual to be corrected must be entirely enveloped in the power that is being exercised over him,” so the total power of the academy is not and cannot be disturbed by the third party—either the students or the culturally disenfranchised texts, the students and texts being entirely neutered of power (*Discipline and Punish* 129). If the student is completely enveloped in this power hierarchy, then how are the representative texts even truly representative? The texts should represent the past but also the future of the discipline and the students themselves, through a *selection* of texts rather than *selective* texts; not merely the same canonical authors that are continually studied. To answer this question more thoroughly, however, we must examine the academy itself as a real and ideal space, and the role of agency (or lack thereof) within the academy.

Perhaps turning to the classroom, and the apparent “trained readers,” teachers, will yield an answer as to what constitutes a “canonical” work, and why student opinions are not heeded in their choices of what reading material appears on the syllabi. Yet here we face more confusion: teachers and scholars are no better in their assessment of the

canon, how it is implemented, or why. A roundtable discussion with five participants, either chairs of English departments or teachers, which took place in 2007 at the Brooklyn Friends School in New York, titled "The Canon Examined," proves enlightening but frustratingly lacking in reaching an elusive student-centered approach. Steven Nelson, of the Calhoun School in New York, gains considerable distance from the Bloomian exclusivity of the canon, blurring the distinction between "mediocre" literature, or what teachers perceive may be student-chosen, and canonical literature, saying

presenting [students] with the opportunity to read good books, rather than getting carried away with the idea that we have this literary canon that we simply have to shove down their throats in order to make them better, brighter people in the future. While I know that all of us in the room have read many of the books in the canon and have been captivated by them and believe deeply in their power (when they are not freighted with pretense), I think it can also be presumptuous of us to think that, because we had a good experience, all students will have a similar interest or even the capacity to be drawn into it. Maybe the better experience for them is to enter the world of literature through some other doorway. (Bridges et al)

This kind of self-reflection is lacking in our current classroom discourse at the graduate level. To offer the option to study great works that are part of the literary canon is not the issue, for it is not a choice. Given the choice, students pursuing advanced degrees would likely choose some of this canonical literature and understand its importance, though some of it they will have undoubtedly already studied. Instead, the larger idea is that not all of us may be enamored of nineteenth century American literature, or Shakespeare, or

Victorian poetry. That is not to say that we do not appreciate and admire the vast amount of knowledge that our professors have accrued on such topics or do not wish to acquire this knowledge ourselves. However, it does indicate that there are other doorways besides those that professors lead us to through their own selections. It is imperative that there be a distinction between foundational knowledge offered and foundational knowledge impressed upon graduate students because it is part of a professor's repertoire.

Throughout the roundtable discussion, only Nelson, out of the five teachers present, raises this and similar points regarding the student role in the teaching of the canon. Yet he falls short of explaining what this "other doorway" looks like, or whether this alternate entry may, in fact, be an alternative student-chosen canon. As Gerald Graff succinctly states, "we teachers face complicated combinations of emulation and resistance, attraction and repulsion, to what we have to purvey. Unless this ambivalence is recognized, there is a certain irrelevance in the debate over the literary canon. For that debate could be settled tomorrow without materially affecting the student" (*Beyond the Culture Wars* 94). If, as Graff states, the debate could be settled without affecting the student, there is a much larger problem to be addressed. Those who are part of the debate are in some way aware of its self-perpetuating nature, and graduate students are therefore marginalized, indeed largely nonexistent, pseudo-members of a debate that is entirely about them. There is little research in the area of student choice in postsecondary required reading, but some professors are willing to make the leap from rhetoric to practical application. Laura Aull, a professor at Wake Forest University, is one of the few professors to address student involvement in reading selection. Aull states, in reference to the curriculum and implementation of required readings, that "the guides implicitly

suggest that once chosen for the classroom, the recommended approaches remain intact and unquestioned, insofar as the guides do not suggest students should interrogate the grouping or selection of the texts or witness the instructor's own process of choosing an approach" (503). Aull's response to this problem was to create an end of semester assignment for her undergraduate American literature course that allowed her students to create their own anthologies, but the students were required to give reasons behind their selections, based on their interpretations of "American," "literature," and "anthology" (508). The result of this assignment was that the students created anthologies based on choice, but with criteria to guide them. None of the anthologies contained poetry, and only one contained "traditionally canonical texts," but were presented in a way that these texts were not considered "better" than the other selections. Students presented anthologies that contained children's literature, arguing that the texts were cherished and offered cultural heritage; others decided that commercial success was the greatest factor in anthology selection. Another groups' definition of American literature included widely disseminated texts and images, including Coca-Cola's trademark and a screen shot of the Facebook interface. Yet another produced a YouTube video asking students who did not participate in the course to provide their definition of the American canon (509-10). This professor's experiment was successful, since it demonstrated that students were able to think critically about what is most representative of American literature (one of the goals of effective literary study) without feeling constrained by what has come before, since they were able to create their own definitions of what made these particular texts or objects worth studying. In effect, this experiment offers a glimpse of what might happen when students are permitted to adopt the role of "trained reader," and the results show

that they are in fact, quite trained, if we understand that the humanities are defined by a consensus that does not merely exist among specialists and scholars. There is not one definition of literature, but a necessary diversity that challenges all our notions of what characterizes literature. The challenge counts only, however, if the student choice and literary diversity is implemented in meaningful ways within the classroom.

Clearly issues arise when we think about allowing students to create their own anthologies, for the hierarchies will inevitably still exist in some form. Barry Gilmore offers a counter-argument to this approach in “Worthy Texts: Who Decides?” He poses troubling questions, among them, “does such a [choice-centered] list leave room for any of the canon, much of which is still valuable?,” “if a teacher assigns an entire class a nontraditional book, doesn’t the book take on the aura of the canon and become...just another forced text?,” and “who’s going to pay for providing so many different books?” (50) These questions bear further consideration. As to whether a student-chosen book could become another forced text, a renewal of choice should be part of the process, so that the choice becomes a democratic process and remains new and relevant. It is also possible that several canonical texts could be assigned alongside student-chosen texts, thereby attributing equal value (discussion and overall course time) to the texts, while also demonstrating true peer status between professor and student in the distribution of authority. Graduate students are adept at finding PDF versions of nearly everything, or may own the texts already, so they could acquire these texts at little or no cost.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This raises the issue of copyright infringement, specifically when discussing recent texts, but this is a separate issue that this thesis will not address. However, it is worth noting that professors frequently reproduce canonical works or selections of canonical works for classroom discussion. It is also important to note that composition studies has addressed this issue at length, specifically in regard to how students perceive their writing as opposed to writing produced by published authors (for instance, see Andrea

The contemporary canon, and therefore the contemporary classroom, is represented by “a vast number of what could be called ‘identity-based’ or ‘identity politics’ and theme-based anthologies, along with a related proliferation of critical methods, aimed at opening the accessible canon to historically disenfranchised groups” in addition to the classics that were studied (Golding 29). The canon has become more pluralist, much to the chagrin of traditionalists such as Harold and Allan Bloom, but does it even matter? Does the author, the text, and its cultural significance have any bearing? Foucault’s answer would be no, for the inclusion of these “historically disenfranchised groups” is merely another mechanism of power, and does not include student representation. What could be viewed as a great stride towards cultural inclusiveness and great rebellion against a traditional Western canon is, in fact, “not intended to eliminate offenses, but rather to distinguish them... to use them; that it is not so much that they render docile those who are liable to transgress the law, but that they tend to assimilate the transgression of the laws in general tactics of subjection” (*Discipline and Punish* 272). By assimilating new representative texts into the canon, students get the impression that there is now some control over what is granted entry, “but this did not make the nature of what was prescribed precisely clear,” so definitions of “genuine” and “sacred” are never explicitly stated (*Beyond the Culture Wars* 100). We return to vague definitions and classifications that lead us no closer to an answer as to why any of it matters, though we do understand that the question is worth asking because the answer is foundational to what we do as scholars.

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Lunsford, Jenn Fishman and Warren Liew’s “College Writing and the Production of Intellectual Property: Voices from the Stanford Study of Writing” [2013].

In order to have a greater understanding of the power that is evident within canonical selection, we must return to the real spaces of the academy, to examine where these textual selections most frequently occur: in syllabi on college campuses. Foucault describes this as the “art of distributions” or the enactment of discipline by distributing individuals in a space. “Discipline,” he states, “requires enclosure, the place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself... the protected place of disciplinary monotony” (*Discipline and Punish* 141). Clearly the academic institution fits this description most acutely. Although the idea of intellectual freedom is pursued, it is rarely pursued where it makes a difference, in the classroom. As Aull’s experiment demonstrates, true intellectual freedom is produced when students have some choice in what they are studying. In fact, the choice itself is crucial for the capacity to think critically rather than become a passive vessel to be filled with knowledge. Clearly some pedagogical approaches have the potential to make a difference, and that area will be more fully explored in chapter two of this thesis. Unfortunately, graduate school pedagogy is a far cry from Aull’s inclusive, democratic approach, and for this reason it is important to examine the academy as an appropriate structure for the canon to exist within. The concept of the academy as heterogeneous could inhabit the traditional definition (diverse in content), but both Foucault’s concept and the concept of the study of canon within the academy could also satisfy the mathematical term that defines heterogeneous as “incommensurable through being of different kinds, degrees, or dimensions,” incommensurable in having no common standard of measurement, or being unable to be judged by the same standard as something else (“heterogeneous”). The canon, with its vague definitions of authenticity and superiority, cannot be judged by any



common standard of intellectual measurement in that there *is no actual definition* of what makes certain works of literature canonical. Matthew Arnold, in *Culture and Anarchy*, was one of the first to distinguish what those who study the humanities must pursue, stating that we must acquaint ourselves with “all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world” (5); however, this statement leads us back to the previous vague definitions and classifications, stating that we must seek what is “best” but never quite providing an answer to what exactly is “the best” when it comes to literature. Arnold goes on to state that “culture... is the study of perfection,” which leads us toward “developing all sides of our humanity” (9). We are left with the same predicament: there is no literary definition of perfection. Further, from a broader perspective, one could make the argument that it takes more than the study of perfection to lead us to the development of our humanity, which, after all, is flawed.

These binaries of perfection and fault are not explored in the institution, as justifications for the texts that are studied are rarely provided. No larger explanations are provided regarding why certain texts are widely accepted as superior, or why those same canonical texts might, in fact, be less perfect than we are led to believe from their repeated examination. In this space of disciplinary monotony, the academy on a macrocosmic scale and the classroom on a microcosmic level, there is no room for questioning or identity. That is, while ontological and existential questioning and a greater understanding of human identity is encouraged in first-day professor introductions, course descriptions, or classroom discourse, these actions do not translate to the student having a say in precisely what they study. The question of the student’s place in the classroom, the author’s place on the syllabus, and the professor’s role as

trained reader conferring expert knowledge in a specialized area, are not up for debate. Individuals are no longer individuals, but part of a mechanism of discipline that separates itself from others through a hierarchy in which they function as guardians of a tower they have not built, one that they cannot expand, or, as Foucault explains, “one must be able simultaneously both to increase the subjected forces and to improve the force and efficacy of that which subjects them” (“Two Lectures” 105). The idea of a pluralist power in the canon representing the constituents who study these texts seems to suggest that there is a say in what is produced; however, “the impression that power weakens and vacillates... is in fact mistaken; power can retreat here, re-organize its forces, invest itself elsewhere”; therefore, the idea that the canon has “opened” in some way is really just a manifestation of a reorganization of power to strengthen its function (“Body/Power” 56). The function of power, in this case, is further repression. At its most basic level, “Power is essentially that which represses,” and nowhere is this more hypocritically enacted than in the real and idealized spaces of the academy, and specifically within the humanities, where participants profess to work against repression in all its forms (“Two Lectures” 90). The academic institution, with its “distribution of values or merits in material terms” (in this case the distribution of knowledge through required readings) “in the space of the college or classroom” creates what Foucault describes as “docile bodies” or willing participants in their own repression (*Discipline and Punish* 147). This, of course, is not unique to the college classroom and could indeed be found in any workspace; however, what makes this repression troubling is that it occurs within a space of humanistic exploration and higher learning that should be, if not immune, then at least especially sensitive to this kind of repression. Especially in the academy, “these relations of power

cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation, and functioning of a discourse,” and this discourse is the exclusive and specialized discourse of the academy (“Two Lectures” 93). This specific discourse has real implications when considering the perpetuation of a certain kind of literature as canonical, and the place or lack of place for students’ questioning and involvement in their own course of study.

This concept is thoroughly explored by John Guillory in *Cultural Capital*. Guillory defines “cultural capital” as derived from Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological and philosophical notions of power distribution within society:

The problem of what is called canon formation is best understood as a problem in the constitution and distribution of cultural capital, or more specifically, a problem of access to the means of literary production and consumption. The “means” in question are provided by the school, which regulates and thus distributes cultural capital *unequally*. The largest context for analyzing the school as an institution is therefore the *reproduction* of the social order, with all of its various inequities. The particular authors who happen to be canonical have a minor role in this system of reproduction, but the far larger role belongs to the school itself.

(Guillory ix)

What Guillory refers to as the reproduction of social order is replicated within the canon in its unequal distribution of representation, and within the academy in its real and idealized spaces. These spaces, as Foucault describes, are real in their material existence as spaces meant for discourse and study, but “also ideal because they are projected over

this arrangement of characterizations, assessments, hierarchies” (*Discipline and Punish* 148). In such a place, it is impossible for agency to exist, for individual reality to become discernable in any meaningful way. Existing hierarchies preclude any attainment of new hierarchies or disabling of the old: the new texts can be represented only within the existing classifications. The academy is the first classification, the canon second, the move from accessible or potential to selective and critical canon the final demonstration of normalization that renders the student voiceless. The voice that speaks within the canonical text is that of a representative voice. Yet this “trained reader” voice is not representative in the sense of being typical of a class or group, and instead is an appointed voice that shares no actual commonalities with the group which it supposedly represents, the students. A multiplicity of specialized knowledge becomes valued over individual knowledge. The general attitude toward punishment when the canon becomes inclusive but knowledge is regulated is one of “an effort to adjust the mechanisms of power that frame the everyday lives of individuals; an adaptation and a refinement of the machinery that assumes responsibility for...their everyday behavior, their identity...another policy for that multiplicity of bodies and forces that constitutes a population...a closer penal mapping of the social body” (*Discipline and Punish* 77-78). What are the consequences of this close mapping of the social body within the academy and refinement of the canon to be more inclusive and seemingly “open” to a diverse body of individuals? The main consequence is misrepresentation and therefore lack of agency. Therefore, “a given text’s historical specificity is effaced as it is absorbed into the unity of the syllabus/canon” and with it, the identity and cultural significance of the piece: it

has now become part of a unifying tradition, and has received the punishment of normalcy that Foucault describes (Guillory 34).

The concept of punishment of normalcy or power over consciousness is also explored in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, and her discussion of the political reasoning for the effacement of what she terms the "subaltern" or the social group outside of the hegemonic power. We can view any social group outside this dominant power (white male) and their exclusion and inclusion not as an act of true representation but as an "account of how one explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one" (Spivak 2115). The idea of the subaltern is explicitly related to both Foucault's and Guillory's ideas of exclusion and heterogeneous bodies attempting homogenous canonical inclusion, as Spivak asks, "Can the subaltern speak? Here we are within Foucault's own discipline of history... the subaltern *subject* is irretrievably heterogeneous" (Spivak 2117-18). What Spivak italicizes—subject—is indicative of the idea that the subaltern has been relegated to subject rather than consciousness, and here adopts its heterogeneity in its representation rather than its identity. This is the concept of Foucauldian punishment, evident when Foucault asks, "Where exactly did the penalty apply its pressure, gain control of the individual?" and answers, "Representations: the representations of his interests, the representation of his advantages and disadvantages, pleasure and displeasure... for the condemned man and for the spectators—an object of representations" (*Discipline and Punish* 128). The subaltern is now object/subject rather than individual/autonomous. Though Spivak is hopeful in her assessment of the possibility for the subaltern to actually possess a voice, she does acknowledge that "All speaking, even the most immediate, entails a distanced

decipherment by another, which is, at best, an interception,” and this poses all sorts of problems in that we must wonder whether there is ever such a thing as true representation (Spivak 2124). Foucault clearly believes that there is not, that it is an impossible attainment so long as the decipherment and interception is occurring, and in this case it is perhaps worse because these actions are being committed in the form of normalization by the institution. Though Spivak sees the relation to Foucault’s subject of “history,” in many ways she complicates Foucault’s implications of discipline and punishment, believing that a line of communication can ultimately be achieved. Foucault is less interested in the *why* than the *how* of domination, yet seems to answer the why when he seeks the how: the control obtained through power. Power accumulates over time, fed from knowledge and vice versa. What he terms the “reduction of power to law” serves several functions, one of which is that it “enables power to never be thought of in other than negative terms: refusal, limitation, obstruction, censorship. Power is what says no,” and the academy, for all of its posturing towards yes, is most definitely saying no in its perpetual canon argument that is really no argument at all since it does not account for its constituents (“Power and Strategies” 139). When we ask whether the subaltern can ever really speak, we can turn to Guillory for an answer:

the pedagogic imaginary within which the critique of the canon has been advanced is at once in excess of that solidarity because it constructs out of its alternative canon/syllabus/list a culture (of women writers or Afro-American writers, etc.) more homogeneous than it actually is, and in defect of that solidarity, because the image of cultural homogeneity it disseminates is only an image for those who consume it in the university,

where it is consumed *as* an image. The “open” canon can lay claim to representational validity not in the experience of “women” or “blacks” but of women or blacks in the university—which is not itself a *representative* place. (37)

There can be no democracy in a university that values heterogeneity and hierarchy, and therefore there can be no other knowledge than that which Spivak terms “subjugated knowledge” or that which is inadequate and underrepresented (2115). Foucault’s social mapping becomes the method by which the university decides to nominally represent the non-traditional canonical texts and satisfy the representation on the part of the university’s social map, not the larger society’s map outside the real and idealized spaces of the university. The “canon wars” are really not wars at all, for as Foucault states, “what is called the crisis of the universities should not be interpreted as a loss of power but on the contrary as a multiplication and re-inforcement of their power effects as centers in a polymorphous ensemble of intellectuals who virtually all pass through and relate themselves to the academic system” (“Truth and Power” 127). Limitation, obstruction, and censorship are achieved through the very existence of the university and its implicit and explicit hierarchies that could not and can never offer any real openness outside of its classroom and syllabi. All discourse, all “choice,” revolves around the academic axis, the canon functioning as one part of the system.

So we return to Foucault’s assertion that “what happens now is not necessarily better or more advanced, or better understood, than what happened in the past” (“Prison Talk” 50). After we examine the ways in which Foucault’s concepts of discipline and punishment so eagerly and seamlessly interact with that of the academy and the canon,

existential questions of power emerge from the theory. Foucault, as Guillory points out, is now part of a separate “theory-canon” which “signifies in its totality a discourse of mastery,” thereby altering the “traditional literary canon” by its very existence (Guillory 203). Foucault, Spivak, and Guillory are now canonical themselves, which paints an appropriate and macabre (in its Foucauldian) picture for the *discipline* of literature in both its definitions. Yet this does not mean that we cannot use any of these theorists’ arguments to achieve a greater understanding of the academy, the canon, and the people who have functioned and continue to function within it. This is what the best literature and theory is supposed to accomplish: forwarding an argument in small steps over time through conflict and critical thought.

A deeper look at Fowler’s “trained readers” professors is required to gain a better understanding of the implications of the separation between scholarship and pedagogy, and the trouble with acting as guardians over an esoteric type of knowledge rather than peers within the real and idealized space of the institution. The research-based apprenticeship model acts as further, foundational repression and hierarchy, contributing to the “crisis of the humanities.” Solutions, if they are discussed at all, are only discussed at administrative levels. Since equality is what those who study the humanities strive for and is mirrored in the material we study, we must examine whether it is possible for these inequalities to be removed in the current climate that encourages a “publish or perish” mentality. This mentality is then foisted upon graduate students in regard to pedagogical choices that value expert knowledge over collaboration and choice. We must ask whether it is possible to value true, participatory learning that acknowledges the students’ worth in and outside of the academy.



## Chapter Two

## Graduate School Pedagogy, Student Agency, and the Canon: “Guarding the Tower”

Many graduate students are self-directed, and it's plausible to suggest that such students gravitate toward graduate study because of the unusual intellectual independence it offers.

(Cassuto, “Graduate School, Graduate Students, Graduate Teaching” 16)

The epigraph above is an excerpt from a guest introduction by Leonard Cassuto, author of *The Graduate School Mess: What Caused it and How We Can Fix It* from a cluster on graduate education in the journal *Pedagogy*, published in 2015. In this cluster, approximately fifteen scholars weighed in on the problem of increasingly diminished academic job placement, with questions from within and outside the academy regarding the success of English graduate programs. One of the contributors, economist David Colander writing with Daisy Zhou, disagreed with Cassuto's assertion: “It is amazing how the current structure of the programs suppresses this intellectually enjoyable aspect of the study in the attempt to prepare students for an academic research job” (148). These scholars argue how the state of the discipline came to be so research-focused, whether it is enough for students to enter graduate school with just the oft-overused quality of “passion” for their subject, and what can be done to solve the crisis. The consensus is that very little about graduate school pedagogy has changed in decades. The current and historical model is based on an apprenticeship model, grooming graduate students to become university professors. The model is based on repetition, comfort level with the material, and perhaps most important, areas of specialized research. In this way, a cycle is created, wherein research universities seek funding, which derives from increased publication by professor-scholars. Scholars, by and large, publish on canonical material and therefore teach the material that they have published or will publish (to obtain or

keep tenure track positions, i.e. “publish or perish”). Graduate students must also study and write about this material in order to pass the required literature courses, especially if they wish to gain admittance to a PhD program, where they, too, will become published scholars on the same subjects that their professors published...except that they most likely will not obtain professorships<sup>2</sup>. But who is responsible for the perpetuation of this model? If graduate students are predisposed to select graduate study for its aforementioned “unusual intellectual independence,” where has that independence gone; or, to return to a Foucauldian question, did it ever exist in the first place?

More troubling is the evidence that all of the literature, such as recent MLA publications and publications by scholar-professors focused on “fixing” this problem, and the current state of graduate programs arguably caused by this pedagogical approach, seem to suggest an increased focus on pedagogy, professionalization, and restructuring of graduate seminars. Books and articles abound, debating whether teacher training should be part of graduate curricula, whether professionalization should be introduced as a way to better prepare their graduate students for alternative careers, and whether the increased call for transparency within graduate programs is a positive or negative strategy. Yet none of this material focuses on student involvement, student choice, or most important, the material itself (the study of canonical literature) as potentially contributing to the

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<sup>2</sup> This is true of literature professorships; however, a search of the most current job listings demonstrates that composition and rhetoric professorships do not suffer the same fate. It would be interesting to seek to understand the reasons that this field remains strong, beyond the obvious concept that writing skills are and will remain valuable in any economic climate. In addition, it is worth noting that this does not include adjunct positions, which are in high demand. The following pages at least suggest that preparing students for any type of teaching position, including adjunct teaching, is not ideal for a variety of reasons. However, the broad and controversial issue of adjunct teaching, including economic implications, university culpability, working conditions, etc. is not explored in this thesis.

overall problem<sup>3</sup>. As Cassuto aptly states, “the bottom line is that professors (including administrators) don’t spend much time understanding how graduate students learn and helping them do it. Nor do we spend much time thinking about what graduate students want to learn and what they ought to learn” (*The Graduate School Mess* 15), and though Cassuto himself repeats such statements, he offers little in the way of solutions, unless they focus specifically on graduate student advisement, a separate (though nonetheless important) issue. In addition, the Executive Summary of the Report of the MLA Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature, published in 2014, states: “Concern about the future of humanistic study motivated the MLA Executive Council to charge a distinguished task force of members with recommending changes to doctoral education” (1). None of the members included graduate students. The report repeatedly emphasizes, as part of these proposed changes, a “de-centering” of graduate study but never explicitly discusses a “de-canonization” or a reduced emphasis on canonical literature. Recommendations abound, but they are very much administrative and professorial suggestions – when there is the possibility of fostering scholarship outside of specific literary niches, there seems to be hesitation and outright resistance. There is a lingering feeling that “their” discipline is being threatened, a prevailing feeling of intellectual propriety over literature that is not their own, but that they have (somewhat justifiably) claimed as their own through a lifetime of scholarship. As this phenomenon

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<sup>3</sup> Some texts, most notably Gerald Graff’s *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (1987) and Robert Scholes’s *The Rise and Fall of English* (1998), challenges the traditional, white male-dominated Western literary canon. However, these texts do not advocate student representation, but rather a “teaching of the conflicts” between traditional and pluralist approaches to the canon in order to provoke a renewed flexibility and creativity within the discipline of literary studies. Notably, neither book specifically addresses the graduate student population and their ability or inability to effect long-lasting change in this area. In the decades since both were published, the concept of teaching the conflicts has become more commonplace, but little has changed at the graduate level, where canonical texts still compose the vast majority of the course offerings and curricula.

has continued, “[professors] come to know more and more about less and less... increasingly blind to anything outside their limited perspective” (Hinchey and Kimmel 59). Yet the desires and pressures of the research university pigeonhole professors in this mode from which it is difficult, if not impossible, to escape. This is evident in all disciplines within the university; however, ironically, within literature studies, publishing on canonical material is directly equated to job prospects. For instance, the Modern Language Association (MLA) job listings for full or associate professors of literature (and the listings are very few) state that the college is “committed to a teacher-practitioner model, where individual members of the faculty shape the future curriculum based on their particular interests and abilities” (MLA.org job search, Bennington College). The same search on a different search engine yields posts with the same language: “Applicants should have a significant publication record, two books of creative nonfiction minimum.... Three letters of reference and a writing sample that consists of a .pdf of the latest published book should be sent” (HigherEdJobs.com job search, University of North Texas). Both colleges, one in Vermont and the other in Texas, are representative of the rhetoric that is included in current and old job listings in an MLA search from approximately 1969 forward. Research universities began to flourish at the beginning of the nineteenth century; however, they did not become the global model until the mid-twentieth century, at which time the language within job listings begins to state that publication is “strongly preferred,” “encouraged,” or “desired” (Altbach 14). This type of pressure has perhaps taken some of the humanity out of the humanities, by forcing professors to specialize without accounting for the unique and varied interests of the individual. Though this is true of most all professions, the forced

study and publication in specific subfields of literature, many of which demand canonical knowledge, filters down to the students in ways that perpetuate the model, making it difficult to pursue new areas of study. This, in turn, creates a demand for more professorships that address these small subfields, more scholarship in these narrow areas of specialization, and more graduate students believing that they must also pursue narrow areas of interest.

This chapter will seek to explore more in depth the two problems that I have identified here, as well as explore alternatives and a potential evolution of graduate study in English Literature that challenges and disrupts the research-based apprenticeship model. It will also include research from an anonymous survey that I conducted, titled “A Study of Student Representation in Pedagogical and Curricular Choices in the Montclair State University Graduate Program in English,” taken by graduate students currently enrolled in the Graduate Studies Program in English Literature at Montclair State University (MSU). Fourteen graduate students completed the survey. Though a substantial number of students responded, the graduate program in literature at MSU is quite small. The survey included nine questions related to course and text choices, and career plans. It is important to note that MSU is not necessarily a representative institution, and also does not offer a PhD program in English literature. The survey was intended, however, to offer a more complete view of the student’s feelings toward the program and identify any possible disparities between the program, including those that may exist between the university’s stated goals and the students’ intellectual motives.

Part of the reason that there is little focus on graduate pedagogy is because of the “unstated and suspect assumptions” that “graduate students already know how to learn,

content coverage is most important, graduate student writers are future professionals in training, and graduate courses are for advancing innovations in research, not teaching” (Khost, Lohe and Sweetman 19). An important part of this equation is the focus on content coverage and research. It is no secret among professors and university administrators, and the academic community at large (except for some students, who remain largely uninformed for a variety of reasons) that job placement for PhD’s in English is terrible. MLA data demonstrates that over the past thirty-five years, “fewer than half of graduated PhD students have gotten tenure track academic jobs upon graduation” (Colander and Zhou 139). Since the statistics prove the troubling job placement prospects in academia, why the continued focus on content and research? More pointedly, we must examine the link between specialization and scholarship as related to employment opportunity, and how it affects course offerings and content, creating a cycle that revisits the same canonical works rather than allowing for broader options and more freedom for students and professors in regard to what is studied. Enabling graduate students to have greater choice in what is studied, means that they will be able to select material that is based not only on interest, but also on future employment. For instance, the Open Syllabus Project, housed in Columbia University and begun in 2012, described as “an effort to build the first large-scale online database of university course syllabi as a platform for the development of new research, teaching, and administrative tools” (The American Assembly at Columbia University: Open Syllabus Project), demonstrates that content is overwhelmingly canonical. The tool can filter information by field, and a search of “English” in universities within the United States shows that the top five books that appear on English syllabi are: 1) *The Bedford*

*Handbook*, Hacker, 2) *Frankenstein*, Shelley, 3) *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer, 4) *Paradise Lost*, Milton, and 5) *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad. The top twenty are rounded out with Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot and Hawthorne, among others (Open Syllabus Explorer). Of course, the database is a work in progress and cannot be refined to include graduate study specifically. However, thoroughly canonical works are the texts that appear most frequently on university syllabi, which must be reconciled with the fact that “the majority of English graduate programs are preparing their students for jobs at research-focused universities, but most of their graduates do not get such jobs and cannot expect to” (Colander and Zhou 145). What are we to make of the disjunction between academic job prospects and the study of such texts? That this has been occurring for at least thirty-five years is troubling, for it means that there has been knowledge of the problem far longer than there have been any solutions either posed or practiced. Is it the universities themselves that are to blame, or the professors who continue to teach this material while understanding that what they are teaching and assigning may have very little relevance to their student’s eventual careers?

Part of the problem is that “graduate study in the humanities has for generations been relentlessly content driven” and this has proved “harder and harder to sustain, particularly as literary canons have expanded and reading lists with them” (Cassuto, *The Graduate School Mess* 66). As a result, “[graduate students] specialize... sooner than ever before” as a result of the understanding that not everything can be covered, and as the students are seeking employment in academia, they surely have no choice. Yet we have already demonstrated that the chance of a student’s landing a professorship is slim, and for this reason, “it’s time—past time, really—to think about the seminar from the student’s

point of view as well as the teacher's" (*The Graduate School Mess* 67). This is clearly a "top-down" problem as universities seek candidates who have specialized and published, and these applicants, once they obtain professorships, must maintain them by continuing their specialization and publication. However, it is worthwhile to question the level of agency that the professors possess, as well. Professors are concerned with content coverage, understandably, and "behave this way because they want to impart 'mastery.' But they do not think of what 'mastery' means" (67). Professors should ask themselves this question more often, for this mastery should not be limited to knowledge of canonical works, nor should it be focused on scholarship in these narrow areas. I do not disagree with Cassuto's assertion that "[graduate students] have to be able to work with what they read" (68) in that they should be comfortable analyzing and critiquing works of literature; my position is that, because of our varied individual interests as humanists combined with our limited job prospects in academia, perhaps the content and its application should be more wide-ranging. Cassuto even acknowledges that "your learning benefits your career only if you can draw on it while you work, not just for a brief period of your training" (69), and also, "professors must take a more active role in promoting not just formal knowledge but *learning*" (71), but he does not detail what this might look like. This is understandable, given what little research exists on the subject, but it is disappointing to see the rhetoric not expanded upon in a meaningful way that articulates what this type of graduate seminar might look like.

There is some research at the K-12 level that could be applied to higher education, and specifically to graduate school, especially when we view more feet-on-the-ground research rather than rhetorical flourish. One such example is Grant Lichtman's 2014



*#EdJourney*. Lichtmann worked in various positions at the largest independent school in the country, the Francis Parker School in San Diego, California, for fifteen years (“About”). He decided to travel to 64 public, charter, and private schools across the country and interview over 600 teachers, parents, administrators, and notably, students, to determine what strategies work and how. On the very first pages of his book, he acknowledges that “The goal of education has changed from the transfer of knowledge to the inculcation of wisdom, born of experience, which will help students succeed in an increasingly ambiguous future. Schools must either radically change what they do or very quickly become utterly irrelevant” (xi). Lichtman is concerned with the ways that schools innovate and take risks and adapt to change. The most successful schools he visited viewed change as a way to strengthen their institution.

One of the concepts he comes to view as especially important, a concept that I will return to later under the slightly different term of public scholarship, is what he terms “permeability” or the idea that students and teachers spend significant time off campus so that the line between “school’ as differentiated from the ‘real world’ disappears” (xviii). But there are other, equally valuable concepts explored, as well. Lichtman notes that risky behavior is not rewarded among teachers, for it threatens good evaluations and promotions, and that educators “default to their own histories of what good education looks like” (25). He found that the best teachers, not surprisingly, learn from their students and encourage a classroom that values reciprocity: not a new idea certainly, but at least Lichtman has found evidence that it works when implemented (106). Other sections, titled “Students Own the Learning” and “Blending Content and Skill,” explore how some of the teachers found ways to quite literally change their course content on a

daily and weekly basis to account for the students' interests and abilities, and how these teachers were also able to "help the students master heavy doses of content through the use of what we call twenty-first century skills" (110). Of course, these heavy doses of content are even more crucial throughout grades K-12 because of the heavy emphasis on assessment, restrictions not found in a standardized capacity in higher education, though other types of assessment do exist. If the content in lower grades can be molded to fit the twenty-first century skill set and can also be adapted to incorporate student interests, while still meeting the requirements of the institution and larger state and federal guidelines, we must ask whether this would be possible in higher education. Overall, Lichtman found that having a perspective that embraces educational institutions as constantly evolving ecosystems rather than industrial models is what works; an environment that values dynamism, adaptability, permeability, and self-correction, and models that encourage not just consumption, but creation of knowledge (xviii). That Lichtman was willing to do more than ponder the question he asked himself 30 years ago—"What defines great learning?"—and do more than accept that change is difficult and uncomfortable, but to make a literal journey to discover the answers is admirable and makes one wonder why such active questioning does not occur in the upper echelons of academia.

The only scholar to attempt to broach these subjects on the graduate level, referred to by Cassuto in *The Graduate School Mess*, is Ed Neal, a professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His essay, titled "Leading the Seminar: Graduate and Undergraduate" though short, is admirable for the "Remedies" offered, divided into "Planning" and "Leading" the graduate seminar. He first defines: "Following

a model created in German universities, the seminar is a course in which advanced students conduct original research under the close guidance of an expert in the field” (Neal). He then admits that this approach can be successful, but can also fail for a number of reasons, among them, “If a teacher narrows the seminar topic to conform to his/her current research interests, it can become too specialized to stimulate student interest” (Neal). The “Planning” section of the essay contains common-sense approaches to organizing the course, but the section titled “Leading the Seminar” provides a solution that allows for student agency and a broader range of topics:

Some teachers also allow students a greater voice in deciding on the focus of the seminar. To provide context, in the first seminar meeting the teacher describes the work being done in the field, outlines the more important questions and issues, and relates these questions to the discipline as a whole. Students read selected pieces to fill in the background and, in a class discussion, the teacher and students together select the specific issues the seminar will address. This approach allows students to choose areas that interest them most, but within parameters provided by the instructor.

(Neal)

This is the type of solution that professors should be implementing in their classrooms, the kind that Neal envisions, wherein “students and teacher work together as a community of scholars engaged in a common academic endeavor.” This seems to be the goal of a graduate seminar, but what is unsettling about this approach is that it was written in 1996, two decades ago, and there is little evidence (because there is little research on graduate seminars and pedagogy) that these kinds of methods have been

executed, and if so, what were the results? It seems that an approach combining both of Neal and Cassuto's tactics (recognizing the need for more realistic advisement and frank discussions regarding employment in academia, as well as a classroom environment that follows a model closer to collaboration than apprenticeship, destabilizing the canonical focus and deemphasizing expert knowledge) is a good place to start.

Instead, professors are still writing such statements as "If we are indeed preparing our graduate students for a variety of employment outcomes" (and of course this is a very optimistic outlook, as very few are), "it behooves us to ask how useful it is to have all students take the same type of content-oriented, highly specialized graduate seminars that lead to the production of an independently researched seminar paper" (Schmid 171). Much of this knowledge has already been covered in undergraduate courses. As one student aptly stated in response to the survey question as to why canonical texts are taught at the graduate level, "as graduate students, we should be reading and discussing more experimental texts, as well as those that we have not yet discovered—why learn what you already know?" So much for psychoanalytic readings of T. S. Eliot's "Prufrock," the concept of home in Ambrose Bierce's short fiction, and Genesis as it relates to Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables*, if we are revisiting material from our undergraduate study, and our employment prospects lie within "government agencies, nonprofit organizations, publishing houses, and so on" (171). This is not to say that literature holds no value, or offers no reflection of the human experience, or that graduate students do not enjoy a more complex understanding of previously explored texts, for that would be a short-sighted and wildly incorrect sentiment. Rather, the problem is that it's simply not always useful (read: practical) for graduate students to be researching and

writing exclusively about highly esoteric topics concerning canonical authors that appear in most syllabi when post-graduation, they will be writing grant proposals, editing manuscripts and hosting corporate fundraisers rather than teaching courses as full time, tenured professors. The study of literature is a worthy pursuit, no doubt: but is it worth more than the student's eventual public and professional life, and can professors hope to bridge the gap between the study of this material and its practical application? Through the aforementioned combined approach, it seems possible that we could determine ways to offer a variety of courses that balance literature with writing studies and other skill-based courses. Within the literature courses, content that combines canonical works with more contemporary and student-chosen texts could provide foundational knowledge, as well as a crucial kind of intellectual independence that is both scholarly and professional. Using the critical and analytical skills that we pride ourselves on within the humanities, and with the incentive of rescuing our discipline from accusations of irrelevance, we should not find it difficult to determine ways that we would be able to make literature, canonical or otherwise, applicable to the students' future careers. The larger questions are why haven't we made our discipline more varied, and why do we continue to follow the apprenticeship model that is clearly broken?

The 2014 MLA Task Force recommendations do little to address this question. Of the ten recommendations to increase the success of doctoral programs offered, three include: "strengthen teaching preparation," "expand professional opportunities," and "use the whole university community" (2). These three recommendations appear reasonable on the surface, but are in fact conflicting. Strengthening teaching preparation is not logical if graduate students are not obtaining professorships, expansion of professional

opportunities rarely occurs on most university campuses, and when the task force references the “whole” university community, they are referring to other professionals in the university (administrators and librarians, for example), not graduate students.

However, if graduate students are asked about preparation for their future careers, we discover that instead, the question becomes, “*What* preparation?” For instance, one student responded uncertainly to the survey statement “What I have been taught in my graduate level literature courses thus far will apply to the post-graduate work I pursue,” indicating that

We had no on the job training or any necessary internship credits as part of the program, so most of the responsibility is on the student to market their skills and the benefits that the MA program will have in their future employment. There is little support from the graduate department about any job opportunities—the school is good at forwarding us opportunities to send our papers to conferences and the like, but as far as I know, there isn't really any help when it comes to actually finding employment post-graduation.

This particular respondent indicated a desire to seek employment within the publishing industry, which one might assume has lower employment rates than academia, yet this respondent found employment as an editorial assistant at a large publishing house within weeks of this survey. However, this student felt that a graduate assistantship better prepared her for this intended career than the actual courses or course material during graduate study. It appears from the survey results that graduate assistantships are tailored more to students' eventual careers than to what occurs inside the seminar classroom, and

this is admirable but should be reflected throughout the program, not in only one facet of study. The assistantships, if they are not within the university writing center, are largely research-based, dealing with canonical works. However, it is not the canonical material itself that prepares the students for employment, but the skills obtained from research and practice. This is an instance where the apprenticeship model does have benefits, though the apprenticeship is more one of skill than profession, for the skills are transferable to a range of professions, not merely within academia. The pedagogy within the classroom follows an apprenticeship model that is more closely aligned with the attainment of specific, specialized knowledge applicable only to eventual professorships, as well as the scholarship and publication that come with it.

Though it is often the case that students pursuing a graduate English education have a deep love for literature, it is simply not enough to rely upon this assumption any longer, for it is easy to imagine many of us “finishing coursework and even leaving [our] programs having had interesting conversations, but not quite knowing what [we] have been learning to *do*” (Khost, Lohe, and Sweetman 21). One survey participant indicated, in response to the same statement posed above, that graduate study “... will help [me] because now I can write a paper. Which means I can strive to be published. Will I get a teaching position? I will probably have to wait in a long line of other English MA's for the interview. But, I do have letters of recommendation! Most of which say that I can write a paper.” This answer demonstrates the confusing predicament that most graduate students face when attempting to reconcile their class discussions and research with their eventual employment opportunities. The writing that is done inside the classroom is beneficial to prepare graduate students for potential publication, but “it’s one thing for

graduate students to be encouraged to publish, and quite another for them to be pressured to do so, with the feeling that unless they do, they have no chance for a job” (Graff, “Two Cheers for Professionalizing Graduate Students” 1192), and that is often how many graduate students feel. Of course, amid those interesting conversations, personal and professional breakthroughs can occur in the way that we approach complex human issues. We can also assume that many students have professors whose teaching style they favor and may imitate, hence the “apprenticeship” model.

Plenty of literature constitutes what Stanley Fish terms the “Woe-Is-Us” narrative surrounding the subject of “the fate of the liberal arts in our time” (Fish, “The Woe-Is-Us Books”). Fish explains that “some of the recommendations... are specific—end tenure, restore mandatory retirement, reduce presidential salaries, get rid of departments. Some are more general and unexceptionable—make students use their minds, cultivate the mind and heart, encourage reflection and self-scrutiny” (Fish). Again, no mention of students unless it’s making them do something – not negative things, of course, but cultivating our minds and hearts, or encouraging self-reflection and scrutiny (most graduate students engage in these exercise too much already). Though honorable and worthy ventures, they won’t help us to obtain employment.

The power hierarchy is always firmly in place, despite theory and scholarship that is supposed to make us aware of its presence and perhaps do something about it, and despite that graduate students are often referred to by their professors as “peers.” The professors are not employing empty rhetoric: they mean it. Yet when they create their syllabi, they do not consult their graduate students regarding what should appear on it. One student’s response addressed this issue, when asked, “Why do you feel that



canonical texts are taught in graduate level literature courses?" she responded that these texts are taught, "More for lack of creativity and vision on the part of the people who design the courses than for any perceived timeless benefit in the canonical texts themselves." The same student later explains, when discussing future employment opportunities, that she wishes to research, write, and teach post-grad, and does not feel that this specialized knowledge is necessarily a bad thing, but that "The classes so far have helped mainly through the individual merit of the professors and their specific disciplines. The professors are remarkable, and they are legitimate students of their sub-disciplines. But even they, I think, are hurt by the lack of comprehensiveness and coherence in the course designs." Another student sees a disparity between what is offered at the undergraduate level and what is offered at the graduate level, recognizing a need for diversity. When asked what she would have liked to have seen offered during her studies, she responded: "I would love to see more of a range of courses that fall under the English umbrella that would be instrumental to a number of careers, such as creative writing, as well as courses that focus on specific areas of theory or theorists, women writers, pedagogical courses, courses concentrating on specific social movements, a wider variety of courses dealing with international literature, etc." Though many of these responses contain opinions or suggestions that may seem to disagree with some of my points regarding what is studied at the graduate level, the fact remains that *listening* to what graduate students have to say is a first step in changing graduate studies and potentially changing the discipline to make it more reflective of the twenty-first century and its students. The solution will require balance and equality, but will undoubtedly bring us closer to a more representative (in the sense of both content and students)

discipline that takes a more collective, democratic approach while still accounting for the needs of the individual.

The literature on these types of forward-thinking solutions in graduate studies is scant, but if we return to Lichtman's observations and suggestions for K-12, we recognize that we should "unburden ourselves of the concept of 'school' as a place where we go to work" and that "learning is not constrained by a physical boundary" (135). The absence of constraints is necessary to create a more inclusive, open approach that looks outside the physical text and the physical space for true learning to occur, what Lichtman terms "meeting at school, but learning in the world," whether that be through social media, Skype, or the old fashioned way of driving or flying somewhere (135). This is the type of learning that has not permeated graduate study, with the exception of courses that specifically focus on digital rhetoric or community activism, or on broader concepts of technology within the realm of literature or writing.

These sub-arguments about what should be included in graduate study and why are often difficult to discuss, since (sometimes understandably and sometimes not) there are many involved in the argument who take these criticisms personally. After all, the same professors who indicate that it's enough that students pursue advanced degrees in English literature simply because they love the subject were once students themselves, who continue to love their subject, demonstrated by their decision to teach and ability to teach well. There is also a larger issue that when these arguments are exposed, when professors must question what they teach and why, we feel we are destroying what we love: we are giving fuel to those who do not have faith in the humanities, or do not perceive the benefits of an education in the humanities and advocate for decreased

humanities funding and increased STEM funding. Perhaps the student voice is the middle ground that has heretofore been overlooked as a crucial bridge between the defenders and detractors. An essential fact has been overlooked: the *students* are the future of the discipline, and their opinions are representative of what works and what does not, and “we must challenge the notion that power is something invested in institutional leaders, with students cast as official underlings. Instead, we must foster recognition of students as partners in what should be a mutually beneficial undertaking” (Hinchey and Kimmel 154). As graduate students, we must be informed of the institutional pressures that exist, and their weight on our professors, what Cassuto describes as the attitude of “‘I never did anything different’ or ‘I don’t know how to [teach] that.’ This is a teaching problem, and professors need to take personal ownership of this problem” (Lecture, 12 Nov. 2015). But students should understand that professors, too, are a product of the problem that they now reproduce. Professors, in turn, must be aware of the larger problem that Cassuto identifies: “graduate students have less power than faculty. If we teach them to seek jobs that don’t exist... on a literal level, we are teaching people to be unhappy. This is beyond unethical, it is immoral. The issue is not the number of MA’s we produce, but producing happier ones. Happy as well as productive” (12 Nov. 2015). It is puzzling that these perspectives have not been adopted by either party; given the intellectual openness of the graduate school seminar room, one would expect a level of honesty to permeate all areas of discussion, including that which occurs outside the confines of the course.

Cassuto’s solution is a combination of logic and policy. He advocates active partnerships with career services, “not when they’re entering the job market, but right away,” and conversations “in the seminar room, with advisors, and with experts in career

services” (12 Nov. 2015). He also suggests that the “dictatorship of ideas of research culture,” the ideology of research culture, be challenged amid this call for greater academic responsibility, but does not explicitly describe what this might look like (12 Nov. 2015). Unfortunately, many “current” arguments fall back on the foundational Graff-Scholes argument and do not offer any recognizable solutions, perhaps due to economic, administrative, and bureaucratic constraints; yet one would think that since this argument has been occurring for at least thirty years, some of the theories would have been tested and analyzed. “Rethinking and Unthinking the Graduate Seminar” by Peter H. Khost, Debra Rudder Lohe, and Chuck Sweetman, for instance, contains a hopeful title and some optimistic proclamations, but little evidence that the perspective the authors are taking is measurably different than other approaches. Although their recommendations are noteworthy, their suggestions remain centered on the apprenticeship model of pedagogy. They asked graduate teaching assistants to participate in a workshop that critiqued lesson plans and writing exercises. Yet the authors state that “anecdotal evidence from our workshop participants suggests that practices like these enhance graduate students’ preparedness for the job market and for literature-teaching jobs” (24) and praised their methods for embracing the student’s feelings and avoiding the “typical lecture-based graduate seminar, [which] neglects such concerns for the sake of content coverage” (25). Although their approach can certainly be praised for its willingness to incorporate student perspectives, it is difficult to see how it embraces their conclusion that, “exposed to a wider range of choices as writers, scholars, teachers, and professionals, graduate students need not simply imitate or become their mentors” (29). Yes, the professors have made student agency a priority, and this has changed the

structure of their course, which are tactics to applaud. But the apprenticeship model has not been effectually changed, unless the students implement the same methods in their own classrooms as professors of literature, and it has been established by this point that most of those students will *not* become professors of literature. Some professors are still behaving as if their graduate students “will go on to become the reserve army of the contingent professoriate” (Bérubé, “Abandon All Hope” 6). This does little more than perpetuate the problem. Instead, professors should seek to inhabit a variation on the Cassuto/Neal method of professorship that broadens the focus beyond individual scholarship and publication and instead guides their students while relinquishing some authority for their greater benefit in the classroom and beyond. Increased advisement and greater autonomy will at the very least increase student morale, and perhaps could lead to greater employability when other, twenty-first century skills are introduced into the classroom.

More optimistically, what does it look like when professors succeed in bridging the gap between canonical and professional-practical? At the University of Washington, a Graduate Certificate Fellowship Program in Public Scholarship has been in place since 2010. Miriam Bartha and Bruce Bergett developed the program, which was “designed as a critical alternative to the apprenticeship model that dominates graduate training and socialization in the humanities and elsewhere across the university” (33). The program allows “site visits to local organizations engaged in arts and cultural programming; workshops with practicing faculty members, graduate students, and staff; and discussions of institutional politics with department chairs, center directors, and divisional deans,” which stress “the skills and capacities required of academic and nonacademic culture

work” (33). In the process, much as the student survey that is a part of this thesis hopes, in part, to accomplish, the professors and administration were awakened to an increasing dissatisfaction among graduate students with the current model expecting them to pursue academic positions. The administration recognized the need to create a curriculum that addressed graduate students’ wishes for an “effective means to frame the scholarly value of their engaged research and for... programmatic initiatives that develop, make visible, and link all of these resources” (34). In order to achieve this, the professors asked the graduate students to develop their own task force. Their study begins with a gateway course and ends with a capstone portfolio course that creates a digital portfolio aligning with the student’s professional aspirations (34), a concept I will discuss further in the final chapter of this thesis. Frequent roundtable discussions included the graduate students, faculty, and alumni in order to continually check in with students and refine objectives based on dispatches from those working in a number of different career settings. It is important to note that the authors recognized that the current rhetoric surrounding the “crisis of the humanities” in fact also circles around attention toward the job market crisis. In their view, both foci, though relevant, “ignore students’ motivations for entering into graduate programs in the first place. True, some students aspire from the outset to tenure-track jobs,” but many “have more complex commitments and view their relation to institutions of higher education more critically... the problem with the [apprenticeship] model is that it casually yet ruthlessly prunes any intellectual, educational, and political capacities or aspirations that do not fit the specific academic-professional trajectories normalized in graduate degree programs” (39). This is clearly a step in the right direction—a small one which only currently exists in the form of a

fellowship/certificate program, but a step—and demonstrates what the authors view as a way to “recognize and support graduate student agency in institutional contexts” (40).

The anonymous survey results on student representation support this view, as well, as one student stated regarding the Montclair State University graduate program: “I understand that the program is small and there are not many seats to fill, but there must be a way to offer more, especially if the department worked with graduate students to sort it out.”

From the anonymous responses received for the survey, three themes have become apparent: a deep love and respect for the professors whom the students work with and learn from, a dissatisfaction with career preparation, and a desire for more diversity within course offerings. Graduate students understand at some level that professors experience constraints when creating course contents, and truly admire the levels of expertise that the professors have attained. Many graduate students have excellent mentor-mentee relationships with their professors; but then of course, those who may feel bitter or indifferent towards their professors most likely did not respond to the survey. For those who felt invested enough to respond, it seems that a three part solution would be effective. As Cassuto stated, students should be informed of job prospects right away, either prior to or at the very beginning of their graduate programs. It was disheartening to see that many survey respondents are set on pursuing their PhD in English literature and obtaining professorships. Perhaps they are not aware of the statistics that they may become a part of, or perhaps they are aware but feel that they, for some reason, have better hope of obtaining a faculty position than others do. This is a flaw in the research that should have been addressed with a more direct question, but nevertheless demonstrates that there is a necessity for more transparency and honesty with graduate

students when addressing their future. Additionally, a greater working relationship between the graduate school, English department, and career services would be beneficial to all three departments as well as the students. By keeping an open line of communication with alumni to track job placement, as exemplified in the University of Washington certificate program, the departments could collaborate to determine the best way to incorporate necessary, desirable employment skills such as public writing and social media in their courses. This, in turn, would lead to more diverse course offerings, which could effectively balance both foundational, canonical courses with those more representative of both student interests and future employability. However, this would require an overhaul of the status quo, as professors are still subject to the requirements demanded by university hiring committees, who emphasize specialization and publication above all else. Yet this certificate program, if replicated, could change that atmosphere from the bottom up, as it could lead to greater employment numbers among recent graduates by providing real evidence of job placement (i.e., where recent graduates have been successful in finding employment and where they have not). Courses could be tailored accordingly, flexibly, and frequently, and demonstrate that, at the very least, specialization is not and should not be relegated to a specific historical period or canonical author.

An especially appropriate way to bridge the gap between the foundational canonical texts and student interest is through a more digital environment. Over the past thirty years, the digital age has ushered in the biggest and perhaps most rapid changes we have experienced as humans, and therefore one of the biggest changes in the way that we learn and should approach the humanities. This kind of technology-driven environment



creates a more student-centered approach while dismantling previously held notions of what it means to be “canonical.” Since current and future generations of graduate students are digitally literate, a distancing from the physical text to a more open notion of what texts are worth studying would result in a classroom environment where students have the potential to inform the professors just as much as the professors are teaching the students. The digital landscape will also increase the students’ marketability for any potential employer. Creating digital portfolios, as practiced through the University of Washington Public Scholarship Certificate Program, could be one model to change the current method from a text-producing populace to a more informed, culturally and technologically relevant student body prepared for the future of a changing discipline: it could even replace not just the seminar research paper, but also the thesis and dissertation. This, of course, is dependent upon many different factors, including the university’s level of acceptance and comfort in experimenting with, learning from, and implementing such a model, and the professors’ willingness to cede some authority to graduate students. However, it does present a true exploration of democracy in the classroom and challenges the apprenticeship and research-based model of graduate study perhaps more than any other approach.

A look towards the potential benefits and solutions that could be offered by the emergence of the digital humanities and public humanities follows in the final chapter, as well as how the emergence of pop culture studies changed the landscape, but still may not offer a complete solution in terms of greater student agency. I will attempt to explore in depth what a twenty-first century graduate classroom should look like, and define what it

means to be a scholar of literature now as compared to thirty to fifty years ago when we consider what, if anything, about the discipline of literary studies has changed.

## Chapter Three

## Literary Equipment and Its Practical Purpose: The Responsibility of Twenty-First Century Users

Classification, as herein suggested, would derive its relevance from the fact that it should apply both to works of art and to social situations outside of art. It would, I admit, violate current pieties break down current categories, and thereby “outrage good taste.” But ‘good taste’ has become inert. The classifications I am proposing would be active. I think that what we need is active categories....

(Burke 597)

Where is the discipline of English literature? Has it become more discipline than democracy, and if so, what is left of it? The old configuration defined by period, genre, and other categorizations seems no longer to serve a potential purpose when we view the progress of academic pursuit. The “additive” type replacement of texts after the canon wars, the inability of pop culture studies to make a dent in most graduate school programs, and the apprenticeship pedagogical model that underpins it all do not seem to account for the student’s place, present or future. When we imagine the future of our discipline, when we envision a twenty-first century graduate classroom and curricula, what is it that we see? We must ask ourselves whether the classroom and curricula is parochial, or if it is as broad-minded as we perceive ourselves and our work to be. It is not just a matter of canon exclusivity, but an exclusivity of the mind and of practice. The conditions that we find ourselves in and the rhetoric we employ to manage those conditions, alternately personifying Chicken Little and bastions of hope, do nothing to give us the tools to enact a meaningful future.

If we are seeking greater career diversity for PhDs or even recent MA recipients (other than adjunct positions), we must ask whether the study of canonical literature is really all that relevant to these new job prospects. Perhaps it would be more fruitful to take a public humanities approach that engages students with the surrounding community

rather than focusing so heavily on publishing and scholarship as the goal of graduate education. At the very least, it seems that there should be a balance between the study of canonical literature and the pursuit of other types of literature or even other avenues within the discipline that incorporate additional, skills-based training. The study of canonical literature is intertwined with the “crisis of the humanities,” but many are reluctant to address this issue for fear that discussing the relevance of these texts might undermine the discipline itself. I believe there must be a way to approach this question without devaluing what we do as students of literature.

In an atmosphere of academic capitalism, concerned with an endgame that has more to do with profit than enlightenment, we must seek a rationale less aestheticist and more populist, that disrupts the values we seek in our literature but also justifies them. The kind of knowledge offered within these pages, an esoteric sort that dispenses Foucault and refers to Bloom and Graff, is one encumbered with the jargon of the academy, the special language that gives us, as students, admittance to the ivory tower. We are not ungrateful for this dialect: we learn it willingly and openly and know that it is conferred to us with the best intentions. In this way, we are not quite Foucault’s “docile bodies” repeating the functioning of a specialized discourse within the academic system, but still exist within the academy, which is not a truly representative place. Texts are consumed and the social order of the institution is reproduced, and this is how degrees are earned. Choice does not enter into the equation, in terms of the texts we study or the directions that our program takes. What of our own language as students, the dialect of the constituency? Agency must be reclaimed and the value of what we study must be

made explicit; graduate students are not submissive entities, but view their discipline, role and relationships to the institution critically.

The humanities, specifically the study of English literature, has been a field of production, alternately defined as a solitary and cultural type of production, financial and critical, institutional and popular. It is quite clear that the humanities' ability to humanize or facilitate empathy may fit with what is prescribed, but does not fit with what is produced. If "the literary canon is ancient; universally accepted and agreed; and uniform and consistent between high and popular cultures" yet "these statements are wrong in absolutely every particular" (Holderness 73), then we must ask ourselves: what is the purpose of this foundational aspect of everything that we do? If the study of literature is considerably different than what it was fifty years ago, we need to acknowledge that "these alterations have not been produced by the fragmentation of a canon... they have been produced by social developments, by educational progress, by cultural reconfigurations, by political action" (79). The alterations have been changed by people from within the academy, politically, over time and with great force.

For instance, pop culture studies has transformed the canon, through overtly political action, and this area of study was able to "wrest away [culture] from Intellectual Tories from Matthew Arnold to F. R. Leavis, and to strengthen its broader, more anthropological connotations" (Bérubé, *Public Access* 139). Pop culture studies recognizes that it is a part of the culture it studies, not separate from it, and that "it is not a unified movement, it's not a hostile takeover, it's not a 'school' and it's not an academic discipline: on the contrary, it raids and unsettles the compartmentalized disciplines of traditional academic study" (138). Yet it seems uncomfortable with its own

unsettling: that is, it remains fearful of being swallowed by the academy. There is a fear that “American academics... will set upon and devour culture studies... in a way that soothes and protects the entrenched interests of American universities” (140) and that it is “subject to the same pressures and political harangues that have dogged all innovative work in the humanities” (148). Whether popular culture studies has succumbed to these pressures is debatable, for though there are many specific graduate programs in popular culture studies throughout the United States and across the world, it is difficult to know if these programs include an increased level of student agency; though to be sure, they do more to account for the current climate of the discipline. However, two issues exist in the study of popular culture: the first is that, like other subfields (and like the pluralist canon), it has been relegated to its own curriculum or area of study, completely separate from literary studies, once again an “additive” solution rather than an incorporation. The other issue is that, although pop culture studies is acutely aware and questions its position within the institution, academics must remember that “there is all the difference in the world between understanding the politics of intellectual work and substituting intellectual work for politics” (Hall 275). Even when academics feel that we are politicized, or when we are happy with inhabiting conflict, it does not serve as humanities-in-action. Yes, pop culture studies has opened up the canon, and indeed it has changed the humanities as did the canon wars and the introduction of critical theory before it: but we must ask what difference, what change it has made. Is it enough for the discipline to be aware that you are aware (self-conscious or reflective) or is part of the problem with the humanities as a whole that we recognize innovation but refuse to fully integrate it, believing that the humanities should not be corrupted by outside forces that threaten to “undermine” it?

It is difficult to see where this question exists in the current climate, not in the discipline but within the classroom. There is no shortage of suggestions about what should be done to revitalize the discipline. The view varies, but revolves around the same general principles:

In the view of some, English conceived as the close reading of literary works of established cultural value has lost its luster. Undergraduates are feared to be abandoning the field in search of more practical, employable, and digital degrees. For others, this looks like a good opportunity to creatively destroy the Establishment. For still others, now is the time to repackage literary studies in new digital boxes. (Cooper and Marx 145)

The canon is no longer a serious part of this argument about the future of the discipline, though it should be. The issue is not that the close reading of canonical literary works has been abandoned (a look at any undergraduate or graduate level English program curricula, specifically the assignments, will demonstrate this), but that it has lost relevance for those doing the close reading. Meaning has become more and more difficult to grasp in an atmosphere that encourages participation in a specific discourse that does not account for the graduate students' input in terms of the texts that are studied and the goals of the courses. Everything from assigned essays to administrative attitudes have prevented new iterations of aesthetic value. Sure, graduate students can write about anything they would like, as long as it is tailored to the material in the course and meets the requirements of a genre or period-specific type of literature, specializations evident from a look at the course titles. If graduate students want to study song lyrics or

television shows, they will meet with resistance or at the very least not be taken as seriously as peers studying a more traditionally specialized area.

For instance, though pop culture studies has certainly made its mark in the discipline beginning about thirty years ago, there is still a significant battle within the academy to incorporate popular culture into regular curriculum rotation, or to even slightly infiltrate literary studies. Michael Poliakoff, policy director for the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, disagreed with the introduction of “zombie literature” into college curricula, because he cited that “many college graduates lack proficiency in basic literacy,” which should be a more important concern: why study such frivolous topics when what he calls, not ironically, “survival” is at stake? (Phillips). Perhaps it is obvious, but worth stating, that students might gain basic literacy skills from reading this literature, because it interests them. Maybe reading blogs about *The Walking Dead*, or reading graphic novels or comics, will achieve both goals that Poliakoff sees as disparate but are in actuality the same goal. The problem is that he is not viewing zombie literature as “real” literature. And yet a thirty four year old student at Clemson University named Christopher Schuster who is a former Iraq war veteran found himself in this literature-that-is-not-defined-as-literature because he drew parallels to post traumatic stress disorder, how it transforms former soldiers, as being similar to the experience of changing into the undead (Phillips). This is one of the values of literature, and one that the academy has increasingly sought to force into particular categories that are overwhelmingly canonical. Canonical literature has long been judged for its aesthetic value and vague notions of superiority, but only by the gatekeepers, by Fowler’s “trained readers.” Perhaps readers are “trained” by an experience such as that of Schuster rather



than through the accumulation of esoteric knowledge. This knowledge grants one, knight-like, the ability to defend “real” literature from interlopers such as the professors and students who wish to study a different type of literature not just at the undergraduate level, which has made marked progress in this area, but at the graduate level. But perhaps we could learn from the interlopers about the ways in which literature effects change.

As graduate students, rather than undergraduates, we have the privilege of not being concerned about basic literacy skills. We are in a program of study that we chose specifically for reasons we generally feel revolve around a great love for our discipline. We are not immune, however, to concepts of what constitutes “real” literature. It is understood that we must be given a basic knowledge of this canonical literature (perhaps because, increasingly, from “zombie literature” and the like, many have not been exposed to canonical literature as undergraduates), and we are not asked for our input as to what literature we feel would be most relevant to study and why, and the courses are not planned accordingly. In the anonymous survey completed for this thesis, one student indicated, when replying to the question, “Why do you think that canonical texts are studied in graduate level courses?,” that “It is the standard practice, I imagine. The intention, perhaps, is to go beyond the cursory understanding of a given text that one studied as an undergraduate.” And yet, responding to the statement, “What I have been taught in my graduate level literature courses thus far will assist me in obtaining employment when I graduate?” a survey participant stated, “there is very little discussion from anyone I've talked to in the department about how the MA itself can help you gain employment that your undergraduate degree could not.” Therefore, there is a tension or disagreement between what is studied as an undergraduate and as a graduate, and the

difference in employment prospects that either entails. If studying canonical works is meant only to encourage or prepare for a job in academia (apprenticeship), then the system is not open enough to account for the reality of a multiplicity of outcomes that most likely will not include a professorship. Another student responded, to the same question of why canonical texts are taught at the graduate level, "There isn't one true answer, but I do feel that reading and writing about canonical texts helps us to develop fundamental critical thinking skills required to write the traditional academic research paper." To revisit the same texts for greater understanding and to write a paper, but have no clear idea of how their hard-won MA will truly differ from their BA in terms of employability: Is this the goal of a graduate program? It seems that we simply repeat what has always been, for "today the canon has undergone the whole trajectory from a serious critical idea to a trivialized parlor-game" (Holderness 80). But the academic board game and card players who have been part of the trajectory have not fully considered what or who is at stake when they discuss what texts are studied. An illusion of freedom hides the truth that "English became a department in which almost anything could be studied, so long as its graduates also reproduced 'traditional' literary subfields such as 'nineteenth century American literature' or 'British Romanticism'" (Cooper and Marx 140). Many of the complaints received in the anonymous survey of MSU graduate students in literature conducted for this thesis indicates that students are frustrated with the gap that exists between opportunity and reality. Though the survey may not be representative of graduate students in other universities, I believe that it is a worthwhile pursuit to poll the students anonymously to gauge morale, understand the problems which might exist, and tailor solutions in the academy accordingly. At MSU, for instance, many

graduate students wish to study authors and texts not on the syllabi and to take more contemporary literature courses, but feel frustrated with an inability to do anything to change it. Outside the classroom, another kind of frustration exists: the desire to implement the valuable teachings we find in the literature we do study both in and outside of the academy, and the hope that in whatever career path we choose, we have the opportunity to do so. The apprenticeship model does little to relieve this frustration. As one student aptly stated, canonical texts are studied at the graduate level because they are “extremely influential”; however, she states, “I feel that most of these texts should have been taught at the undergraduate level and that as graduate students we should be reading and discussing more experimental texts, as well as those that we have not yet discovered—why learn what you already know?” Why, indeed, especially if graduate students are unclear as to whether (or if) their studies will lead them toward the meaningful pursuits and employment they desire.

There is a distinction between “academic work produced for its own ends and academic work that is instrumental for other ends” (Grusin 89). Ihab Hassan, in an article titled “The Educated Heart: The Humanities in the Age of Marketing and Technology,” questions the effectiveness of the humanities in civilizing the human race (605). This obviously became a valid argument after the art and literature-loving Nazis committed genocide, thereby deflating the argument that the purpose of art and literature is to “moralize” human beings. Is the canon still effective in civilizing students in graduate school, Huck Finns all of us? There is evidence that graduate students at MSU are thinking critically about this issue when they provide answers such as those previously mentioned, that demonstrate an understanding of the historical importance of canonical

texts, but also say, "I feel that any text that was or is widely read obviously speaks to its culture and should be canonized regardless of its claims to being 'literary,' whatever that means." If the humanities "renew themselves, thriving on debate, dialogue and reciprocity" (609), are we experiencing enough of this debate in the texts we study and in our classrooms, are we working to renew our discipline, or simply treading the same ground, thinking that we are still traveling the road less traveled? Many English graduate students at MSU feel that they are doing the latter: "The courses that I have taken included writers I have always known and loved, but isn't the point of grad school to expand our thinking?" one participant pointedly asks. The "intellectual freedom" of graduate school, mentioned by professor-scholars such as Cassuto and others, seems nonexistent in favor of revisiting the same dusty bookshelf within the seminar room walls, yet this seems to be an overlooked, though foundational, part of his and others arguments about what is wrong with graduate study.

It is difficult to change this argument or inject it with fresh ideas, especially as a student with little to no say. Digital humanities offers one option to "help transform our understanding of the canon and history of the humanities by foregrounding and investigating the complex entanglements of humans... of humanities and technology, which have too often been ignored in conventional narratives of the Western humanistic tradition" (Grusin 89). There are those who wish instead to focus more acutely on the cultural production behind these canonical works, to expand humanities scholarship beyond its traditional resources. There is a Shakespeare Quartos Archive that makes "each of the thirty-two extant copies of Hamlet available online" and also a Preserving Virtual Worlds Archive that ensures "future access to computer games, interactive

fiction, and virtual communities” (Kirschenbaum 5). It is a field that is relatively young and “values collaboration, openness, [and] non-hierarchical relations” and also seeks to “focus the anxiety and even outrage of individual scholars over their own lack of agency amid the turmoil in their institutions and profession” and rebel against the status quo of the institution (8-9). Yet the digital humanities provides its own kind of ivory tower that restricts access to those who understand yet another kind of language. Like its non-digital counterpart, it tends to insinuate broader, more democratic notions while still retaining its exclusivity. Like the canon debates, it only postures toward a new way of thinking: “Digital humanities says that scholarly publishing and peer review must change, arguing that older forms of scholarship were ‘locked’ within an ivory tower and that its new form of scholarship constitutes a kind of ‘public humanities’ although a public preference for computationally intensive text processing over close reading has yet to be demonstrated” (Columbia 161-62). But the digital humanities has received generous funding from universities for this ability to compute and process texts and therefore somehow quantify the work that occurs inside the classroom, and it may potentially increase job opportunities for graduates.

In addition, “Digital humanists are beginning to press for open access not only to digital collections, tools, and scholarship, but also to educational resources and even course evaluations,” for instance, “making visible its curriculum and offering educational resources for current students, and faculty members by documenting their educational innovations and giving them access to the pedagogical contributions of their colleagues” (Spiro 25). This is the type of necessary change that occurs through transparency, and that is more likely to occur through the openness of technology. A twenty-first century

classroom should be more transparent and should foster “an ethos that promotes collaboration as essential to its work and mission (even as it recognizes that some work is better done in solitude)” (25). Although collaboration is fostered among undergraduates and within writing courses, especially, a truly collaborative environment has yet to penetrate the graduate level, where the “work better done in solitude” is still the prevailing sentiment: “within the humanities, especially over the recent history of our discipline, scholarship is seen as an individual, indeed often solitary, performance. Digital humanities did not invent collaborative scholarship, but it does make such work more acceptable and transparent” (Perry 436). These are statements that seem self-aware in a way that the traditional humanities are not.

Perhaps this is because digital humanists recognize the disconnect between the seeming enthusiasm for the field and its practical application in and outside the classroom, since it is still largely controlled by the upper echelons of the institution. For instance, they are willing to acknowledge that “some digital humanities values may clash with the norms of the academy. For example, universities’ intellectual property policies may be unfavorable toward producing open-source software... and may find it difficult to find publishers for their work,” and more important, “many humanities departments favor solo work in their tenure and promotion policies” (Spiro 30). But these are also the qualities that make a field such as digital humanities so relevant, the idea that they are aware of what are perceived as values that are supposedly antithetical to academia, but should therefore be more fully embraced: “these values point to an overarching ethos that promotes innovative scholarship as public good and believes that it should be practiced openly and collaboratively” (30). This is one of the most valuable contributions of the

digital humanities, the ability to recognize innovation and employ a more current and forward-thinking methodology than those that already exist, to understand that “the digital has so altered the academic culture that there are relatively few scholarly activities that are not already significantly altered by the digital” (Parry 432). Though this seems optimistic, it is colored by the reality (acknowledged) that “for the most part... the digital has done little to alter the structure of the humanities... the work of the humanities scholar remains largely unchanged by the existence of the computational device” and furthermore, “[digital humanities] does little to question the founding principles of academic knowledge” (433). This type of recognition counts for much within the humanities, for even though theories, arguments, and solutions abound, many do not question these founding principles, or especially question the approach to the humanities in the twenty-first century. There is an awareness within the subfield that there really is no such thing as a “non-digital” humanities, an awareness that “there is no humanism separate from the digital... the idea of studying itself is altered by the digital” (436). Students understand that their lives are increasingly digital, but in many ways literary studies has not caught up to this idea.

In addition, there are many graduate students who, though digitally literate, are not familiar with the field of digital humanities. Instead of serving as a panacea, it “might serve as something like gateway drugs for administrators addicted to quick fixes and bottom line approaches to the structural problems facing higher education today, providing them the urge to experiment” (Grusin 88). Though the digital world is by and large the domain of the student (and a few professors willing to embrace its practice), the choice of what is studied is decided by department heads, administrators, and professors,

not graduate students. Despite the multimodal, collaborative approach (which has other definable benefits outside of digital humanities specifically) and the potential for the field to empower students, “knowledge production is still administratively captured” and economically driven (Raley 33). Despite the affordances and clear advantages of the digital approach that the digital humanists themselves recognize, it has not breached study, scholarship, and the academy at large in a transformative fashion.

Moreover, despite the emphasis on collaboration within the digital humanities, the “public” aspect of public scholarship within digital humanities is still difficult to find. Though digital humanities has the potential to rescue and archive long-forgotten works by canonical and non-canonical authors alike, non-canonical texts are still not making their way into the academy in any tangible way, since the majority of the texts which appear on syllabi are remain canonical. In fact, digital humanities scholars have been “organized around canonical texts, authors, and cultural artifacts. They have been motivated by a desire to understand those (quite limited) objects more robustly and completely” (Wilkens 256). If we are merely using this new field and the tools inherent in it to study the same texts, we are not making any progress in our discipline, nor are we really helping students to transcend the perspective of the humanities as a failing, impractical field. If anything, this type of scholarship has “reinforced the canonicity of their subjects by increasing the amount of critical attention paid to them” (256). The hierarchies are instead reinforced, and instead of using what could be a unique kind of agency within this sub-discipline to create a new type of scholarship, it is as if these digital scholars do not know what to do with the freedom of a new field and instead mostly revisit what is familiar. There has been significant work completed in race,



culture, and feminist studies within digital humanities, in reclaiming texts that have long since been forgotten, but this has manifested in the same either unrecognized or “additive” type approach present in the traditional humanities, for as previously explored, the founding principles of the humanities and of “academic knowledge” itself remain unquestioned.

It seems that these offshoot disciplines or sub-disciplines (though they do not view themselves this way) appear stuck within either the constructs of canonical literature and the apprenticeship model of teaching or the urge to quantify and compute that same literature. Neither produces employment for graduate students struggling to enter a workforce that increasingly devalues the humanities. It is instead critical to have an “attunement to the importance... of literatures in the broadest possible cultural and social contexts, from the global to the local” (Presner 156). “Local” in this sense is defined not only as the students in the classrooms, but also in the literal sense, the community or communities surrounding the ivory tower. What can be distilled from a field such as the digital humanities is the importance of centering on engagement and collaboration, though the topics and texts worth studying must look toward the future rather than the past, and must continue to question the status quo and inner workings of academic reproduction. In order to do so, this field, just as the traditional humanities, must place more faith in the students and the larger public rather than revisiting notions of “what makes literature great,” which is merely opinion and consensus, becoming narrower and narrower in specialization and scholarship. Though we can certainly recognize the value of such a field, we must also view the “affordances of digital media... with a measured skepticism that might serve as a buffer against the irrational exuberance that too often

characterizes the administrative framing of our projects” (Raley 41). It’s a gamble to invest in a field that has the potential to arrive at the same goal as traditional humanities and literature studies if only because it is more esoterically quantitative.

The canon wars of the 1980s and 90s attempted to reconcile the social movements of the previous thirty years with the lack of inclusivity in the discipline. Now, quite slowly, we are attempting to reconcile the canon wars of these past thirty years with a highly technological environment that we have not yet, as a discipline, fully embraced. “Whereas the new publics after the 1960s formed around categories of identity politics, the new publics of the twenty-first century are forming in and through networking, which connects people not only on the basis of avowed affiliation but also through media of interaction that cut across group barriers and spatial boundaries and create alliances of unexpected kinds” (Jay 61). This kind of connection does not merely have to be viewed, however, as a binary: it does not have to be a connection with texts *or* a connection with technology. Instead, it could be a connection with one another and humanity at large: an experiencing of the humanities in the true sense of the word, to pursue “diverse interests and a common public purpose” (Ellison 463).

While the argument that scholars within literary studies, and in the humanities generally, should reach out and create alliances with other departments and disciplines is nothing new, what if we were to view this as a creation and interaction with graduate students themselves, and with the communities of which the students are a part? More specifically, “What if campus-based artists and humanists—connoisseurs of metaphor—took ourselves more literally? What if we took the question of democratizing the canon literally enough to enter in the joint discovery of literary knowledge with non-

academics?" (468). This joint discovery would signal a transformation of the discipline, which traditionally places emphasis on "normative campus goals, structures, and reward systems" such as the "triumvirate of 'teaching, research, and service' with 'service' a distinctly less-rewarded and less-respected afterthought in the typical academic's workload" (Jay 54). This kind of service (rather than research) orientation could lead to a devaluing of a canon that may not represent what graduate students see and experience as human beings outside the tower walls. Specifically, the focus must be shifted from the pressure to specialize and publish to instead specialize in a true humanist sense, in the study of people both on the page *and* in the community, and to think of publication as more than an individual pursuit or accomplishment, or path toward promotion or tenure. This type of real, action-based public scholarship has the potential to redefine the canon in a meaningful way by replacing it with narratives that are realer than any of the fiction that compose the canon. Publication could bridge the gap between the literature that we read inside the classroom and the experiences we encounter outside the classroom. Exposure to new narratives *outside* the tower walls creates a grounded practicum for a theoretical existence *within* the tower walls. It has the potential to restore respect to a discipline in crisis, increase enrollment, and open employment opportunities for graduate students by allowing them to see that there is more than the choice between either professorship or professionalization. It also, perhaps most important, has the potential to inspire a greater appreciation for the humanities when we ask ourselves questions such as, "What if we took our interest in gender and genre literally enough to work with high-school girls active in the poetry movement?" (Ellison 468) or discussed Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics* instead of the tried-and-true "The Yellow Wallpaper?"

Or read James Baldwin to prisoners, or to use a previous example, discussed zombie literature or *Frankenstein* with veterans suffering from PTSD? Though this is being done across the country, there is little evidence that it is being practiced in graduate school as a way of altering the discipline for a fully engaged twenty-first century classroom or twenty-first century graduate students, who are very aware of and exposed to the world outside the classroom not just physically, but also through social media and digital environments. This idea directly counters Bloom's assertion that "Shakespeare invented the human" (as suggested by the title of his 1999 book, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*) by acknowledging that Shakespeare studied the human, and was able to create what are considered great works of art only through an almost anthropological examination of the human (he was not the first to do so, nor the last). It also interrogates the integrative yet often empty promises of the pluralists who seek to expand the canon: graduate students have the ability to forge their own definitions of great literature, create their own narratives that support any canon as foundational while also questioning and potentially marginalizing it. Through these types of outreach, graduate students have the ability to prove that the story of humans is more than that which we find within the canon, and that the greatest authors were great because of their real and keen observations of humanity, rather than agreement among fellow intellectuals that certain texts were more worthy of study than others. Perhaps the meaning that we find in the pages, not on our own but through our interactions with each other, is more relevant than the aesthetic marks of value that have been placed upon those pages. This is not necessarily a reader-response approach, but a more primitive human-text-human form of readership and action. It would allow us to bring ourselves to the text, experience the text.

We could then revisit one other in a way that implements real change not just inside the classroom in the way that we understand our world, but also in the way that we experience and behave toward it.

One program that supports this idea is the Cultures and Communities Program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, based on the Arts of Citizenship Program founded in 1998 at the University of Michigan. The program seeks to put “the community at the table from the start as an equal member of the team designing the research, learning, and product” (Jay 56). Students left the academy on a weekly basis to gather community narratives, but also to garden and work on community projects. The service was supported by an educational framework in the classroom, and so “to prepare, the class also studied...select films and literary works” (Jay 56). The community benefited from the service, and the students benefited from breathing air outside the classroom walls, while gaining real experience developing employable skills. As a result, “students are producing public scholarship in internet-based formats that serve to document the history, mission, current activities, and planned events of our partners” (Jay 56). Service learning type programs have long been a fixture in first-year college experiences; however, there are many practical reasons why such programs may not be feasible at the graduate level. “Public scholarship may not be the future of the humanities because many scholars come to their careers with solitary temperaments... a ‘service’ dimension of their labor that cannot be counted like a publication” and it also does not bring in outside revenue, is unable to be “assessed” and importantly may not include all of the information covered in their work, at least in the sense that it is a more localized application of community engagement (Jay 56-57). However, it does serve to put our

long critical and analytical discussions to action in meaningful ways and distance ourselves from the “expert knowledge” and pressure of the publish or perish narrative by showing the vast and far more important world outside research and the academic marketplace bubble.

This program developed at the University of Michigan was part of a larger endeavor, the “Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life” program, founded in 1999 through the White House Millennium Council and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, which sought to rectify the following issue: “Across the country, there was recognition of an informal “movement” growing among artists, humanists, designers, and other scholars in the cultural disciplines who passionately wanted to claim engagement at the core of their identities as intellectuals and artists.” (“Imagining America: About”)

This engagement includes “project teams, program directors, and leaders in arts and humanities organizations, as well as university and college presidents” to “pursue integrative, multi-disciplinary project-based work” (Ellison 469). In the 2008 report titled “Scholarship in Public: Knowledge Creation and Tenure Policy in the Engaged University,” by Julie Ellison and Timothy K. Eatman, under part one of the “Recommendations” section, they provide these definition of “Public Scholarly and Creative Work”:

Publicly engaged academic work is scholarly or creative activity integral to a faculty member’s academic area. It encompasses different forms of making knowledge ‘about, for, and with’ diverse publics and communities. Through a coherent, purposeful sequence of activities, it

contributes to the public good and yields artifacts of public and intellectual value. (1)

Herein lies the problem, which is how to apply, at the graduate level, the study of literary works (the faculty member's academic area) to activities geared toward the greater public good, and how to make those specialized areas less specialized and more open to student choice in the process. As students of literature, we have no trouble producing ideas which produce papers that may or may not eventually lead to publication—but these are of intellectual value, not public value in the sense that they realize individual goals related to scholarship and specialization rather than collective goals applicable to humanity. If they do benefit the greater good (and of course knowledge should), we are not doing a good enough job, within the discipline, of illustrating exactly how, in the same way that, for instance, writing studies is able to engage with activism through the study of rhetoric. They should not be viewed as disparate concepts, but are often frustratingly enacted this way through the constraints of the academy. We must combine intellectual capital and public wealth to create a hybrid that achieves a function beyond the classroom and the academy, considerate not just of administration and scholars but also of students and citizens. This is exactly the issue what we must be prepared to address if we are to convincingly defend our discipline from outside criticisms that devalue the purpose of the humanities. It is a question vital to graduate students, and it is precisely the question that we either refuse to answer or avoid answering. We resist providing an answer in favor of other arguments, when by answering this question we may arrive at an answer to those existing arguments regarding the state of the discipline and employment, and perhaps also open a dialogue to hidden issues such as student engagement and agency. Graduate

students may be able to link technology with community outreach, which is already being accomplished in many writing studies programs, but has not broken into literary studies. This, again, raises the question “what is literature?” for we would then have to view tweets, Facebook and blog posts as literary artifacts on par with Hemingway and Woolf, and engage with them as a living, breathing public product rather than a static text. Viewing texts this way not only alters how we view literature, but naturally, how we interact with the community and each other. Twenty-first century graduate students in a twenty-first century seminar classroom may choose this type of collaboration and public interaction, or they may choose the study of select texts or other cultural artifacts. What matters is that graduate students are given the choice, leading to greater initiative investment, and independence in their intellectual pursuits.

The challenge remains, however, of addressing how this type of work would be assessed. Though it seems ludicrous to discuss how one might assess philanthropic work, in the economic environment of the university, it is a valid concern since “traditional curriculums emphasize the production of an object... whose quality is measured irrespective of any value to a community or larger social purpose” (Jay 59). This produced object is directly tied to scholarship and publication at the graduate level and beyond. In a more engaged environment, the assessment would have to be focused on “linking the production of knowledge to community, cultural, social, and/or economic development and the advancement of social justice” (59). This is difficult, no doubt, but surely not impossible. For if we can judge the merits of a literary work based merely on subjectivity and critique, by applying a theoretical lens or vague set of criteria and writing a lengthy essay or publication about a text, we should be able to, or learn to be



able to, judge the real value of knowledge application in real, not fictional, communities. The real is difficult in a way that the page is not. The value of both should not be underestimated, for they work in concert, not against one another: the text informs the application and vice versa. For instance, we could begin by merging this type of program with the certificate program at the University of Washington, mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, which combines public scholarship with a digital portfolio documenting experience and increasing the student's eventual employability in various fields in and outside the institution. The digital portfolio could document the student's work in the community, and also provide, via survey or other quantifiable results, the goals that this work was able to achieve within that selected community and/or through other partnerships. For "collaboration... thrives in projects that the participants experience as fluid, uncertain, and calling for improvised strategies" and in doing so "transform[s] complications that are typically viewed as barriers to community partnerships into conditions of possibility" (Ellison 470). These types of projects would demonstrate the student's ability to think critically by applying or relating literary concepts to real-world problems while demonstrating problem-solving skills by calculating the student's ability to successfully approach such a challenge.

No matter the approach, we must begin to focus on the idea that "the aim of placing students in a workforce should not seem the opposite of developing a social conscience" (Cooper and Marx 149). We take great pride in our accomplishments as scholars, which often includes publications meditating on an author's purpose or a specific quality or analysis of a text. These analyses, many times, concern the greater purpose of the work, the importance of the work to humanist study. But what of pride in

our actions, that moves beyond *writing* about what we admire and *does* the thing that we admire? Literature has the ability to change people and perspectives by allowing the reader to inhabit characters so unlike themselves, but what is that worth if we do nothing with it other than produce endless scholarship? Yes, we achieve a greater understanding of the work and perhaps ourselves, and others, but what does that achieve, tangibly? To return to Burke, literature should be “treated as *equipments for living*... [Its] relation to typical situations [should] be stressed” (Burke 598). As graduate students, we are given (used) equipment without a say in what type of equipment we receive, or its usefulness. We have it, but the question that remains is: what is our particular purpose? For all the discourse revolving around declining interest in literature programs, there is little interest in asking the constituency without which the party would not exist. Perhaps we, as graduate students, should be given a voice to answer that question, since we are the voice that has heretofore remained unheard in the cacophony of speculation about the discipline of which we are an essential part.

### Conclusion

We should, rather, see the humanities as the study of what it means and has meant and might yet mean to be human, in a world where 'the human' itself is a variable term, its definition challenged and revised time and time again.

(Bérubé and Ruth 54)

This thesis has offered an explanation, I hope, of how we define the discipline of literary studies, without asking our graduate students for a definition and by revisiting the same texts. Although many of these texts are important and foundational, they should perhaps not be our only mode of transportation well into the twenty-first century. This is an argument that is ongoing, and is meant to be. The humanities are dynamic, thriving on conflict, and "help us to grapple with the stubborn fact that some kinds of conflict might be intractable. That stubborn fact takes many shapes, from the trivial to the critical" (52). Embracing that conflict, I feel, is the focus that must be redefined: recognizing what is trivial and what is truly critical. There is no dearth of theory and scholarship surrounding the fate of the humanities, but we must learn, though it is uncomfortable, to leave the solitary scholarship behind, to put the pen down or move away from our computer screens, at least temporarily. We must begin to put our minds to work by actually working, implementing potential solutions to determine which serves us best. The answer will not be one-sided or simple and will not come easily. But it is my hope that we are beginning to recognize what does *not* work.

Part of what does not work, as my thesis has attempted to demonstrate, is that a discipline cannot hope to survive without student input. What is practiced in the university and what graduate students seek from their university programs can look very different—or not—but we don't know this until we attempt to find out. Offering the same eight out of ten courses that deal solely with genre, period, and canonical authors is not

the way to move into the twenty-first century, and perhaps hasn't been the best approach long before the twenty-first century began. The conversation must continue, but take seriously what matters most, which are the students who think critically about not just Shakespeare, but also song lyrics and zombie shows, the #BlackLivesMatter movement and rape culture, colonialism, and their future careers. There is a way to guarantee that all of these issues enter the discipline by approaching the individuals who populate the ivory tower—students—and simply asking them and allowing them to become part of the conversation. We may learn that as graduate students become part of the conversation, the humanities becomes more meaningful to them, to their professors, to the administration and to the world beyond the walls.

The magic of what we do as scholars of literature is that we embrace what is uniquely human, that which is fluid and existentially elusive. There is a time, though, to recognize that this kind of elusiveness can take us only so far. We resist binaries and deconstruct, we conceptualize and analyze, and we are uncomfortable with answers for they signal an end to the epic searches that we love to undertake. We are unsettled by what we sometimes dramatically and often preemptively term a “crisis” of the humanities; but the humanities have always been in crisis. The difference has only come in the organic ways that we have responded. This time, perhaps a conscious choice is necessary in how we respond, an intentional movement based on fact and self-aware, less a call to arms and more an encouraged epiphany that demands and deserves more than a printed response.

Cassuto calls this “owning our own academic responsibility” in the last lines of *The Graduate School Mess* (238), but I view it as more nuanced and complex than this.

The responsibility is all of ours, and it's more than academic. It's humanistic beyond the academic definition of the humanities. Making sense of the world, yes, and recognizing our academic responsibility, of course, but the twenty-first century, with its unique and rapid technological innovations, requires us to do so in a careful, generous, and inspired way that nevertheless challenges our complacency: true learning, enacted with dignity.

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