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*Chapter 10*

**THE GREAT BOOKS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY:  
THE RISE AND FALL OF WESTERN MEMORY  
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR TIME**

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WHOSE SCHOLARSHIP CELEBRATED THE WESTERN CANON**

The great books have encapsulated the historical and cultural foundations of modern Western Civilization since the age of Gutenberg, although the works that informed the Canon extend back to the Greco-Roman Empire and forward beyond the 1969 American “manned” moon landing. This heritage survived a challenge in the years preceding World War I only to be undermined by the “Culture Wars” that began in the 1960’s and climaxed by the early 1990’s. As this essay will demonstrate, the Great Books movement was ultimately felled by a triumvirate of false virtues: cultural relativism, social justice, and feminization, which served to replace excellence with a child-centric perspective founded on empathy.

Enter the new medium, the Internet, with its emphasis on image and sound supplemented by some rudimentary text, and a “secondary orality” is born where the narcissistic self has no social or cultural foundation with which to navigate the world of ideas. Hence, consciousness dims, the voices that speak within are misinterpreted as those of deities, and our civilization flounders. Thus ensues a devolutionary spiral with catastrophic consequences. Today, we bear witness to this cultural demise as we stand upon the remnants of our desecrated civilization.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GREAT BOOKS

It was once thought that the purpose of our educational institutions was to transmit the great ideas, contained in our Western Canon, from one generation to the next. That “Imaginary Library”, as Alvin B. Kernan has characterized it, was viewed by the poet Shelley as the sum total of cultural knowledge manifested as “that great poem, which all poets, like the cooperating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world” (Kernan, 1982, p. 8). From the Middle Ages through the late eighteenth century, most educated Westerners, as historian A. O. Lovejoy demonstrated in *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*, viewed the world—and by inference its fundamental ideas—as governed by innumerable hierarchical strands from the lowest of low to the highest of high that united to form one inexorable connection (Lovejoy, 1936). Thus, from Isaac Newton’s perspective his path-breaking discoveries could be characterized as the culmination of advances achieved by scientists through the ages: “If I have seen further [than others], it is by standing on the shoulders of giants” (as cited in Topper, 2007, 141).

But the evaluation of this compendium of human knowledge—to say nothing of the means of conveyance—has long been subject to debate within our academic institutions. Until the 1880’s American universities maintained a classical curriculum emphasizing Greek, Latin, rhetoric, philosophy, history, as well as mathematics, physics, and chemistry. However, in 1899 the president of Harvard University, Charles W. Eliot, introduced changes that resulted in an entirely elective curriculum that subsequently set the standards for course offerings by other universities (Beam, 2008). Nevertheless, while speaking to an audience of workers in 1909, Elliot extolled the virtues of a fifty volume, “five-foot shelf” that would provide the foundations for a great education based on a minimum of fifteen minutes of daily reading. In 1910 Elliot’s Harvard Classics were published by P.F. Collier. Over the course of twenty years, 350,000 sets were sold (Kirsch, 2001).

The selections included in the Harvard Classics were shaped by personal preferences and societal norms. Eliot, a chemist by training, chose unabridged texts. Scientific selections were based on their accessibility to humanists. While the set included *Don Quixote*, *Stories from the Arabian Nights*, and Goethe’s *Faust*, overall the literary choices were constrained by Eliot’s decision to exclude nineteenth-century novels. This omission was partially rectified in 1917 with the addition of the Harvard Classics Shelf of Fiction, a 20-volume supplement. In the area of philosophy, there were also gaps: nothing by Aristotle and Aquinas, Leibniz and Hegel or, for that matter, Kierkegaard, Marx, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Freud. Speculative metaphysics was noticeably absent as were epistemology and theology (Kirsch, 2001).

Nevertheless, Elliot’s “five-foot shelf” marked the beginning of a twentieth century American “conversation” regarding what should be included in the “Imaginary Library” that would enable aspirational Americans—with or without a college education—to become truly educated.

This “conversation” was renewed by John Erskine, a professor of Elizabethan poetry at Columbia University, during the 1920-1 academic year when he pioneered an honors undergraduate program based on many of the foundational texts of Western Civilization. These classes, as Erskine noted in his 1948 memoir *My Life as a Teacher*, typically began with an open-ended question posed on the basis of the assigned reading: “What”, for

instance, “is the ruling passion in *The Iliad*?” (as cited in Beam, 2008, p. 18). Two teachers, with oppositional perspectives, then guided student discussions. The instructors were not experts. Rather, their role was to elicit participation by students based on the readings.

Mortimer Adler was one of the first students in this undergraduate honors program. In 1923 he teamed up with Mark Van Doren to teach the Great Books and subsequently joined the Columbia faculty. Three of Adler’s students became notable “Great Bookies” (Beam, 2008, p. 18, i): Clifton Fadiman, the future book editor for the *New Yorker*, and Lionel Trilling and Jacques Barzun, both of whom later co-directed the Colloquium on Important Books at Columbia. In 1927 Adler met Robert Maynard Hutchins, then Dean of the Yale Law School. Both had been scholarship students enthralled by the potency of intellectual ideas. Thus when Hutchins was named President in 1929 of the newly formed University of Chicago, he had little trouble convincing Adler to join the faculty of this Midwestern university for the express purpose of instituting a Great Books program (Beam, 2008).

Hutchins and Adler began teaching a Great Books seminar in 1930 as part of an undergraduate honors program modeled after the one developed by John Erskine at Columbia University. Over the course of Hutchins’s twenty-two years at the University of Chicago, the advocacy of Great Books became a highly effective means of promoting both the man and the institution. By 1935 Hutchins was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine and celebrated within its pages as the “golden boy of U.S. education” (as cited in Beam, 2008, p. 49). Beginning in 1937 St. John’s College in Annapolis developed its undergraduate program as a four-year embodiment of the Hutchins/Adler Great Books program and that curriculum continues today. In 1942 the “Hutchins College”, a two-year undergraduate program founded on the President’s vision for a classical curriculum, was formed at the University of Chicago, although its existence was brief. The following year a Great Books seminar was introduced at the University Club located in the heart of downtown Chicago (Beam, 2008).

The Great Books phenomenon was so prevalent by the 1940’s that a study undertaken by Harvard in 1945, as historian Timothy Cross noted, recommended that core requirements there be reinstated and that these emphasize “the heritage of Western Civilization and endow all students with a common intellectual background” (as cited in Beam, 2008, p. 68). Indeed by 1946 there were 5,000 Great Books programs formed throughout the Midwest. This rapid development prompted an editor for the *Ladies’ Home Journal* to suggest that the Great Books movement was growing faster than Alcoholics Anonymous. By 1947 the Great Books Foundation was established to facilitate expansion of these programs throughout the United States. Within four years there were 2,500 discussion groups. They met in libraries, churches, offices owned by the chamber of commerce, corporate centers, army bases, and even prisons (Beam, 2008).

But the most significant endeavor to influence the content of the “Imaginary Library” and shape the reading habits of Americans was the publication in 1952 of the Great Books of the Western World, a fifty-four volume set that was two inches longer and four volumes greater than Harvard’s “five-foot shelf”. The Great Books of the Western World contained 443 works by seventy-four white men, the contents of which encapsulated 102 Great Ideas within its 32,000 pages. It was the brainchild of William Benton, publisher and publicist, and Mortimer Adler, its Associate Editor, who oversaw the project from inception to completion. Robert Hutchins served as the editor in chief. Since its initial publication in 1952, the Great Books of the Western World has sold one million sets, each costing hundreds of dollars (Beam, 2008).

The impact of the Great Books movement was most prevalent between the late 1940's and the early 1960's. The Great Books Foundation suggests that as many as 50,000 Americans were enrolled in groups in 1947. By the 1950's these numbers dropped to approximately 25,000. They climbed back to about 47,000 in 1961 in conjunction with a major advertising campaign by Encyclopedia Britannica to promote the Great Books of the Western World to paying subscribers. Unit sales were greatest in 1961, although the greatest profitability was achieved seven years later. Nonetheless, by the 1970's sales had dropped significantly. Even a revised edition in 1990 that included texts by women failed to revive flagging readership (Beam, 2008).

So we are compelled to ask four questions: "What did the Great Books of the Western World encompass?"; "Why was the idea initially successful?"; "How did the decline in Enlightenment values pave the way for the rejection of the Great Books?"; and, finally, "What might be the consequences of our failure to understand the foundations of Western Civilization?"

## CONTENTS AND GOALS OF THE GREAT BOOKS

The first volume of the Great Books of the Western World, *The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal Education*, is an extended essay by Robert Hutchins. Its purpose is to elucidate the importance of the classic texts that have defined our Western heritage and to suggest how these ideas may provide readers with an understanding of ourselves and our world. As Hutchins notes in the preface, "We are as concerned as anybody else at the headlong plunge into the abyss that Western Civilization seems to be taking. We believe that the voices that may recall the West to sanity are those which have taken part in the Great Conversation" (Hutchins, 1952/1988, p. xii).

The Great Books, Hutchins suggests, is not a panacea, although these works illuminate the causes of our difficulties. Nor does he believe these classic texts are the only ones worth reading. Hutchins acknowledges that there may be "errors of selection" and that revisions may occur "in the light of the criticism it will receive" (Hutchins, 1952/1988, p. xiv). The project, he explains, was born out of the realization that the "great books have disappeared, or almost disappeared, from American education" (Hutchins, 1952/1988, p. xiv). Hutchins insists "we regard this disappearance as an aberration, and not an indication of progress" (Hutchins, 1952/1988, p. xiv). The Great Books set, he suggests, is offered in the belief that the understanding obtained by reading these works will enable us to gain insight into the "history, politics, morals, and economics" (Hutchins, 1952/1988, p. xiv) governing our society. Reading the Great Books establishes that "habit of mind" critical to assessing and reaching "a valid judgment" on any given issue (Hutchins, 1952/1988, p. xiv).

Above all, Hutchins argues, the Great Books of the Western World is intended as a means of engaging Americans in the "Great Conversation" that can only come with a nation united in a common understanding of shared values. The knowledge gleaned from the Great Books permits us to understand and take the appropriate action necessary to nurture a vibrant democracy. The assumption is that the Great Books should be read by all Americans, young and old, not just individuals who attend elite colleges and universities. For the wisdom

obtained from the Great Books will be invaluable for our nation and its citizens (Hutchins, 1952/1988).

What books are included in the first edition of the Great Books of the Western World? They consist of many of the greatest writings known to Western Civilization. To read them is to become steeped in a classical education: Homer's, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, works by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Herodotus, and Thucydides, and Plato, as well as Aristotle and Plutarch, Tacitus, Plotinus, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Montaigne, Sir Francis Bacon, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Montesquieu, and Rousseau. Within that first edition are works by Adam Smith, Edward Gibbon, Kant, Hegel, and Marx and Engels whose ideas form the basis for modern economic, historic, philosophical, and political thought. The set includes foundational American texts: *The Declaration of Independence*, *Articles of Confederation*, *The Constitution of the United States*, and *The Federalist*. Literary classics are represented: Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, as well as many of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* along with a number of his other writings. The Great Books includes Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, and Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (Hutchins, 1952/1988). Twentieth century ideas are only nominally represented through the writings of William James and Sigmund Freud. Noticeably absent from the Great Books are the English romantic poets and the American fiction of Hawthorne or Twain. Not a single book written by a woman or, for that matter, a non-white man is included in that first edition.

Much of the opposition to the Great Books has been well publicized. Hutchins and Adler were accused of "Aristotelianism," "Thomism"—an obsession with Thomas Aquinas—"medievalism", as well as an unhealthy obsession with metaphysics (Adler, 1977). Critics objected to the quasi-religious character of the Great Books movement and the dubious prospect of amateur forays by "novice" readers into the academic sanctuary of intellectual ideas. As with the Harvard Classics, there was a great deal of debate over what was included and excluded from the Canon (Beam, 2008). Complaints were made about the "cultish" nature of the enterprise (A. Bloom, 1987). Intellectuals despaired about the "middle brow" character of reading groups and book clubs (Rubin, 1992). Critics objected to the use of older translations, some of which were of marginal quality. Adler's two-volume index, referred to as the Syntopicon—with 2,428 pages with 3,000 subtopics, and 163,000 entries—proved cumbersome. Many readers longed for introductory explanations and footnotes to elucidate the texts (Beam, 2008).

There were debates about the inclusion and relevance of science texts among the Great Books of the Western World. Joseph Schwab, a chemistry professor, was the only scientist represented on the selection committee. Two other members, Lionel Trilling and John Erskine, objected to the inclusion of scientific writings while even Hutchins acknowledged he never intended to read works by Ptolemy, Copernicus, and Kepler, although they were within the fifty-four volume set (Beam, 2008).

Despite this antipathy to science, some foundational scientific texts were included if only because it is difficult to conceive of the "Great Conversation" without a discussion of *The Thirteen Books of Euclid's Elements* or *On the Sphere and Cylinder* by Archimedes or *Dialogues Concerning the Two New Sciences* by Galileo or *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* by Newton or *Analytical Theory of Heat* by Fourier or *The Origin of*

*Species* by Darwin. Missing from the Great Books were works related to the seismic revolution in science from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century: electromagnetism, thermodynamics, relativity, and quantum mechanics while cybernetics and genetics, which were only in the early stages of discovery, were, understandably, absent. As with any canon the Great Books is subject to modification. Among those scientific works that today might be considered less worthy of inclusion are the writings of William Gilbert, William Harvey, and Christiaan Huygens.

## INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE GREAT BOOKS

Whatever the perceived defects, as stated earlier, Encyclopedia Britannica sold one million sets of the Great Books (Beam, 2008). Why did so many Americans buy them? The answer is remarkably simple: the cultural norms of the 1950's and early 1960's encouraged aspirational values. Americans hungered to be educated. They understood the importance of reading as a means for obtaining knowledge that would improve the quality of their lives while, possibly, opening the door to economic opportunity. Consider, for instance, the significance Hutchins imputes to the "Great Conversation" in enabling Americans to live meaningful and productive lives.

The aim of liberal education is human excellence, both private and public (for man is a political animal). Its object is the excellence of man as man and man as citizen. It regards man as an end, not as a means; and it regards the ends of life, and not the means to it. For this reason it is the education of free men. . . . The liberally educated man understands . . . the differences and connections between poetry and history, science and philosophy, theoretical and practical science. . . . The liberally educated man . . . knows what is meant by soul, state, God, beauty. . . . The liberally educated man is at home in the world of ideas and in the world of practical affairs, too, because he understands the relation of the two. (Hutchins, 1952/1988, pp. 3-4)

Indeed, the ideas conveyed by Hutchins in *The Great Conversation* are inexorably linked to the worldview expressed by William H. Whyte in *The Organization Man* (Whyte, 1956). Americans in the 1950's and early sixties belonged to civil, social, and political organizations. Institutions were central to American life: the company, the university, the family, marriage, and the social networks of local communities. Shared norms shaped the nature of these interactions. It was understood that the "self" necessarily took backstage to the nurturing of meaningful associations. It was a "manly" world in which the corporation was hierarchically structured, competition in service to excellence was a given, and there was an expectation of financial rewards based on bona fide performance. Success, when it was achieved, was obtained through initiative, hard work, and abiding by social dictates.

Certainly, this culture of excellence based on talent and merit had its defects. Women who wanted education and professional jobs were often discouraged or prevented from competing with men. Members of ethnic and socially marginalized communities were frequently denied opportunity and promotions. These obstacles and restrictions limited the ability of all Americans to partake of not only the "Great Conversation" but also the economic possibilities afforded by competitive excellence.

Despite these impediments there was, nevertheless, social mobility. Education offered the best means to improve one's economic or social status. Not everyone obtained a college degree. But through encyclopedias, book-of-the-month clubs, newspapers, weekly magazines, and discussion groups, people obtained critical information necessary to gain some understanding of their world. This knowledge became the engine of social communication and economic opportunity. Personal gratification was deferred: parents saved their money to send their children to school while their sons and daughters were encouraged to work hard to set aside funds for long-term objectives. The society exercised judgments about the values and standards that would prevail. These norms were observed at work, home, and in the community, thereby suppressing identity politics and potentially deviant social practices.

### THE DECLINE OF THE GREAT BOOKS

What happened to undermine the societal norms that fostered excellence and the pursuit of knowledge? A foreshadowing of the circumstances that led to our decline can be gleaned by considering the circumstances in Vienna in the years immediately preceding World War I. In Carl Schorske's *Fin-De-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, we witness the collapse of Western Enlightenment values and the concomitant rise of decadence, first evident in Nietzsche's philosophy and, later, permeating every facet of Viennese society in the years leading to the First World War (Schorske, 1980).

In the hothouse of post-Nietzschean high culture, Enlightenment principles were jettisoned in favor of "irrationalism, subjectivism, abstractionism, anxiety, and technologism" (Schorske, 1980, p. xix). The expectation that knowledge would be passed on from generation to generation was rejected. Instead, politics, culture, art, architecture, and music—all embodying characteristics of the new age decadence—were no longer transmitted historically. Instead, they became unmoored from diachronic time and frozen in a synchronic stasis, unable to progress, yet no longer grounded by cultural antecedents (Schorske, 1980). Not surprisingly, Durkheim's path breaking work, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, first published in France in 1897, characterized this vertiginous state of disaffection as *anomie*, a condition characteristic of a destabilized society in which the prevailing social norms have dissolved (Durkheim, 1897/1951).

This rupture in continuity was musically manifest in Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-tone music. As with postmodernism in the late twentieth century, atonal music is characterized by relativism. It is missing a defining key and, therefore, lacking a tonal center. Musical storytelling disappears (to Western ears there is no song to hum), the ability to create and resolve tension is annihilated (the absence of a principal key prevents the migration away from and the return to a tonal center). What remains appears to the listener as a primitive sonic void: rhythm (beat), dynamics (loud/soft), and timbre (the quality of sounds conveyed by the instruments themselves) that together support an impoverished musical composition that, despite its acoustic complexity, is perceived by the Western ear as noise.

*Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* explores the "dance macabre" (Schorske, 1980, p. 3) of Viennese culture at the turn of the last century. There the "avant-garde" rejects the neoclassical foundations of the Enlightenment in favor of the primordial "id" where "Eros" (love) and "Thanatos" (death) join forces to annihilate civilization (Schorske, 1980, p.

11). In *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* that artificial construct of society, the perfectly manicured garden, is metaphorically destroyed by the artist Kokoschka when, as a child-demon, he willfully detonates an ant colony in the garden only to be banished from the [now] desecrated Garden of Eden. The incident serves as a symbolic referent for Europe's decadent collapse on the eve of World War I (Schorske, 1980).

Thus, modernism—Norwegian Symbolist, French Fauvist, Viennese Secessionist, German Expressionist, and English Post-Impressionist—severed its associations with the past. Although this first generation of practitioners on the eve of the First World War understood the culture they were annihilating, a half-century later Americans living in the “Age of Aquarius”—that ironic moment of illusionary triumph when our astronauts ascended to the moon while we descended intellectually into the wasteland of popular culture—effectively erased the foundations of Western Civilization from contemporary memory.

The philosophical foundations of our present decadence are based on the tenets of John Rawls as expounded in *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls, 1971). His perspective is significant given that he is regarded as the “greatest political philosopher of the twentieth century” (Larmore, 2008, p. 43). *A Theory of Justice* “changed the way the idea of social justice is understood, and provided the starting point for almost everything of note that has come afterward in political philosophy” (Larmore, 2008, p. 43).

Rawls's social contract rests on the assumption that justice should be rendered from behind a “veil of ignorance” as a result of which, it may be presumed, individuals do not know their social class or ability or, for that matter, their future circumstances. His political philosophy has a dual foundation: a “liberty principle” based on equitable rights and a “difference principle” that ensures that the greatest benefit accrues to the most disadvantaged members of society. These principles are the basis for Rawls's “justice as fairness” doctrine (Larmore, 2008, pp. 44-45), a reworking of the theory of “social justice” from “be fair” to a sustained advocacy of remedial social justice. This is a corruption of the well known Marxist doctrine: “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs” (as cited in Simon, 1994, p. 315).

The consequence of accepting the tenets of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* as the philosophical belief system of late twentieth century America—if not Western society overall—has been profound. Where once the values of our society were founded on the “manly” virtues of excellence and competition, now resources were allocated to those members of society least capable of providing for themselves. With empathy and nurturance trumping truth and excellence, there could be no justification for the Great Books. By the 1970's the changing ethos was evident, although it was during the 1980's that the seismic changes were embedded into our social firmware. By then the Canon, with its texts written by white men of European heritage, was perceived as the very embodiment of white, male tyranny, a hegemonic culture intent on “colonializing” its powerless victims. The new feminized worldview was multicultural, celebrating diversity and identity politics while hostile to “elite” Euro-American culture. In this environ nurturance and a reverence of juvenile virtues prevailed at the expense of “manly” excellence.

Thus, those members of society least capable of fending for themselves would disproportionately share in the resources. It was the natural consequence of the Russian Revolution (1917), which ushered in the “Demotic Life and Times”, an age when the values “of the people” (Barzun, 2000, p. 773) prevailed at the expense of an Enlightenment tradition. This “anti-culture”, which Jacques Barzun suggested in *From Dawn to Decadence* reached its



“high tide of demotics” in the second half of the twentieth century (Barzun, 2000, p. 797), would eradicate the very foundations of Western Civilization, giving rise to triumphant individualism and identity politics that culminated in the “Culture Wars”.

The term “Culture Wars”—as it is applied to contemporary American politics—was introduced by James Davison Hunter in his study *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (Hunter, 1991) to illuminate the fundamental ideological divide between conservatives and “progressives”. In what was later characterized as his “Culture War Speech”, Pat Buchanan spoke at the Republican National Convention before a prime-time audience on August 17, 1992. “There is a religious war”, he stated, “going on in our country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself” (Buchanan, 1992a). He elaborated the following month, suggesting that the “Culture War” was a battle over America’s core values of right and wrong that would fundamentally shape our societal norms (Buchanan, 1992b).

Hunter and Buchanan were prescient. The impact of the “Culture Wars” in altering the social and cultural landscape of America was profound. Let us consider three books that describe this fundamental shift: Christopher Lasch’s, *The Culture of Narcissism* (1978), Allan Bloom’s, *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), and Robert Hughes’s, *Culture of Complaint* (1993). We will assess each in turn.

For Lasch, the American “failure of nerve” results from a collapse of “bourgeois society”, which “has lost both the capacity and the will to confront the difficulties that threaten to overwhelm it” (Lasch, 1978, p. xiii). This shortcoming stems from the inability of western society to comprehend “the course of modern history” (Lasch, 1978, p. xiii). Liberalism—as was also the case in Schorske’s Viennese society—has become politically and intellectually bankrupt. Modern society has severed its links to historical time. This “waning of historical time” results in “presentism” (Lasch, 1978, p. 3), a moment-by-moment means of living in which the past and the future are replaced by the eternal present. Consequently, we are continuously surprised as events unfold before us. By way of example, Lasch quotes a passage from Donald Barthelme’s short story “*Robert Kennedy Saved From Drowning*” published in his 1968 collection *Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts*.

The Marivaudian being is, according to Poulet, a pastless futureless man, born anew at every instant. The instants are points which organize themselves into a line, but what is important is the instant, not the line. The Marivaudian being has in a sense no history. Nothing follows from what has gone before. He is constantly surprised. He cannot predict his own reaction to events. He is constantly being overtaken by events. A condition of breathlessness and dazzlement surrounds him. (as cited in Lasch, 1978, p. 3, ii)

The literary writer, supersaturated in self-consciousness and lacking the historical and cultural foundations with which to position his or her characters within the world, rejects the social context of reality. Instead, we have the writer as narcissist who myopically constructs a solipsistic realm devoid of all external references.

The voyage to the interior discloses nothing but a blank. The writer no longer sees life reflected in his own mind. Just the opposite: he sees the world, even in its emptiness, as a mirror of himself. In recording his “inner” experiences, he seeks not to provide an objective account of a representative piece of reality but to seduce others into giving him their attention, acclaim, or sympathy and thus to shore up his faltering sense of self. (Lasch, 1978, p. 21)

The rise of the narcissistic self—concomitant with the loss of historical and cultural traditions—succeeded in eradicating the Western Canon. The result, as Lasch noted, is that in just two to three generations—and given that it has been more than thirty years since the publication of *The Culture of Narcissism* we may safely add yet a fourth generation—since the Judeo-Christian tradition, “so often invoked by educators but so seldom taught in any form, [has] passed into oblivion” (Lasch, 1978, p. 150).

But nowhere is the impact of the “Culture Wars” more effectively discussed and its ramifications made evident than in *The Closing of the American Mind* (A. Bloom, 1987). Where once we had a civilization based on natural rights that was founded on the belief that people were united by common goals, now universality has been jettisoned in favor of a myriad of conflicting agendas. The result is that in educational institutions today openness to contradictory belief systems trumps an understanding of the importance of natural rights and, indeed, our heritage. Consequently, multicultural grievances prevail over commonly shared values founded upon a social contract and receptivity to “social justice” trumps fundamental truths that challenge the prevailing doctrine of “fair-mindedness”.

The recent education of openness . . . pays no attention to natural rights or the historical origins of our regime, which are now thought to have been essentially flawed or regressive. It is progressive and forward-looking. It does not demand fundamental agreement or the abandonment of old or new beliefs in favor of the natural ones. It is open to all kinds of men, all kinds of life-styles, all ideologies. There is no enemy other than the man who is not open to everything. But when there are no shared goals or vision of the public good, is the social contract any longer possible? (A. Bloom, 1987, p. 27)

As Allan Bloom noted, the Founders deliberately sought to suppress minority interests. They understood that factions threatened the common good. What has been lost today is an understanding of our civilization and the values that foster American exceptionalism. The result is that while postmodern diversity lays claim to openness it closes the door to intellectual inquiry. “Thus what is advertised as a great opening is [actually] a great closing [of the American mind]” (A. Bloom, 1987, p. 34).

It is with respect to values battling for primacy in the “Culture Wars” that Allan Bloom makes his strongest argument. Wars are fundamental disagreements about values. Since perceptions and world views guide and frame the way members of society live their lives, there can be no reasoning that permits accommodations of disparate values. Wars are fought in order to ensure that one set of cultural values prevail over another.

Liberal democracies do not fight wars with one another. . . . Cultures fight wars with one another. They must do so because values can only be asserted or posited by overcoming others, not by reasoning with them. Cultures have different *perceptions*, which determine what the world is. They cannot come to terms. There is no communication about the highest things. . . . Culture means a war against chaos *and* a war against other cultures. The very idea of culture carries with it a value: man needs culture and must do what is necessary to create and maintain cultures. There is no place for a theoretical man to stand. To live, to have any inner substance, a man must have values, must be committed, or *engagé*. Therefore a cultural relativist must care for culture more than truth, and fight for culture while knowing it is not true. (A. Bloom, 1987, p. 202)

This single paragraph suggests why the great books are no longer read and celebrated today. The cultural values that venerated our European heritage and the principles of American Exceptionalism no longer prevail. Western Civilization is viewed as hegemonic, intent on subjugating weaker nations and peoples. To study our history is perceived as an exercise in white male hegemony at the expense of the powerless. Postmodernism, celebrated by cultural relativists who dominate our academic and cultural institutions, minimizes Western Civilization, thereby contributing to its destruction in order to ensure that multicultural agendas will prevail.

Despite the prevalence of cultural relativism, it is essential to remember that the historical circumstances leading to the formation of our republic were without precedent. Our citizens must be apprised of our heritage and the documents that present the foundational narrative of our constitutional history: the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the American Constitution, and what is today referred to as the Federalist Papers. All told these documents and the values they engender helped to lay the groundwork for a society resistant to both aristocratic and autocratic influences. A cultural understanding necessitates learning not only the history of Western Civilization but also the distinguishing characteristics of American Exceptionalism since knowledge is the means by which we gain the fortitude to perpetuate these virtues. Which is not to deny our legacy of shortcomings, among which are acts of racism, discrimination, and sexism. But only through education will we obtain the wisdom to forge a better society.

Which brings us to *Culture of Complaint* (Hughes, 1993). Contemporary American society, according to Hughes, has become effete, no longer a nation capable of courage or heroism. What, then, might be its attributes? For Hughes, America is a decadent society in which decentralized interests override power, fairness replaces excellence, pity replaces justice, redemption supersedes virtue, victimhood trumps self-reliance, ethnic and social grievances erode universal values, and a pervasive child-centric universe annihilates adulthood. By way of illumination, Hughes quotes from the poem "For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio" (Auden, 1944/1945). In Herod's soliloquy the king justifies his decision to massacre the Innocents. For Hughes these stanzas by Auden are nothing less than a prophecy for our times.

"Reason will be replaced by Revelation . . . Knowledge will degenerate into a riot of subjective visions. . . . Whole cosmogonies will be created out of some forgotten personal resentment, complete epics written in private languages, the daubs of schoolchildren ranked above the greatest masterpieces. . . .

"Justice will be replaced by Pity as the cardinal human virtue, and all fear of retribution will vanish. . . . The New Aristocracy will consist exclusively of hermits, bums and permanent invalids. The Rough Diamond, the Consumptive Whore, the bandit who is good to his mother, the epileptic girl who has a way with animals will be the heroes and heroines of the New Tragedy, when the general, the statesman, and the philosopher have become the butt of every farce and satire". (as cited in Hughes, 1993, pp. 3-4)

What can be written about the social context of the "Culture Wars"? What began in the 1960's as generational rebellion flamed by racial strife had by the 1980's fundamentally altered our cultural landscape such that by 1987 American universities, colleges, and community colleges shifted from an emphasis on Western Civilization to a post-disciplinary focus based on "diversity" and identity politics (Menand, 2001, iii).

This transformation reflected a significant demographic shift in the gender and ethnic composition of full-time faculty. Prior to 1985 university teachers were only 28 percent women and 11 percent Hispanics or nonwhites. After 1985 full-time faculty were 40 percent women and 18 percent Hispanics or nonwhites (Menand, 2001). The changing gender and ethnic composition of faculty in colleges and universities significantly altered the emphasis in education. Western culture, perceived as “hegemonic” and, therefore, brutally engaged in asserting its power over weaker nations and peoples, could no longer be taught as the foundation of our civilization.

Identity politics became the controlling ethos of humanities departments throughout the country. With the rise of identity politics came the dominance of “new left” agendas that politicized academic departments, thereby reducing scholarship to political jeremiads in support of ethnic and social causes at the expense of scholarly research. The result was that Western Civilization and the Great Books were marginalized as the domain of “dead white males” hostile to ethnic minorities and the socially disadvantaged and, therefore, worthy of destruction. The result, suggested Todd Gitlin, a professor at Columbia University, was “the cant of identity”.

Protected by the academic superstructure as a relatively cheap alternative to disruptive protest, the separate programs cultivate a rapture of marginality. For identity-based movements, the margin is the place to be. Within each margin, there are always more margins to carve out. Postmodernist thought confirms that there is no center; or, rather, that those who claim the center—who claim a common truth or even the possibility that any common truth is attainable—are false universalizers, colonizers, hegemonists. The center, if there is one, is the malevolent Other. But this false center—so the argument goes—is only a margin in disguise. The margins are bastions from which to launch intellectual raids on a center that has no right to be central and has, moreover, lost confidence in itself. (Gitlin, 2005, pp. 403-4)

Thus the metaphor of immigrants assimilating in the “melting pot” was replaced with that of a “salad bowl” in which ethnic groups collected, asserting their distinctive identity and particular grievances. Under these circumstances Western Civilization and the Great Books were, at best, one focus among many with the emphasis increasingly on multiculturalism and popular culture at the expense of foundational truths about our heritage.

However, not only was Western Civilization denigrated—now routinely attacked as the bastion of powerful, Caucasian men intent on exerting colonial tyranny—it was replaced with a feminized worldview in which the focus was no longer on the competitive jousting of intellectual ideas for dominance but rather on the advocacy of remedial justice with its emphasis on assisting children and the socially and economically disadvantaged members in our community, a philosophical perspective championed by the aforementioned John Rawls.

To understand the implications of this shift we need only read *Sexual Personae* (Paglia, 1990), which depicts the relationship between men and women as a battle between the sexes in which men, at their most heroic, are engaged in a quest for discovery and women, almost universally, are motivated by a primal drive to fulfill their biological destiny. In this war of competing agendas, the female drive for offspring threatens to annihilate the male quest for innovation. It is a primal war with potentially catastrophic consequences (Paglia, 1990). Were Camille Paglia not a lesbian and, therefore, celebrated by those members of the academic

community who extol identity politics, it is questionable whether this “anti-feminist” book would ever have received the attention it so justly deserved.

Thus, the prominence of John Rawls’s theory of “social justice” and the triumph of feminized virtues gave rise to identity politics at the expense of Enlightenment thought and the Western Canon. As Allan Bloom so rightly pointed out, there can be no accommodation in a culture war. One set of values must prevail over another. Either we embrace multiculturalism and “social justice” or we begin to rebuild the traditions and standards necessary for a culture of excellence. This requires a commitment to marriage and families and rigorous education. It must be a “manly” society based on competition that stifles identity politics and, in Robert Hughes’s memorable phrase, quells the “culture of complaint”.

In physics, it should be noted, the state of maximum entropy, known as Chaos, occurs when all values become relative, that is, when everything in the universe is considered of equal value. Relativism in the physical world causes a state of maximum entropy and, therefore, a state of maximum uncertainty. It has a destructive capability second to none. The parallels between science and civil society are unavoidable. Must we permit everything to be socially and culturally relative and, if so, are we prepared to live with the “Heat Death” of our World?

## CONTEMPORARY VIEWS OF THE GREAT BOOKS

In providing a history of the Great Books, Alex Beam entitles his work *A Great Idea at the Time*. But the title is erroneous. Either the Great Books is a great idea or not. Ironically, Beam’s story is the most moving when he interviews people whose lives have been unequivocally altered as a result of reading the Great Books. These people are substantial. They understand who they are within the larger context of a civilization. We want to talk to them. We are elevated by their words. In short, they become our “cultural heroes”. These are the individuals with whom, dear reader, you not only want to engage in a conversation, but would be prepared to join in the trenches. You may safely trust your life to someone who believes in the “manly” virtues of truth and excellence; however, do not expect to find valor and courage from a feminized cultural relativist.

Which brings us back to the issue of the Great Books and its inherent worth. If the teaching of the Great Books is essential for educating our society and if the intellectual ideas presented in the Great Books are still valuable, how could they be “a great idea at the time?” If they were a great idea, then, necessarily, they must be of importance today. Unless, that is, our cultural values have altered. If we subscribe to cultural relativity at the expense of truth and excellence, then reading about Western Civilization loses “currency”. But if this Canon of Great Books is of intrinsic worth, then, the question shifts to whether some books might be added and others discarded in order to ensure that it is representative of the best ideas that Western Civilization offers. If we have a belief in the intrinsic worth of our culture, then, we are compelled to discover our heritage. If cultural relativism has devalued our culture, rest assured it will not be long before these decadent values lead to our social annihilation.

The issue of the Great Books, that Canon of works that incites the imagination and represents the contents of our “Imaginary Library”, has long been a topic of considerable interest to literary critics. Ironically, in the universities it is within English Departments, more

than almost any other discipline, that the Canon has dissolved and authoritative standards of truth and excellence have been abandoned. The late twentieth century has not been kind to literature. English Departments have responded by becoming post-disciplinary and politically destructive, advocating everything except their core subject in a misguided effort to justify their continued relevance (Menand, 2001).

For many years one of the most passionate advocates of the Canon has been the literary critic Alvin Kernan. Despite his valiant efforts, by the end of the twentieth century the debate over which books should occupy a place in the “Imaginary Library”, that collection of works that would represent the culmination of Western Civilization, took a back seat to chronicling the demise of the novel and the death of romantic imagination. For the novel, as Kernan noted, is under assault: “Literature is ceasing . . . to seem believable and useful to large and important groups in the society” (Kernan, 1982, p. 32). Where once “the great books which had hitherto formed the basis of liberal education” had been celebrated, by the 1980’s they “were denounced as elitist, Eurocentric, and the tools of imperialism” (Kernan, 1990, pp. 3-4).

Indeed, for a generation of scholars and readers “who matured intellectually in the ancient régime of high culture”, this denigration of Great Books and “dead white males” in favor of stories suffused in identity politics represented “nothing less than the setting of the sun of the human imagination in the evening-lands of Western Civilization” (Kernan, 1990, p. 6). “Literature”, suggested Kernan, “began to lose its authority, and consequently its reality, at the same time that the ability to read the book, literacy, was decreasing, that audiovisual images, film, television, and computer screen, were replacing the printed book as the most efficient and preferred source of entertainment and knowledge” (Kernan, 1990, p. 9). Not surprisingly, he concluded, “Humanism’s long dream of learning, of arriving at some final truth by enough reading and writing, is breaking up in our time” (Kernan, 1990, p. 135).

Then, there is the Old Testament prophet of literary criticism Harold Bloom, who dons vestments saturated with Romantic ardor. For our purposes we will not discuss his selection of books appearing in the appendices of *The Western Canon* (H. Bloom, 1994/1995) or those books selected in *How to Read and Why* (H. Bloom, 2000), although readers are encouraged to consider and appraise his selections. Rather, we will examine Harold Bloom’s perspective on the [Literary] Canon since he, perhaps more than any other critic of his generation, has been read and celebrated for his advocacy of the great works of the imagination. Yet by 1994 when *The Western Canon* was first published, the very concept of the canonical tradition was under siege. Indeed, a decade earlier Frank Kermode, Britain’s most highly regarded literary critic, had acknowledged that though canons are intended to be “time-proof” they are intrinsically dependent on institutional and social norms. Consequently, Kermode had emphasized that “if people think there should not be such things, they may very well find the means to destroy them” (as cited in H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 3).

For Harold Bloom, the defining characteristic of a work worthy of inclusion in the [Literary] Canon spins on the axis of “strangeness”, which he characterizes as “originality that either cannot be assimilated, or that so assimilates us that we cease to see it as strange” (H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 3). The term is borrowed from the English critic Walter Pater, whom Harold Bloom suggests defined Romanticism as “adding strangeness to beauty”, which Pater then applied to “all canonical writing” (H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 3, iv). “When you read a canonical work for the first time”, notes Harold Bloom, “you encounter a stranger, an uncanny startlement rather than a fulfillment of expectations” (H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 3).

Thus he argues that “read freshly” what these canonical works have in common “is their uncanniness, their ability to make you feel strange at home” (H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 3).

Harold Bloom insists that Shakespeare is “the largest writer we ever will know” while acknowledging that the great English playwright often makes his readers feel “at home out of doors, foreign, abroad” (H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 3). This “strangeness” is achieved through the “anxiety of influence”. It is a Freudian joust between canonical fathers and sons that motivates the sons, who thirst for greatness, to misread the writings of the fathers, thereby enabling the sons to wrest free of paternal influence and write path-breaking creations of their own (H. Bloom, 1973).

However, not everyone accepts this argument. Kernan, for instance, characterizes Harold Bloom as a political conservative who harbors psychologically radical predilections since the “anxiety of influence” denies the prospect of writers who master the ideas and techniques of their “fathers” without undergoing overwhelming oedipal *angst* while, nonetheless, creating contributions singularly their own. In Harold Bloom’s hands, Kernan suggests, creative genius is grossly distorted, a canard whereby the great writer is reborn as “an Oedipal terrorist, desperately trying to escape the shadow of his predecessor-fathers in order to write something new and authoritatively his own” (Kernan, 1990, p. 73).

Whatever the reader’s assessment of Harold Bloom’s subversive intent, there is little doubt that his book *The Western Canon* is, ipso facto, an elegy while, nonetheless, serving as impassioned advocacy of great literature. The need for a canonical point of reference is essential since, as Harold Bloom points out, the world is glutted with books and it is, therefore, essential to make choices informed by greatness: “Who reads must choose, since there is literally not enough time to read everything, even if one does nothing but read” (H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 15). This means rejecting political ideologies—both left and right—since “the West’s greatest writers are subversive of all values, both ours and their own” (H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 28).

Harold Bloom celebrates reading as a solitary act, “the relation of an individual reader and writer to what has been preserved out of what has been written”, rather than “as a list of books for required study” (H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 17). For him, the act of reading represents “the sovereignty of the solitary soul, the reader not as a person in society but as the deep self, our ultimate inwardness” (H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 10). But, of course, this is Harold Bloom at his most romantic since for the “solitary soul” to live there must be economic and social nourishment, yet in a society without a dedication to culture there can be no true sustenance.

Thus, despite his insistence on “the individual self” as the “only method and the whole standard for apprehending aesthetic value” (H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 22), Harold Bloom is forced, reluctantly, to acknowledge that the “self” is conceived within a socio-economic framework. “But ‘the individual self’, I unhappily grant, is defined only against society, and part of its agon with the communal inevitably partakes of the conflict between social and economic classes” (H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 22).

Harold Bloom acknowledges the dismal prospect for educational instruction of great literature in the future: “After a lifetime spent in teaching literature at one of our major universities, I have very little confidence that literary education will survive its current malaise” (H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 483). He concedes that “perhaps the ages of reading—Aristocratic, Democratic, Chaotic—now reach terminus, and the reborn Theocratic era will be almost wholly an oral and visual culture” (H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 485). Nevertheless,

Harold Bloom harbors the hope that individual readers will persist since the hunger for the Canon is driven by a universal quest for immortality. For, as he astutely surmises, only in the company of greatness does the potential for immortality exist.

I think that the self, in its quest to be free and solitary, ultimately reads with one aim only: to confront greatness. This confrontation scarcely masks the desire to join greatness, which is the basis of the aesthetic experience once called the Sublime: the quest for a transcendence of limits. Our common fate is age, sickness, death, oblivion. Our common hope, tenuous but persistent, is for some version of survival. (H. Bloom, 1994/1995, p. 489)

What may we conclude? The years since the publication of *The Western Canon* have not been favorable to great literature. By the late 1990's Kernan published an edited collection of essays by notable scholars *What's Happened to the Humanities?* (Kernan, 1997). It was a devastating account of the decline of academic scholarship, examining "the means by which poststructuralist methodologies succeeded in annihilating Enlightenment values . . . , thereby ensuring the triumph of postmodernism" (Sheets, 2008, p. 1).

In the new millennium *Theory's Empire: An Anthology of Dissent* (Patai and Corral, 2005) continued the examination of the causes underlying the demise of the academy begun by *What's Happened to the Humanities?* *Theory's Empire* provided a comprehensive examination by renowned academics of how "for more than a generation [poststructuralist and postmodernist] Theory has dominated the Humanities, laying waste to centuries of accumulated wisdom (Sheets, 2008, p. 5). Most recently, *What Price Utopia?* (Patai, 2008) has offered a post-feminist indictment of Women's Studies as it is practiced today that reveals how political correctness has eroded, if not destroyed, academic scholarship.

Two recent studies *Reading at Risk* (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004) and *To Read or Not to Read* (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007) provide a wealth of evidence that reading and literacy are dying, thereby rendering moot the issue of whether we can revive the Western Canon. If we had any doubt that we are entering a "secondary orality" (Ong, 1982, p. 11, v) that severely limits our ability to read and comprehend basic information, consider the assessment of Mark Bauerlein presented in *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* (Bauerlein, 2008). Weigh also how this decline in literacy has impacted journalism and our ability to obtain and understand information about the world (Sheets, 2009).

## CONSEQUENCES OF THE REJECTION OF THE GREAT BOOKS

*Finally, that fateful question: What are the consequences of our loss of cultural memory?* Foremost, of course, is that we lose our collective understanding of our heritage. We no longer share cultural perspectives that unite us. Our "waning of the sense of historical time" erases the past and annihilates our future. We live in the eternal present and are constantly surprised. We are motivated by "self". But that "self" is so rudimentary that it is, effectively, devoid of consciousness. We do as others do. We feel as others feel. On a pragmatic level there is the possibility that another culture that retains its own history and aspirational values will dominate our nation, thereby determining not only our values but also our future. Under these circumstances we would migrate from our current quasi-zombie state into a state of



“Otherness” in which our thoughts would be shaped by another society with its own distinctive world-view.

As distasteful as that prospect may be, the worst case scenario is one in which we—as a global civilization—would collectively lose consciousness. We would become entirely susceptible to suggestion since we would lose our analytical powers of reasoning. Our “group think” would be determined by a commoditized culture that would influence our motivations and our actions.

How might we behave under those circumstances? Our society would resemble that of ancient Greece as depicted by Julian Jaynes in his path-breaking work *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Jaynes, 1976). Society would be highly stratified; our actions would be dictated by authoritarian rule—with television and the Internet now also acting as our internal voice of suggestion. Since we would no longer read or think on any meaningful level, we would regress back to a bicameral mind where “voices” in our head, which we would interpret as those of God, would dictate our actions. We might have emotional responses to events, but we would have no conscious awareness of why we feel what we do or what causes us to react to the stimulus around us—except that there would be “voices” telling us how to respond.

Under these circumstances we would have no coping skills, no awareness of time with its diachronic reach from the past into the present and stretching well into the future. Instead, we would live in the eternal present. Our cultural memory would be void. We would have no narrative as a nation or as individuals that would assist us in navigating the world.

Not surprisingly, our circumstances would resemble the fate of classical music following Arnold Schoenberg’s introduction of the twelve-tone scale. The narrative of classical music died—though not without a noble fight from the Russian composers Prokofiev, Stravinsky, and Shostakovich. Without a musical story and left with only rhythm, dynamics, and timbre there remained nothing to hold the imagination of a listening audience. How easy, therefore, to replace classical music, once the foundation of Western Civilization, with rock ‘n’ roll and gangsta rap. For if there are no standards, if everything is relative, anything is acceptable and nothing memorable.

In this twilight state we would be unable to respond to anything but sensory stimulation: hunger, thirst, anger, fear. Intimacy: impossible. Community: a relic of the past. Instead, there would remain only a constant drone, an unbearable sameness—or nothingness.

This state of catastrophic anomie is nihilism incarnate, a state of nonbeing with no expectations, no history, no culture, no dreams, no hopes, no stories. Nothing could be worse for America or, for that matter, our globalized society. Under these circumstances the Second Law of Thermodynamics would prevail, ushering in the “Heat Death” of our World. Let us strive, therefore, to restore our culture, our aspirations, our dedication to the nurturance of the “Imaginary Library” while we still possess an ember of consciousness flickering in the dark.

## NOTES

- i The term “Great Bookies”, which is used by Beam and employed in this essay, has been borrowed from the obituary Joseph Epstein wrote in memory of Mortimer Adler, which

- was published in *The Weekly Standard* and titled “The Great Bookie: Mortimer Adler, 1902-2001” (Epstein, 2001, p. 31).
- ii Although it should be noted that Barthelme’s fiction, which is postmodern, is typically devoid of realism and a narrative arc. Instead, it is steeped in “presentism” and saturated with cultural relativism borrowed, to a significant degree, from the decadent German philosophers Husserl and Heidegger.
  - iii Identity politics encompasses Black Studies, Hispanic Studies, Jewish Studies, Women’s Studies and/or Gender Studies, Native-American Studies, Asian Studies, Middle-Eastern Studies, Post-Colonial Studies, “Queer” Studies, and those of a host of other ethnic and special interest groups that feel “oppressed” by traditional scholarship founded on Western Civilization.
  - iv “It is the addition of strangeness to beauty that constitutes the romantic character in art”. These words appeared in *Appreciation, Postscript* (Pater, 1889/2001, p. 246).
  - v “Secondary orality”, as it is envisioned in this paper, is not the progressive development conceived by Walter J. Ong in which orality coexists with a sophisticated understanding of technology and the written word, a perspective explored at length in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Ong, 1982). Rather, it is viewed as a regression back to a primitive state of consciousness activated by rudimentary stimulus response.

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